



April 29, 2005

IMPRESSIVE CONSERVATION EFFORTS

Carbon Update

Last week, a representative from the Chicago Climate Exchange and Iowa Farm Bureau gave an update on the carbon offset contracts and shed some light on how many farmers are participating in the carbon pilot project through 2006. Iowa Farm Bureau has developed the carbon offset contract for farm land and sold the concept to Iowa farmers over the past two years. In that time, they enrolled 83,000 acres in the program. We swamped the Iowa Farm Bureau office with Southeast Nebraska applications in which 70 applications still need to be processed.

In late February, it appears that Nebraska farmers have enrolled an estimated 160,000 acres of continuous no-till acres in one month to meet the April 1st deadline. Saline County has 45 producers involved, Gage County has over 75 producers involved, Jefferson County 25 producers and about 5 each from Lancaster, Pawnee, Otoe, Johnson, and Thayer Counties. This represents impressive conservation efforts from farmers who continuously no-till all or part of their farmland, to protect soil, save fuel, increase yields, and save time. University of Nebraska Extension and the Farm Service Agency offices were involved in helping farmers document their no-till acres for the program. Kudos to Farm Service Agency staff who assisted.

This past week, Iowa Farm Bureau made the first sales of the Iowa farmland enrolled on the Chicago Climate Exchange. A total of 105 contracts for 100 tons of carbon each were sold on the exchange for 2003 credits. One sale involved the University of Iowa Power Plant which has set rigorous carbon dioxide emission standards. They have combined power plant improvements, burning oat hulls from area processing plants, and offset purchase of no-till Iowa farmland to meet their goals. The first checks will go to Iowa farmers next week. The income for farmers is a very modest amount between fifty and sixty cents per acre. It is a new exchange, a pilot project started from a grant and this is a starting point. Following documentation of all the Nebraska acres, there will likely be sale of the Nebraska credits later this year.

Each year of no-till farming is credited with one-half ton of carbon stored in the soil as organic matter rather than being released to the atmosphere as carbon dioxide. The long term tillage of our prairie soils has reduced organic matter levels from the 5-6 percent level to the 2 percent level. No-till farmers have begun a long slow process to halt this decline and increase soil organic matter levels. It is up for debate when a new equilibrium point will be reached. There could be a 50 year plus time of storing carbon before the soils reach a new no-till balance point where as much is being mineralized each year as is being saved.

Conservation Security Programs (CSP)

More than 40 Saline County farmers have already delivered their information to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to sign up for the CSP program. CSP is a pilot conservation effort which could likely be a replacement someday for a portion or all of the current farm program. I call it "green payments." In an effort to assist farmers in understanding the details of the CSP sign-up, three additional small group sessions are planned in Beatrice, Fairbury and Wilber by University of Nebraska Extension and NRCS.



The Fairbury meeting is Wednesday, May 4th, 8:00 AM - 10:00 AM, at the 4-H Building on the Jefferson County Fairgrounds. The Wilber meeting is Thursday, May 5th, 9:00 AM - 11:00 AM at the Saline County Extension Office. The Gage County meeting is set for Thursday, May 5th, 8:00 AM - 10:00 AM at the Extension Office in Beatrice.

Producers from any County involved with CSP are welcome to attend any of these meetings.

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