

Producers are reminded to work with USDA to install and maintain conservation practices.

Part of the state saw significant rainfall recently, with some areas receiving over nine inches in just a few hours. Although the moisture was welcomed in most areas, some areas experienced damages like flooding and soil erosion.

According to State Conservationist Craig Derickson with the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), erosion problems have been high in fields that have recently been broken out for cropland production, or fields that lack structural conservation practices like terraces and waterways.

"High prices driven by a strong demand for our commodities are boosting farm income but are putting enormous pressure on our land and water resources. We're seeing more land broken out to farm and fewer conservation practices like terraces and waterways, which can result in more soil erosion," Derickson said.

This became apparent following last week's heavy rainfall.

On some farms, when heavy rains came, conservation practices were not in place to help prevent soil from washing away.

Derickson said, "Our staff is seeing erosion issues on cropland across the state. In draws where trees were recently removed and then planted through, the newly planted crop has been washed away and there are deep gullies. This is creating concern among NRCS staff as we conduct field visits to do conservation compliance checks."

As part of the 1985 Farm Bill, conservation compliance was enacted.

This created a partnership between farmers and ranchers and the USDA. In exchange for farm program benefits, farmers agreed to adopt land management practices to reduce soil erosion, conserve water, create wildlife habitat and protect wetlands. According to USDA, this resulted in soil erosion being cut by 40 percent on 140 million acres of cropland.

The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) partners with NRCS in the conservation compliance process. "Farmers and landowners certify their compliance by completing a Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Conservation Certification" explained FSA State Director Dan Steinkruger. "We ask farmers to work with the NRCS to evaluate the conservation planning and assistance needed on their farms."

For landowners to remain in compliance with USDA, a conservation plan is required on highly erodible land. NRCS works with landowners to develop conservation plans, and Farm Bill programs provide incentive payments to assist with the installation and maintenance of conservation practices.

"The key to a successful conservation plan is for farmers and ranchers to work closely with USDA. If a producer wants to break out new land, alter a wetland, or remove any conservation practices like terraces and waterways, they need to first visit their local USDA Service Center. USDA employees can work with landowners to ensure any land changes don't put the producer at risk of being out of compliance with their conservation plan," Derickson said.

NRCS works with landowners to develop a conservation plan to apply conservation practices on their property. Conservation practices work to lessen the negative impact of the extreme dry conditions Nebraska experienced last year as well as the recent heavy rainfall events.

"Nebraska is a place of extremes that can quickly move from drought to flooding. Conservation practices can help farmers and ranchers endure these extremes.

Conservation practices work, but they only work if installed and maintained properly.

“America’s farmers produce more than food and fiber – they also produce clean water and air, open spaces and habitat for wildlife. A conservation plan helps landowners achieve these goals that benefit all Nebraskans,” Derickson said.

For more information on conservation compliance and installing conservation practices on land, contact the local Natural Resources Conservation Service office. Information is also available online at www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov.