

DENR To Irrigators: Avoid Overspray

PIERRE — The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) reminds irrigators to check their center pivots to ensure they are operating properly and are adjusted to spray only upon land authorized for irrigation by their water permit.

"It is important that irrigators do everything they can to avoid overspraying onto nearby roads or neighboring properties," said DENR Secretary Steve Pirner. "Irrigation overspray can damage roadways, lead to unsafe driving conditions and impact neighbors."

A water right holder is not allowed to waste water or operate an irrigation system in violation of state water law, which includes spraying water on land not covered by the water permit. Irrigation systems and especially end guns must be constantly monitored to make sure they are not applying water where it is not allowed. Irrigators who fail to prevent overspray can be subject to fines or required to appear before the Water Management Board for possible suspension of their right to irrigate.

South Dakota has nearly 5,300 active irrigation permits authorizing irrigation of up to 879,000 acres.

Critical Wetland Proposals Being Sought

HURON — The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) announced the availability of \$17.5 million in financial and technical assistance nationwide to help eligible conservation partners voluntarily protect, restore and enhance critical wetlands on private and tribal agricultural lands.

"USDA has leveraged partnerships to accomplish a great deal on America's wetlands over the past two decades," said Chad Kacir, Acting State Conservationist with NRCS. "This year's funding will help strengthen these partnerships and achieve greater wetland acreage in South Dakota and throughout the nation."

Funding will be provided through the Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership (WREP), a special enrollment option under the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program's Wetland Reserve Easement component. It is administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Under WREP, states, local units of governments, non-governmental organizations and American Indian tribes collaborate with USDA through cooperative and partnership agreements. These partners work with willing tribal and private landowners who voluntarily enroll eligible land into easements to protect, restore and enhance wetlands on their properties. WREP was created through the 2014 Farm Bill and was formerly known as the Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program.

Wetland reserve easements allow landowners to successfully enhance and protect habitat for wildlife on their lands, reduce impacts from flooding, recharge groundwater and provide outdoor recreational and educational opportunities. The voluntary nature of NRCS' easement programs allows effective integration of wetland restoration on working landscapes, providing benefits to farmers and ranchers who enroll in the program, as well as benefits to the local and rural communities where the wetlands exist.

Proposals must be submitted to NRCS state offices by July 31, 2015. Projects can range from individual to watershed-wide to ecosystem-wide. Under a similar program in the 2008 Farm Bill, NRCS and its partners entered into 272 easements that enrolled more than 44,020 acres of wetlands from 2009 through 2013.

Most of these agreements occurred through the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI). In South Dakota, parts of Roberts and Grant Counties are in the MRBI area. Through partnerships, MRBI identifies high-priority watersheds where focused conservation on agricultural land can make the most gains in improving local, state and regional water quality. The new collaborative WREP will build on those successes by providing the financial and technical assistance necessary for states, non-governmental organizations and tribes to leverage resources to restore and protect wetlands and wildlife habitat.

Through WREP, NRCS will sign multi-year agreements with partners to leverage resources, including funding, to achieve maximum wetland restoration, protection and enhancement and to create optimum wildlife habitat on enrolled acres. WREP partners are required to contribute a funding match for financial or technical assistance. These partners work directly with eligible landowners interested in enrolling their agricultural land into conservation wetland easements.

This announcement builds on the roughly \$332 million USDA has announced this year to protect and restore agricultural working lands, grasslands and wetlands. Collectively, NRCS's easement programs help productive farm, ranch and tribal lands remain in agriculture and protect the nation's critical wetlands and grasslands, home to diverse wildlife and plant species. Under the former Wetlands Reserve Program, private landowners, tribes and entities such as land trusts and conservation organizations enrolled 2.7 million acres through 14,500 agreements for a total NRCS and partner investment of \$4.3 billion in financial and technical assistance.

Visit NRCS's ACEP webpage to learn more about NRCS's wetland conservation options.

Keeping It Clean

The Advantages Of Certified Weed-Free Hay

BY RITA BRHEL
P&D Correspondent

For how many hours landowners spend spraying musk thistle and other noxious weeds in their pasture, they sure do not want to introduce more undesirable vegetation to their property through the hay they purchase to feed their livestock in the winter.

Buying certified weed-free forage does exactly that — helps prevent the spread of noxious weeds through winter hay.

According to Jan Bruhn, Box Butte County weed superintendent at Hemingford, Nebraska, from the PRIDE Weed Management Association, "Any opportunity we have to slow down the advance of noxious and invasive weed species, we have an obligation to act. This obligation not only affects our neighbors, those we do business with and ourselves, but it is a responsibility to future generations."

The Noxious Weed Free Forage Certification program was developed by the North American Invasive Species Management Association as an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) tool initially used to slow the spread of noxious and invasive weeds to federal land via roadways where weed seeds could fall off of hay bales being transported between livestock facilities.

"Roads, highways and trails serve as a major connection route for people everywhere," Bruhn said. "They provide a daily means for commerce, commuting and recreation. Unfortunately, roads also serve as a means for the spread of unwanted weeds."

IPM is an environmentally sensitive approach to pest management that focuses heavily on prevention techniques, such as crop rotations and selecting pest-resistant varieties, combined with monitoring of identified pest species in terms of where their

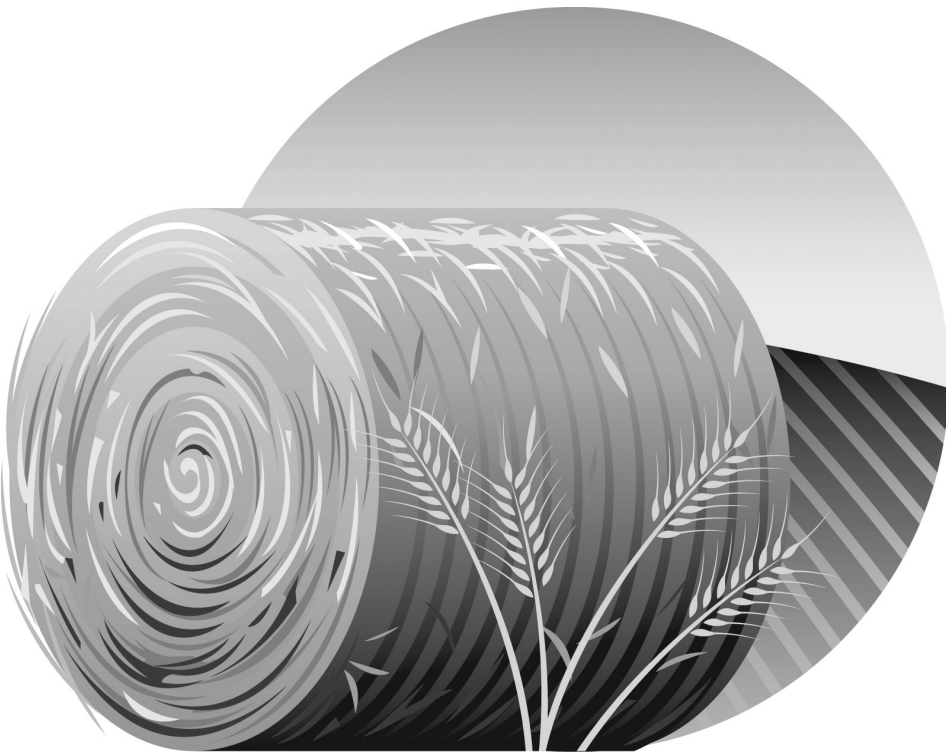


IMAGE: METRO GRAPHICS

populations are in relation to certain thresholds. When a threshold is met, control measures begin with the least environmentally risky, such as trapping and weeding, before moving toward more environmentally risky options, such as targeted chemical sprays. Broadcast spraying of non-specific pesticides are used as a last resort.

Certified weed-free forage would fall under prevention in the IPM strategy.

Some states, like Idaho, where there is a significant percentage of federal land, have required certified weed-free forage use by livestock owners since 2003. In many states, certified weed-free forage is mandated for certain uses, such as highway projects in Nebraska as well as public and provincial lands.

But the certified weed-free program has also been increasing in popularity voluntar-

ily among agricultural users. Going with certified weed-free has become an IPM tool for private pastures, as well as an opportunity for premiums above the market price of hay for growers.

"Participants can also take pride in the fact that they have done what they can to prevent the spread of noxious and invasive weeds on or from their property," Bruhn said.

To use the "certified weed-free" label, fields must be approved by a qualified professional weed inspector to be free of at least 54 weed species that are listed as noxious in at least one state or Canadian province, prior to harvesting. County weed superintendents count as qualified weed-free inspectors. The fee for inspections, certificates and tags vary according to the county.

"Producers gain a trustworthy ally when they join forces with their local weed

control professionals in the fight against invading weeds," Bruhn said.

All in all, while the certified weed-free program is built upon the economic principle of supply and demand — end-user demand of a supply that is confidently free of noxious and invasive weeds — the real value in the program lies in sustaining healthy ecosystems, including agricultural land.

"Invasive, noxious weeds degrade our environment in all ecosystems that they invade, be it urban, rural, cropland, wastelands or wild land," Bruhn said. "Non-native plants outcompete native vegetation for available water and nutrients in the ecosystem. The unintended spread or introduction of an undesirable weed species can turn into a nightmare in a very short time."

Commentary

My Daughter's First Year In 4-H

BY RITA BRHEL
P&D Correspondent

This is my oldest child's first year in 4-H. Our county fair just ended, and it has been a very good season for her. So, I'm going to brag a little...

Rachel started her 4-H year with the Public Speaking Contest in April, where she received a purple ribbon for reciting a Shel Silverstein poem about pancakes.

In May, she completed the mandatory Livestock Quality Assurance training required of all 4-H members exhibiting livestock at the fair and attended a workshop on showing sheep.

June was a busy month. Rachel attended workshops for livestock judging and commercial poultry judging, after which she competed in a contest. She got a red in livestock judging, but a purple in poultry judging. She also attended a workshop on showing meat goats. When we learned that the poultry show would be canceled at the fair due to the Avian Influenza outbreak, Rachel began working on a demonstration for the Presentation Contest on poultry showmanship, receiving a purple. She also got a blue at the Favorite Foods Revue, which is a contest where the 4-H members do a table setting and menu based on a theme and present it to the judge.

Our county fair was earlier in July. Rachel showed meat goats, getting all purples. Instead of the traditional live-bird poultry show, 4-H members were invited to exhibit photographs of their birds and educational posters, and to give their showmanship talk using a stuffed chicken. Rachel received a purple in showmanship and an educational binder on the breed of her chickens:



Rita
BRHEL

specified in the fair book. Oops! Rachel also worked the food stand and a family fun booth with her club, and took two goats through the 4-H Livestock Auction to earn additional premiums on her animals.

Rachel was sad when the last day of fair came, though that doesn't mean it's the end of the 4-H season. She's going to work on a scrapbook to keep track of her ribbons and exhibits, and then it's time to fill out her 4-H Record Books, including listing the skills that she's learned through the year.

4-H is designed for all kids ages 5 to 19, including the Clover Kid pre-4-H program from ages 5 to 8. Rachel's sister, Emily, is a Clover Kid this year and took some clothing and foods exhibits, as well as did poultry and goat showmanship, alongside her sister. Unlike Rachel, Emily receives a participant ribbon without premium money for all of her exhibits. But like Rachel, Emily is picking up skills.

4-H has something for kids whether they are able to show animals or not. It provides an opportunity for kids to learn about subjects that aren't taught in school and that the kids show par-

ticular interest in, such as Entomology for Rachel and Wildlife Conservation for Emily. But the majority of skills gained are those that aren't so obvious to the eye, such as time management, organization, sportsmanship, work ethic, perseverance, patience, teamwork and so on. There is a definite bent toward agricultural literacy, but there's nothing wrong with that: Even with 4-H kids who don't take livestock or crop projects, the agricultural exposure is always positive, even if minimal. As the auctioneer at the 4-H Livestock Auction pointed out, "If you want kids to stay in agriculture, 4-H is where you need to invest your money."

I was in 4-H for 10 years. I took a lot of different 4-H projects and showed beef, sheep and poultry every year and on every level from county to national. I have a definite bent toward agriculture, but probably the biggest skills I picked up from 4-H were in project management, which I use in every part of my life from home and family to my career. Juggling 21 different 4-H projects a year through my later teen years, in addition to as many or possibly more 4-H contests, easily set me up to be able to handle college classes, jobs and internships and then later life as a work-from-home mom with two jobs, three kids, an acreage, livestock care, egg sales and volunteer work. I'm excited to be able to help pass these life skills — and, I admit it, love of agriculture and livestock — to my children through 4-H.

4-H is definitely a program worth investing your time (as a parent or volunteer) and money (as a donation from a business) into. It sets up kids for a lifetime of success as adults contributing positively to society, especially with an appreciation for agriculture.

High Temps, Humidity In The Mid-Summer Outlook

BROOKINGS — Higher temperatures and humidities across eastern South Dakota produced heat indexes reaching the 100 to 110-degree range throughout the first few weeks of July.

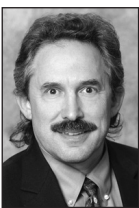
"Fortunately, the occurrences did not extend for several days, which would have had larger potential impacts on people as well as livestock in the state," said Dennis Today, South Dakota State Climatologist & SDSU Extension Climate Specialist.

Today says some summer-like conditions may remain in the state according to the July 16, 2015 long range climate outlooks released by the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

"Although temperatures are predicted to be cooler than average

in states south of South Dakota, our state has about equal chances of being cooler or warmer than average," Today said. "This is a slight shift away from previous outlooks which had South Dakota in the cooler than average outlook."

However, he added that the current climate outlook remains consistent with nearer term computer models which have been staying a bit warmer during July. "Through the middle of the month, most of the state is still below average for July temperatures," Today said.



Today

WHAT THE OUTLOOK MEANS FOR CROPS?

He added that unless conditions turn very warm soon, the overall impact on crops may be minimal to slightly positive.

"Most of the corn in South Dakota is reaching its reproductive phase, which is the part of the growing season where the most yield can be lost more quickly if conditions are too hot and/or dry," explained Laura Edwards, SDSU Extension Climate Field Specialist. "Overall temperatures have been warm, but not too high to accumulate much stress."

According to the latest USDA-NASS reports, corn is slightly behind in development. Edwards said the additional heat will help move crop development along a little more quickly.

"The precipitation outlook has also shifted from wetter to equal chances of below and above average for most of the state. The better chance for wetter conditions is along the Nebraska border and to the south of us," she said.

She adds that current precipitation totals are generally OK to wet across the state; with the exception of a few locations in eastern South Dakota which continue to be slightly dry. "The heat and limited soil moisture could start causing some issues in these mostly isolated areas," Edwards said.

The most recent U.S. Drought Monitor map reflects this issue with continued pockets of Abnormally Dry (D0) conditions in a couple areas of eastern South Dakota.

EL NINO IS STILL A PLAYER

Looking ahead to the fall and winter, El Nino is still a player in the outlooks. "The current outlooks very much reflect El Nino conditions," Today said. "Winter continues to have a good likelihood of being above average in temperature for South Dakota and surrounding areas."

Edwards added that El Nino could create a small potential for harvest issues because a wet fall is more likely. "With crops developing at a reasonable rate, this is not a major concern right now," she said. "Development and harvest should not be impacted greatly. But this should be monitored for changes for potential crop drying and harvesting issues."

To learn more, visit iGrow.org.