

Northern Plains Sheep Symposium Sept. 28-29

BROOKINGS — SDSU Extension in cooperation with the South Dakota Sheep Grower's Association (SDSGA) is hosting the Northern Plains Sheep Symposium in conjunction with the 75th annual SDSGA Convention, set for Lead Sept. 28-29.

Topics covered during the Sheep Symposium include; sheep reproduction, nutrition, health, wool and marketing. Extension specialists, industry experts and government agencies from North Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Minnesota, Colorado and South Dakota will be covering the topics and be available to answer any questions growers may have.

The symposium will be held at the The Days Inn in Lead and will begin Sept. 28 with registration at 1:30 p.m.

Presentations will run from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. The day will conclude with an Emerging Entrepreneur social at 6 p.m. Sept. 29 will continue the educational program and the South Dakota Sheep Growers Convention kick-off with a welcome from SDSGA president Steve Clements.

The two-day event will culminate in a Fresh American Lamb Banquet and wrap up with the state finals for the Make it Yourself with Wool program.

Hotel reservations can be made from the reserved block by calling (605) 584-1800. Attendees should identify that they are with the Northern Plains Sheep Symposium and/or South Dakota Sheep Grower's Association.

To preregister for this event, contact Dave Ollila, SDSU Extension Sheep Field Specialist at (605) 394-1722, David.Ollila@sdstate.edu or Dr. Jeff Held, SDSU Extension Sheep Specialist at (605) 390-7033, Jeffrey.Held@sdstate.edu. Attendees can also register the first day of the event.

Rural Safety Courses Offered Sept. 29-30

BROOKINGS — SDSU Extension will host Rural Safety Courses for all ages during the Dakota Country Lifestyles Expo Sept. 29-30 in the Fine Arts Building at the Central States Fairgrounds in Rapid City.

Topics covered will include livestock handling, machinery, electrical and general outdoor safety.

The safety courses will be held in 15-30 minutes sessions throughout the Expo, which runs from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. (MDT) on Saturday and 10 a.m.-4 p.m. (MDT) Sunday. The Expo will also feature Country Living Seminars and numerous vendors of Dakota-Made products.

Exact safety course seminar times will be posted at <http://www.dakotacountrylifestyles.com/>. For more information, call Mindy Hubert at 605-394-1722 or email mindy.hubert@sdstate.edu.

Signups Being Taken For HELI

HURON — USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) State Executive Director Craig Schaunaman announced that FSA is accepting Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) offers under the Highly Erodible Land Initiative (HELI). South Dakota was allocated 9,600 acres under this initiative.

Signup will continue until these acres are exhausted or Sept. 30, 2012, whichever comes first.

To be eligible, cropland must have an Erodibility Index (EI) of 20 or greater; have been cropped or considered cropped 4 of the 6 crop years from 2002-2007; and be considered needed and feasible to solve the resource concern. Cropland that is currently devoted to grass will not meet the needs and feasibility test, except for cropland that is currently under a CRP contract that is scheduled to expire Sept. 30, 2012. "All counties have soil types and conditions that will meet the EI of 20 or greater, but this type of land is most prevalent in the western part of South Dakota," said Schaunaman.

This initiative is part of an overall effort announced by Secretary Vilsack in March to devote an additional 1 million acres of land in a new CRP Initiative to restore grasslands, wetlands and wildlife. Under this effort, South Dakota has also received additional acres for several wetland practices including the popular Duck Nesting Habitat.

"It is anticipated that producers in the eastern part of the state will utilize the wetland practices and that the HELI Initiative will be utilized by counties located west of the Missouri River," he said.

Producers are encouraged to contact their local FSA office or visit FSA's website at www.fsa.usda.gov/crp for additional information regarding CRP.

Hay To Be Removed From State Highway ROW

PIERRE — The South Dakota Department of Transportation requests the cooperation of all farmers and ranchers in removing processed hay from the highway right of way.

State regulations require that hay be removed from the right of way within 30 days of being processed, but no later than Oct. 1.

Removing hay bales from the highway right of way is an important safety consideration for motorists.

The bales or stacks can be a safety hazard for vehicles forced to leave the road and, in some cases, can restrict a driver's sight distance.

Hay left in the road ditches late in the year can also cause snowdrifts across the highway.

For more information, contact Jason Humphrey at 605-773-3571.



PHOTO: RITA BRHEL

While not a popular feature for most landowners, wetlands play a key role in agriculture by moderating floodwaters, recharging groundwater, controlling sediment, and filtering water contaminants.

Wetlands — Playing A Key Role In Agriculture

BY RITA BRHEL
P&D Correspondent

The only thing most producers want to do with a six-legged creature is kill it, unless it's a ladybug or honey bee or another known beneficial insect. They certainly don't want to take the time to count how many are buzzing around their farm unless it's to determine how much insecticide to spray.

Therefore, most farmers and ranchers aren't going to be interested in taking part of a dragonfly count out of the goodness of their hearts, unless someone can prove that it benefits their bottom line in some way. As it turns out, dragonflies may not benefit agricultural production directly, but their being there indicates something that does — particularly for producers whose property includes, or is bordering, a wetland.

"The high presence of insects such as dragonflies, damselflies, caddisflies, and stoneflies indicate good water, while the high presence of insects such as mosquitoes, blackflies, and midges typically indicate areas of lower quality," said Jolene Laverty, a wetlands coordinator with The Nature Conservancy of Canada in Toronto, Ontario.

Certainly, fewer mosquitoes is always a good thing, but healthy wetlands are not only a haven for biodiversity but also play a key role in moderating floodwaters, recharging groundwater, controlling sediment, and filtering water contaminants.

Drained wetlands are highly sought-after for agricultural uses, because of their fertile soil, high water table, and flat topography. In the 1970s, 53 percent of the nation's wetlands were lost to agricultural uses; today, state and federal laws regulate the land use of wetlands. William Powers,

whose farm north of Lincoln, Neb., consists of mostly salt marshes, said the only agricultural activity allowed on the property is livestock grazing.

But not all wetlands qualify for federal protection. What is most difficult to determine are wetlands that aren't true aquatic habitats — and therefore could be farmed — as there is often no clear boundary between them and uplands that are permissible for agricultural activity. In order for a wetland to fall under federal jurisdiction, the site must be dominated by plants that require or prefer wet soils, the soil must be saturated with water for at least one week

during the growing season, and the depth from the soil surface to the water table must be relative shallow for the area.

Wetlands are not a popular feature for most agricultural landowners, but Neil Bien of Veblen who preserved 100 natural wetlands and has restored another 15 wetlands on his 2,300-acre cattle ranch believes in the value of wetlands to ranchers. Bien received a National Wetlands Award for Land Stewardship in 2005 and continues to be outspoken in his support of wetland preservation and restoration on agricultural land.

But ranchers can utilize wetlands for grazing; wetlands are actual advantageous because of the water supply. Crop producers usually have to count wetlands as lost acres. There are two federal programs that discourage producers from converting wetlands to agricultural land: Section 404 of the Clean Water Act requires landowners to obtain a permit before discharging

dredged or fill material into wetlands, and the Swampbuster provisions of the Food Security Act withholds certain federal farm program benefits from farmers who modify wetlands. However, most agricultural activities are still permitted on most wetland areas if they are not protecting an endangered species such as the Salt Creek Tiger Beetle on the Powers' farm.

In addition, the federal Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) pays an incentive to participating landowners who protect wetlands. And many Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres include wetlands in their payments.

Landowners with wetlands on their property interested in an easy way to monitor the health of their wetlands by counting dragonflies can find more information at www.migratorydragonflypartnership.org. The Dragonfly Pond Watch asks volunteers to follow annual movements of two species of dragonfly.

Dragonfly numbers may well be down this year, though, considering this year's dry conditions. The drought is also affecting wetlands management in South Dakota, where CRP and WRP land has been opened for emergency grazing. Much of Nebraska is in an exceptional drought, the most severe stage, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor, while South Dakota ranges from abnormally dry up north to exceptional in the southeast. The entire Yankton area is included in the exceptional drought.

There is concern that the damage done to wetlands from

the drought may not be reversible.

"Of course, drought is not an uncommon occurrence," said Nikki Conti, biologist with The Wetlands Initiative in Chicago, Ill. "Drought years and rainy years are part of the natural cycle. This process actually benefits ecosystems by maintaining the balance among species and allowing a more diverse range of species to survive."

But, she added, "Top climate scientists say it's very likely global warming has contributed to the record high temperatures of recent years, as well as the extreme 2012 drought. Climate change predictions indicate that droughts such as these will become more frequent and more severe in future years, potentially upsetting the balance of species and threatening ecosystems."

Conti said that scientists believe that weather conditions that have historically been in the southern U.S. may be permanently shifting north. If so, entire wetland ecosystems could collapse — not to mention, every other natural habitat and agricultural system accustomed to more precipitation and more moderate temperatures. Her advice for on-farm wetlands conservationists, at least: Source seeds from southern areas more accustomed to this weather, like Texas, and recreate deeper water habitats to provide refuge to drought-sensitive species like frogs and crayfish.

"This particular summer of drought may be foreshadowing the years to come," Conti said.

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