



February 4, 2005

IT'S ALL ABOUT WATER

Water is Nebraska's greatest resource and will continue to be a main issue that drives our agricultural economy. Last year, a significant change occurred in the Unicameral that had been boiling for awhile and talked about a lot in the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

LB 962, passed by our Legislature in 2004, amended the Nebraska Groundwater Management and Protection Act to include a more proactive approach to Nebraska's surface and groundwater use. Under the amended act, every year starting in January of 2006, the DNR will make a determination of which river basins and subbasins are considered to be fully appropriated for irrigation.

The decision that a basin is fully appropriated will trigger a moratorium on new surface and groundwater uses and the initiation of a process by the DNR. The affected Natural Resource Districts (NRD's) and appropriate stakeholders will develop an integrated surface water and groundwater management plan.

Stays were placed on new water uses in many of Nebraska NRD Districts. This includes moratoriums on developing new irrigation wells. Any more drilling must be offset by the NRD integrated water management plans.

In Saline County, we have seen some declines in our groundwater due to drought in the last five years, but with more rainfall last year, that was a welcome change. The Lower Big Blue NRD works with an existing groundwater management plan if we fall below a certain baseline level with groundwater in consecutive years. This has not occurred. Now, the NRD will also monitor if the District is over-appropriated. There is no moratorium on drilling new irrigation wells in the Lower Big Blue NRD at this time. We are currently not experiencing the problems in Saline County that are impacting other producers across the State.

For more detailed information on the impact of LB 962, contact your local Natural Resources District office.

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