



'Area-Wide Variance' Allowed In S.D.

PIERRE — Due to this year's drought, the South Dakota Natural Resources Conservation Service has allowed an "area-wide variance" for minimum residue requirements on highly erodible lands (HEL).

The variance applies to all counties in South Dakota except Roberts, if eligibility requirements are met.

The area-wide variance would be available for any untilled HEL fields where residue levels are less than required by the conservation plans due to drought or because residue has been harvested for forage (silage baled, grazed).

With the following exceptions, the variance would not apply to HEL fields that have been tilled and have inadequate residue levels since it is expected that tillage activities be reduced or eliminated in an attempt to ensure planned residue levels are met.

- Exceptions-variance would also apply to tilled HEL fields if:
 - A cover crop or fall crop was planted immediately after fall tillage
 - The only tillage was due to spring application of anhydrous ammonia (with a narrow or low disturbance shank on 30-inch or wider spacings)

Again, the variance will only apply if minimum residue levels identified in the HEL compliance plan are not met. HEL fields with adequate residue levels would be considered actively applying the conservation plan and would not need a variance.

For more information on the area-wide variance for HEL, contact Gerald Jasmer, state resource conservationist, at 605-352-1234.

S.D. Ag. Department Asks For Rural Feedback

PIERRE — The South Dakota Department of Agriculture is asking for feedback from farmers, ranchers and others in the agriculture sector through an Internet survey.

"In response to Gov. Dennis Daugaard's Red Tape Review, the department is conducting an online survey to obtain input from the South Dakota agriculture industry on rules and regulations that affect it," said Agriculture Secretary Walt Bones. "We invite all of those people involved in the agriculture sector to take the survey. This is your state Department of Agriculture, and we want to know how to better serve you."

The survey can be found at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/sd-dasurvey2012>.

For questions about the survey, contact Jamie Crew at 605-773-4073.

SowBridge Educational Series Begins Fifth Year Of Distance Education

BROOKINGS — The successful distance education program SowBridge will begin its fifth year Nov. 7. South Dakota State University Swine Extension Specialist Bob Thaler said programming topics and speakers are selected based on participant feedback.

"Participants' suggestions help maintain the program's value. We use their feedback to select current content on topics that people are interested in," Thaler said. "SowBridge provides all participants with the opportunity to hear directly from experts, and to contact those experts following the individual sessions."

Thaler, who also is the South Dakota contact for SowBridge, said the program is intended for people involved in managing or caring for boars, sows, and/or their litters, including operation owners, employees, technicians, managers, and technical service providers. SowBridge is designed to improve the understanding and application of various tools and techniques involved in daily care of the breeding herd and piglets.

"People from the United States, Canada, Australia, Ireland and West Indies took part in this past year's program, and they told us they appreciated having the opportunity for all employees to participate in the sessions without requiring any travel or other expenses," he said. "With the live phone presentation and Power{oint} slideshow viewed on computer, participants do not need internet access and can take part from anywhere."

Entities with more than one location have the opportunity to add locations at a lower rate. This provides access to one phone line per session and all program materials for each registration. Thaler said materials, delivery process and program costs are slightly different for those with non-U.S. mailing addresses, and en-

couraged potential subscribers from outside the U.S. to contact Sherry Hoyer at IPIC by phone at 615-294-4496 or email shoyer@iastate.edu for more information.

Before each session, U.S. subscribers receive a CD containing that session's presentation, along with information on accessing the live speaker presentation. Most participants will call a toll-free conference line to listen to and interact with presenters. Each session begins at 11:30 a.m. Central Time and lasts approximately 45 minutes.

Oct. 15 is the deadline for this yearlong program subscription only program. The deadline ensures participants will receive materials before the first session, which is Nov. 7.

A brochure with information and a registration form is available on the IPIC Web site at <http://www.ipic.iastate.edu/SowBridge/2012BrochureIPIC.pdf> South Dakota residents who want more information can call Stalder at 605-688-5435.

SowBridge is sponsored by a group of 11 state universities from the major swine producing states.



PHOTO: RITA BRHEL

Increased pressure from irrigation is one factor that is putting additional stress on the Ogallala Aquifer, a major water source for the central U.S.

Drought Demands Putting Stress On Ogallala Aquifer

BY RITA BRHEL
P&D Correspondent

It would be an insidious route to the end of the world, one that doesn't make quite the exciting movie plot as asteroids and super tornadoes but that could be far more of an effective apocalypse: Water overuse.

There are nearly 7 billion people on the Earth at this moment, and each person depends on water as a basic requirement for survival. Surface waters, such as rivers and ponds, cannot provide enough water to support society, especially the demands of developed nations, making aquifers—deep caverns of underground water the size of several states, at the least — a vital source of water.

In many parts of the world, civilization is unknowingly sucking these aquifers dry.

Dan Charles, National Public Radio's food and agriculture correspondent, reports that among the world's most important aquifers, those experiencing the most stress are in Western Mexico, the Middle East, India-Pakistan, Northern China, and the High Plains of the United States. And, he says, the primary threat is agriculture pulling out water faster than is being naturally replenished.

"Some of these aquifers are being exploited at a stunning rate, but what's truly alarming is how many people depend on that over-exploitation for their food," Charles said.

He explained what he called each aquifer's footprint, an area of land many times larger than the actual aquifer that relies on the underground resources. For example, huge population densities rely the food grown in India and North China, not to mention Mexico's U.S.-bound fruit and vegetable production and the United States' Great Plains grain belts that "feed the world."

The Ogallala Aquifer, which sits underneath portions of eight states including South Dakota and Nebraska, is the U.S. aquifer that Charles mentions. He stresses that this year's historic drought is definitely playing a part in the Ogallala's failing health, but ultimately, the demand by irrigation needs is the ongoing threat.

"The High Plains [Ogallala] aquifer in the United States, meanwhile, is having a particularly bad



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year," Charles said. "Farmers are pumping even more than usual, because of the drought afflicting this part of the country, and it is getting less replenishment from rainfall. So, water levels in the aquifer are falling even faster, leaving less water for the region's rivers, birds, and fish."

The Ogallala is approximately 174,000 square miles in size and a depth of a few hundred feet to, at most, 1,000 feet depending on the location, according to the High Plains Underground Water Conservation District No. 1, based in Lubbock, Texas. Some wells drilled into this aquifer yield more than 1,000 gallons of water per minute, while wells in others yield only a couple of gallons per minute. Depth to water below the land surface ranges from just 100 to nearly 400 feet, adds the Northern Plains Groundwater Conservation District, based in Dumas, Texas.

The Ogallala is shrinking. In 1990, it contained 3.27 billion acre-feet of water, the majority of which was located under Nebraska. The most recent estimate of the volume of water in the entire aquifer was just under 3 billion acre-feet, reports the High Plains Underground Water Conservation District. It takes an estimated 50 years to recharge lost water to the aquifer. Natural recharge happens through percolation of precipitation through the

soil into the water table. The average recharge rate for the entire Ogallala Aquifer is estimated at one-half inch per year and brings with it chemicals leached from agricultural ground.

Before the development of irrigation, discharge from the aquifer occurred from natural resources such as ponds, lakes, streams, and wetlands fed by seeps and springs. The High Plains Underground Water Conservation District reports that while there are still seeps and springs flowing, many have ceased because of the lowering of the water table. About 95 percent of the water pumped from the Ogallala is for crop irrigation. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, a study from 2000 found that irrigation withdrawals from the Ogallala totaled 17 billion gallons per day. It's no wonder that in the last 50 years, the water table has dropped 190 feet in depth, reports the Environmental Defense Fund, headquartered in New York City with offices across the country.

The Ogallala Aquifer isn't going to dry up in the immediate future, but it's also not an infinite resource. The Environmental Defense Fund estimates the aquifer's lifespan range from 60 to 250 years, depending on the area and the rate of annual water use and weather conditions. Certainly, drought conditions like that of this year—the U.S. Drought Monitor continues to show much of the area covering the region of the Ogallala Aquifer sitting in an exceptional drought with long-range conditions continuing to worsen—deplete the aquifer at an even faster rate. In addition to crop irrigation—a 2003 study found that 1 bushel of corn required 2100 gallons of irrigated water—the Environmental Defense Fund reports

that a significant amount of water usage also goes toward the making of corn ethanol, to the tune of an additional 780 gallons of water to produce 1 gallon of ethanol.

Of course, water is also being pumped from the aquifer for non-agricultural uses, including home use, golf course and green space irrigation, and industrial needs.

Many producers complain about water use restrictions, but before the government intervened, prior to the 1970s, farmers were lowering the water table by as much as five feet in their areas each year, according to the High Plains Underground Water Conservation, and that was well before the crop production levels of today. Still, despite water use regulations, the water table continues to drop, simply because supply can't keep up with demand, Charles reports.

"This can't go on forever. Already, many farmers are being forced to dig deeper wells to get at that water," he said. "In some areas, they'll just have to stop using those underground stores of water altogether."

But there's hope. Here's what's happening in water conservation trends:

- Irrigation technologies that use water more efficiently, adjusting irrigation schedules to local weather conditions and soil moisture results, as well as regulating water pressure to reduce waste through runoff or evaporation.
- New drought-resistant crop varieties, such as Monsanto's DroughtGard corn and DuPont Pioneer's AQUAmax corn.
- More federal incentives to encourage farmers to use less water, such as through no-till cropping systems, crop rotation, and precision nitrogen applications.

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