

NEWS RELEASE



U.S. Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

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State Partners with USDA for Republican River Water Savings

LINCOLN ---Irrigation farmers in 14 southwest Nebraska counties along the Republican River are being offered a one-time \$100 per acre bonus payment to convert irrigated cropland to some other land use, according to state and federal officials here.

Steve Chick, NRCS State Conservationist, and Roger Patterson, Director of the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources, are announcing one million dollars of state funds will be an added incentive to NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program funds to reduce irrigated cropland acres and water use.

Patterson said, "These funds are part of the action needed to reduce Nebraska's water usage to comply with the Republican River Compact. We will add the incentive payment on up to 10,000 eligible acres." Irrigated land within approximately two and one-half miles of the Republican River or its tributaries will be eligible.

Chick said, "These state funds will be committed with approved Environmental Quality Incentives Program applications now being accepted in local NRCS offices. An EQIP contract can pay between \$50 and \$100 per year for three years for irrigated land conversions.

In the EQIP program, converting from irrigated land to another land use has different amounts of payment. Converting irrigated land to dry land cropland has a \$50 per acre payment; conversion to non-irrigated pasture and hay land has a \$60 per acre payment;

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conversion to non-irrigated rangeland has \$90 per acre payment; and conversion to non-irrigated wildlife habitat has a \$100 per acre payment. The EQIP incentive payments are offered up to three years of a four year contract. The state payment is a one-time incentive payment of \$100 per acre, no matter which option is selected.

The state incentive is offered only to producers who receive an approved EQIP contract on the qualifying acres. Eligible land must have been irrigated two of the previous five years. The maximum total area cannot exceed 160 acres. An entire field will generally rank higher in application scoring than partial fields. Irrigated land adjacent to a sprinkler system is not eligible unless the land under a sprinkler is also enrolled.

Contracts that convert land to dry land cropland can not be irrigated for the life of the contract. Contracts that convert land to grass cover must be maintained without irrigation for 10 years.

An NRCS economist estimated, using University of Nebraska crop budgets, that converting from irrigated corn to dry land corn may be more profitable even with less yields, depending on the reduced production costs relative to the price of corn. This profit estimate does not include the state, NRCS or other USDA program payments. Farmers are encouraged to calculate their individual situation.

Farmers interested in this program can apply now for both the state and EQIP funds at their local NRCS office and throughout the year. NRCS will rank the applications on hand as of January 31, 2005 and begin funding some contracts. Additional application deadlines are at the end of March, May and July.

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NOTES TO EDITOR---Questions about the Department of Natural Resources involvement in this cooperative effort should be directed to Roger Patterson at (402) 471-2366 A tiff map of the project area is available as www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov).

