

TIME TO BE READY TO IRRIGATE

As we move into the summer of 2013, we have been much more fortunate in this part of the state, receiving some excellent rainfall this spring. This area of the state is actually out of the drought. This past week we have received some very warm temperatures, with little or no rain; so we could easily slip into very dry to drought conditions in the next few weeks. Having said that, it is important to monitor crop water use, especially as corn enters into its critical stages of growth and development. It is important to keep ahead of potential drought conditions and irrigate when your sensors indicate your soil is being depleted and your crops are nearing a growth stage of high water use. Several NRDs are providing cost-share for irrigation scheduling tools, i.e. Watermark Sensors, ET Gages[®] or flow meters. In 2006 we initiated a pilot project in Nemaha County to provide tools to assist with irrigation scheduling. We installed ETGages[®] and Watermark Sensors to use to estimate evapotranspiration rates and water use so we could improve irrigation scheduling. Since the first set of instruments was installed, there have been other producers in Nemaha County that are utilizing this equipment as tools for their irrigation scheduling. I know several have taken advantage of the 50% cost-share, up to \$300 for equipment the Nemaha NRD has with these tools.

This amounts to a minor investment for producers with the potential savings in water and fuel from less irrigation and fewer trips around the fields. A survey was conducted of 506 participants that utilized these tools in 2010 from 36 counties. The survey indicated a water savings of 2.4” on corn and 2.1” on soybeans. This survey represents 212,660 acres of corn and 130,340 acres of soybeans. This is an increase from 1,482 acres using these irrigation tools when the project began in 2005. On average, annual participants report a water savings of 2.0” for corn and soybeans for six years resulting in total energy savings of at least \$2,142,000 and \$1,313,000 for corn and soybeans respectively. With high fuel prices and the ever present threat of drought in Nebraska, it is always a good idea to be prepared to efficiently manage irrigation water. For information about this cost-share program, contact the Nemaha NRD at (402) 335-3325. For information about the Nebraska Agricultural Water Management Network go to <http://water.unl.edu/web/cropswater/nawmdn> to learn about this program or contact the Nemaha County Extension office at (402) 274-4755.

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