



March 2, 2018

Have You Heard?

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TAKE ADVANTAGE OF COST SHARE IN MARCH

I have always felt cost share can be a win-win for both the government and landowner on mutual goals such as water quantity and quality. There are two items I want to highlight this week on cost share through your Natural Resources District (NRD) with their water quality cost share programs.

Water is the life support of irrigated and dryland agriculture and economy of Nebraska. Nebraska's approximately 8.5 million acres of irrigated lands are extremely vital to the state's economy with an approximate five billion dollars per year of revenue. Anytime we can better manage water to make food, fuel, fiber and feed, it is a big deal. In Nebraska, farmers and consultants utilizing ET gauges and/or watermark sensors are reporting an average savings of two acre-inches of water applied and the associated costs of pumping that water. Where the savings mostly happen are on the front end of irrigation season and the tail end.

ET gauges mimic crop water use. You should annually replace the white wafers on the gauge on a regular basis at the start of each season. The #54 canvas alfalfa reference lasts longer than the wafers but if damaged they need to be replaced. Watermark sensors are a least cost and reliable method (if installed properly) of gathering soil sensing data to estimate soil water status. If you ever have had trouble with a deep sensor re-wetting during irrigation or a rainfall event (leakage down alongside the PVC pipe), ask the Lower Big Blue NRD about the new rubber washers that were ordered. That should really help prevent that issue.

If you have irrigated ground and are looking for ways to save money, reduce nutrient loss and use less water, consider signing up for cost share **no later than March 31** with the Lower Big Blue NRD. The NRD partners with Extension and we help first timers with installations. They pay 50% of the cost of the equipment up to a \$300 maximum per entity. In the Upper Big Blue NRD they cover 50% of the cost and you can order anytime with no limit, but don't wait until the end of June because it gets too late to install.

The Lower Big Blue NRD cost share form is on our website at: <https://go.unl.edu/lbbnrdcostshare2018> It is wise to check your sensors in a bucket of water in March. If any sensor is reading double digits, replace them. Consider data loggers, they are easy to use and makes monitoring quicker. If you don't have one, apply for and get cost share on a backsaver probe to easier install sensors and soil sample with.

The second cost share item to take advantage of this month is irrigation water flow meter cost share of 50% up to \$500 maximum per meter with the Lower Big Blue NRD. There is a limit of 2 meters per landowner. The Upper Big Blue requires flow meters on every irrigation well and will cost share on repairs of a meter. I think installing meters now is a no-brainer to save money in the Lower Big Blue farming area because once the board takes action in the future, there won't be enough cost share money for everyone.

As a landowner, why not contact NRCS now and save \$500 to \$1,000 on one to two meters? The irrigation flow meters are likely to be required in the future, and there is cost share funding now, but it won't be there if new rules are implemented. Flow meters can also save you money because they help with management of the irrigation system. For more information, give me a call at 402-821-2151 or go to the front page of our website where I posted some information this week. For more information on ET gauges and watermark sensors go to: <https://water.unl.edu/category/nawmn>

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