



June 25, 2010

BUFFERS REDUCE ATRAZINE RUNOFF

We should all remember an important lesson of our youth. Too much of anything, even a good thing, can be bad for you. The herbicide atrazine currently is undergoing another EPA review and in Nebraska the main issue is surface runoff in rivers and streams with atrazine. If sorghum and corn producers would lose atrazine herbicide in the future as a tool, cost of weed control would increase and herbicide resistant weeds would be more of an issue.

Buffer strips or filter strips, along streams and water bodies, are our last line of defense to reduce sediment and pesticide runoff that enter streams and other water bodies. The grasses are very effective at trapping sediment and enhancing the infiltration of runoff water. Take a look at where your fields are draining into water bodies, is there a grass buffer?

Buffers improve farm safety by keeping tractors and equipment away from the edge of a stream bank. They also provide excellent habitat for pheasants, songbirds and other wildlife. When planted to trees, a buffer also may provide income for future generations.

Landowners who install filter strips or riparian buffers may be eligible for up to \$250 per acre rental for as long as 10 years through the Nebraska Buffer Strip Program. Craig Romary, Department of Agriculture, is in charge of this program. The program, which started in 1999, is funded by pesticide registration fees.

There is opportunity to increase the number of acres enrolled this year. This is a great opportunity for landowners to help the environment by creating pheasant or wildlife habitat and cleaner runoff water, and get compensated for it. With atrazine runoff being an issue in the Blue River Basin, buffers can be used to reduce atrazine runoff by 17 to 50%, depending on the size of the buffer and storm event.

Landowners are encouraged to combine the benefits of the Nebraska Buffer Strip Program with those of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and/or Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). That way, the landowner will generally receive a higher payment and more buffers can be funded, which increases the environmental benefits for everyone.

It is possible to enroll a buffer only in the Nebraska Buffer Strip Program, which allows some haying or grazing to take place and certain intermittent streams will qualify. Make sure and study the differences between CRP or CREP and the Nebraska Buffer Strip Program.

Information about the Nebraska Buffer Strip Program can be found on the Nebraska Department of Agriculture's web site at www.agr.state.ne.us/division/bpi/pes/buff.htm. Regardless of which program a landowner chooses, he or she should first visit the local Natural Resources Conservation Service office to discuss the various possibilities.



Randy Pryor, Extension Educator
University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension in Saline County
306 West 3rd Street, Wilber, NE 68465
Phone (402) 821-2151 • Fax (402) 821-3398 • e-mail: randy.pryor@unl.edu