

THE FARMER'S REPORT



The Mendota Reporter

The Amboy News

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New (& short) NRCS Conservation video series available for viewing

CHAMPAIGN – The USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service is unveiling a new video series, Conservation at Work, which consist of short, 90-second videos that highlight common conservation practices.

The videos shine the spotlight on farmers, ranchers, and forestland owners from across the U.S. who tell us their own conservation stories, and how practices are helping them protect and improve resources and save time and money.

“By sharing the conservation successes

of our customers, we hope the videos will help educate our customers and the general public and motivate more farmers and landowners to consider conservation,” said Illinois NRCS State Conservationist Ivan Dozier.

Some of the videos you might find helpful in Illinois involve rotational grazing, cover crops, nutrient management, high tunnels, and wetland restoration.

The Conservation at Work video series can be found at www.farmers.gov/conserves/conservationatwork.



How farmers are using drones

The farmers of yesteryear might not be too familiar with their surroundings if they were to visit a modern farm. While the men and women who made their livings as farmers decades ago would no doubt still recognize certain farm features that have withstood the test of time, they might not understand the inner workings of the modern farm, particularly in regard to the role technology now plays within the agricultural sector.

Technology has changed agriculture in myriad ways. The methods farmers employ to produce food and improve the efficiency of their operations has changed as technology has evolved. One of the more noticeable changes that’s hard to miss on modern farms is the use of agricultural drones.

Drones have been around for decades. Sometimes

referred to as “unmanned aerial vehicles,” or “UAVs,” drones can be utilized in ways that can save farmers money and protect the planet.

- Monitor crops: According to senseFly, the commercial drone subsidiary of Parrot Group, drones can help farmers effectively monitor their crops. With a drone flying overhead, farmers can spot and quickly identify issues affecting their crops before those issues escalate into something larger.

- Soil analysis: Another potential benefit of agricultural drones highlights their role in analyzing soil. Agricultural drones utilize complex mapping functions to gather data about the soil, including areas where it might be stressed. That enables farmers to develop accurate soil samples that can be used to guide deci-

sions in regard to irrigation and fertilization.

- Reduce waste: SenseFly notes that data gathered by drones can help farmers determine the vigor of their crops at various stages of growth. Such information can prevent overfertilization and overwatering, thereby reducing waste and runoff, benefitting the planet as a result.

- Planning: Drones can be used to collect data on crop growth and health at various times throughout the growing season. That can help farmers develop accurate predictions regarding harvest quality and crop yield, making it easier for them to plan ahead.

Agricultural drones are one of the many examples that illustrate how technology has changed and will continue to change the ways modern farmers conduct business.



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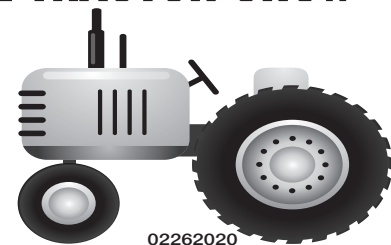


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USDA details risk management programs for hemp producers

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced the availability of two programs that protect hemp producers' crops from natural disasters. A pilot hemp insurance program through Multi-Peril Crop Insurance (MPCI) provides coverage against loss of yield because of insurable causes of loss for hemp grown for fiber, grain or Cannabidiol (CBD) oil and the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) coverage protects against losses associated with lower yields, destroyed crops or prevented planting where no permanent federal crop insurance program is available. Producers may apply now, and the deadline to sign up for both programs is March 16, 2020.

"We are pleased to offer these coverages to hemp producers. Hemp offers new economic opportunities for our farmers, and they are anxious for a way to protect their product in the event of a natural disaster," said Farm Production and Conservation Undersecretary Bill Northey.

Multi-Peril Crop Insurance Pilot Insurance Program

The MPCI pilot insurance is a new crop insurance option for hemp producers in select counties of 21 states for the 2020 crop year. The program is available for eligible producers in certain counties in Alabama, California, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania,

Tennessee, Virginia and Wisconsin. Information on eligible counties is accessible through the USDA Risk Management Agency's Actuarial Information Browser.

Among other requirements, to be eligible for the pilot program, a hemp producer must have at least one year of history producing the crop and have a contract for the sale of the insured hemp. In addition, the minimum acreage requirement is 5 acres for CBD and 20 acres for grain and fiber. Hemp will not qualify for replant payments or prevented plant payments under MPCI.

This pilot insurance coverage is available to hemp growers in addition to revenue protection for hemp offered under the Whole-Farm Revenue Protection plan of insurance. Also, beginning with the 2021 crop year, hemp will be insurable under the Nursery crop insurance program and the Nursery Value Select pilot crop insurance program. Under both nursery programs, hemp will be insurable if grown in containers and in accordance with federal regulations, any applicable state or tribal laws and terms of the crop insurance policy.

Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program

NAP provides coverage against loss for hemp grown for fiber, grain, seed or CBD for the 2020 crop year where no permanent federal crop insurance program is available.

NAP basic 50/55 coverage is available at 55 percent of the average market price for crop losses that exceed 50 percent of expected production. Buy-up coverage is

available in some cases. The 2018 Farm Bill allows for buy-up levels of NAP coverage from 50 to 65 percent of expected production in 5 percent increments, at 100 percent of the average market price. Premiums apply for buy-up coverage.

For all coverage levels, the NAP service fee is \$325 per crop or \$825 per producer per county, not to exceed \$1,950 for a producer with farming interests in multiple counties.

Eligibility Requirements

Under a regulation authorized by the 2018 Farm Bill and issued in October 2019, all growers must have a license to grow hemp and must comply with applicable state, tribal or federal regulations or operate under a state or university research pilot, as authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill.

Producers must report hemp acreage to FSA after planting to comply with federal and state law enforcement. The Farm Bill defines hemp as containing 0.3 percent or less tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) on a dry-weight basis. Hemp having THC above the federal statutory compliance level of 0.3 percent is an uninsurable or ineligible cause of loss and will result in the hemp production being ineligible for production history purposes.

For more information on USDA risk management programs for hemp producers, visit farmers.gov/hemp to read farmers.gov frequently asked questions. For more information on the U.S. Domestic Hemp Production Program, visit USDA's Agricultural Marketing Services' website to read AMS frequently asked questions.

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Wide-ranging partnership to deploy B100 biodiesel technology in daily, high-mileage Class 8 trucks

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo.

— A wide range of organizations announced a partnership to conduct a year-long validation project of revolutionary biodiesel technology to demonstrate its viability in real-world, high-mileage fleet applications.

Under this partnership, five trucks owned by ADM (NYSE: ADM) will be outfitted with Optimus Technologies' Vector fuel system, an innovative technology that enables diesel engines to run almost entirely on sustainable biodiesel. The trucks will be used in daily fleet operations for a year-long period, with each

vehicle anticipated to travel 160,000-180,000 miles and reduce up to 500,000 pounds of CO₂. Advanced monitoring protocols will compare the performance and results of the new technology with five other trucks comprising a control group operating on conventional diesel. All biodiesel used in the project will come from ADM's refinery in Mexico, Mo.

While nearly all diesel engine manufacturers support at least 20 percent biodiesel (B20), the Optimus Vector System is designed to allow conventional diesel engines to run on 100 percent biodiesel in a wide range of climates. The system is already in use in shorter-mileage, local fleet applications such as distribution and waste removal. This new project is designed to evaluate its use for longer-haul over-the-road fleets, potentially opening a pathway to significantly higher volumes of biodiesel in the U.S. truck fleet.

In addition to ADM and Optimus, this project is supported by the American Lung Association, the National



Biodiesel Board, the Illinois Soybean Association, and the Missouri Soybean Merchandising Council.

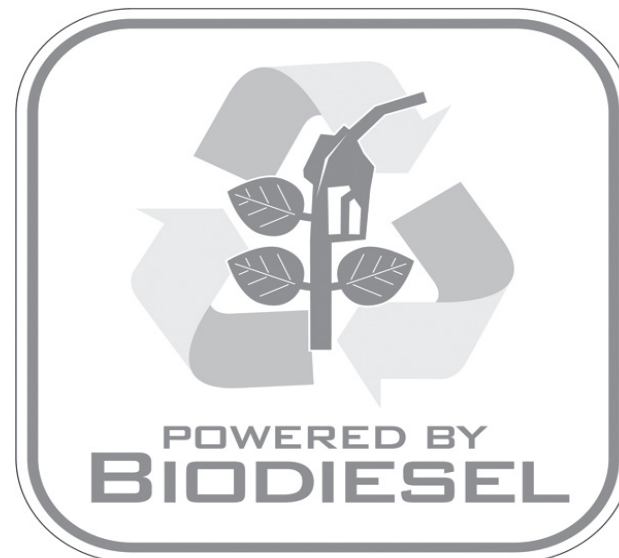
“Our commitment to global sustainability includes reducing emissions, and we have a great opportunity here to validate a technology that could, in theory, expand the use of environmentally-friendly biodiesel in diesel trucks by five-fold or more,” said Steve Finn, ADM’s vice president for trucking. “Going forward, we expect over-the-road trucking miles in the U.S. to continue to increase, so we have an opportunity to use innovative technologies to multiply the environmental and economic benefits of biodiesel. That’s what we are working towards together in this new partnership.”

“Biodiesel blends have been utilized successfully in millions of miles of real-world applications across the diesel sector over the last two decades, but this project is especially exciting as more fleets look to take it to the next level,” said Kaleb Little, director of communications for the National Biodiesel

Board. “Biodiesel’s recognition as a low-carbon fuel option has fleets pushing the envelope, increasing their use of even higher blends, B20 all the way to B100, and this technology makes it easier than ever for users to do just that.”

“We’re excited to announce this partnership with ADM and commend their commitment to sustainability and leadership in both the biodiesel and transportation sectors,” said Colin Huwyler, CEO of Optimus Technolo-

gies. “Trucking is the backbone of the American economy and carbon emissions from transportation continue to rise. Optimus’ technology coupled with ADM’s fuel provides heavy-duty fleets an immediate pathway to reduce these emissions over 80%. While the promise of heavy-duty fleet electrification is still decades off, this project demonstrates the ease, low cost, and efficacy of integrating biodiesel into existing fleet equipment and operations.”



USDA reminds historically underserved producers of advance payment option

WASHINGTON, D.C. — USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) reminds historically underserved producers, who are participating in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), of the advance payment option. This option allows them to get conservation practice payments in advance of practice implementation.

“The advance payment option makes NRCS conservation assistance more accessible to underserved producers,” said NRCS Chief Matthew Lohr. “It enables them to participate without having to worry about covering up-front costs themselves or looking for a loan to cover the costs. Some farmers don’t have the financial ability to wait for the NRCS reimbursement to arrive.”

EQIP provides financial and technical assistance to address natural resource concerns and to deliver environmental benefits, such as improved water and air quality, conserved ground and surface water, reduced soil erosion and sedimentation, and improved or created wildlife habitat. In fiscal 2019, NRCS invested \$1.3 billion through EQIP to implement conservation practices on more than 13 million acres.

A historically underserved producer is described as one of the below:

Beginning Farmer or Rancher – is new to farming or ranching, or, has operated a farm or ranch for less than 10-consecutive years.

Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher – is a member of a group whose members have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity as members of that group without regard to their individual qualities.

Veteran Farmer or Rancher – has served in the armed forces and has not operated a farm or ranch, has operated a farm or ranch for less than 10-consecutive years, or first obtained veteran status during the last 10 years.

Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher – has a household income at or below the national poverty level. Eligibility can be determined by using this online tool.

Under the advance payment option, such producers may request payments when they have final designs and job sheets and are ready to begin their EQIP practices. Advance payments provide at least 50 percent of the payment rate for each practice. The funds must be spent within 90 days of receipt and practices must be completed as agreed to in an EQIP plan of operations. Producers also may opt to have NRCS pay the contractors or vendors directly.

EQIP practices include vegetative practices, structural practices, management practices, and other improvements that further program goals such as conservation activity plans.



Modern farms are technological marvels where various technologies are being employed to produce crops more efficiently and safely than ever before.

The role of technology in agriculture

Modern industry is driven by technology. Advancements in technology have changed how business is conducted, with some industries undergoing dramatic changes since the dawn of the 21st century. While agriculture might not be the first industry people think of when reflecting on the changing nature of industry, The National Institute of Food and Agriculture notes that modern farms are vastly different than those from a few decades ago.

Farmers have long relied on technology to make their operations as efficient, productive and profitable as possible. Precision agriculture, which refers to technological advances designed to propel agriculture into the modern, computerized and information-based world, is helping the agricultural sector become more profitable and efficient while also improving safety and making agriculture more eco-friendly. In addition, the NIFA notes that the mod-

ern agricultural industry employs technology such as robots, temperature and moisture sensors, aerial images, and global positioning systems.

If it sounds complicated, that's because it is. For example, modern sensors can detect soil conditions, potentially producing hundreds of readings per second. These sensors help farmers know the best possible time to plant seeds so they can reach their full potential. That improves both the efficiency of modern farms as well as their output.

The NIFA also notes that agricultural technology has reduced waste. For instance, thanks to agricultural technology, farmers no longer have to apply water, fertilizers and pesticides uniformly across entire fields. Technology has shown that farmers can simply target specific areas or even treat individual plants differently.

That saves time and allows farmers to use only minimal quantities of water, fertilizer and pesticides. In addition, according to the NIFA, employing agricultural technology in this fashion leads to higher crop productivity and reduces runoff of chemicals into rivers and groundwater, thereby reducing the farm's impact on local ecosystems.

Modern farms are technological marvels where various technologies are being employed to produce crops more efficiently and safely than ever before.

Open house presentations to cover gypsy moth spray treatments in N. Ill.

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Agriculture will hold nine open houses to explain the proposed gypsy moth treatment plans for northern Illinois.

The gypsy moth is a non-native pest that feasts on more than 250 species of trees and shrubs, but its preferred food source is oak leaves. Large populations are capable of stripping plants bare, leaving them vulnerable to secondary insect and disease attacks. Severe defoliation can also cause tree death.

Infested sites will be treated with applications of either BtK (Bacillus thuringiensis var. Kurstaki), a naturally-occurring bacteria used by gardeners as an environmentally-friendly alternative to chemical pesticides, or mating disruption (MD), a gypsy moth-specific pheromone that acts as a sexual attractant and prevents male gypsy moths from breeding. BtK is not harmful to people, pets or wildlife.

The BtK product is Valent Foray 48B - Organic which will be applied by helicopter in mid-May, with a second application within two weeks. The mating disruption product, Splat GM-Organic will be applied by airplane in late June.

The gypsy moth program is funded cooperatively through the U.S. Forest Service, Slow the Spread Foundation and the Illinois Department of Agriculture. Illinois has been involved with the Slow the Spread Foundation since its inception in 2000.

The presentation schedule and map of treatment sites are available through the links below.

<https://www.facebook.com/GypsyMothIllinois/>
<https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/agr/Insects/Pests/Pages/gypsy-moth.aspx>



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USDA to invest \$56 million in 2020 to help farmers improve water quality

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will invest \$56 million this year to help agricultural producers improve water quality in more than 300 high-priority watersheds across the country. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is continuing two of its successful landscape-level water quality efforts, the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI) and National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI).

"We've learned that when we partner with producers to deliver conservation practices to critical watersheds, we see a positive impact," said NRCS Chief Matthew Lohr, who made the announcement at the Hypoxia Task Force meeting today. "Through these partnerships we maximize the delivery of our conservation efforts which yields greater results to water quality and benefits the public, our natural resources and farmers' bottom lines."

NRCS launched MRBI in 2009, focusing on watersheds in the Mississippi River Basin, then took the concept nationwide in 2012 with the launch of NWQI. Since then, priority watersheds across the country have seen improvements, including the delisting of once impaired streams.

Through these initiatives, NRCS offers technical and financial assistance to farmers and ranchers to implement practices that avoid, control and trap nutrients and sediment, which in high quantities negatively impact water quality. Practices include filter strips, cover crops and manure manage-



ment, which promote soil health, reduce erosion and lesson nutrient runoff.

NRCS has strengthened focus on watershed assessment and partner engagement in priority small watersheds in fiscal 2020. NRCS will soon solicit state partners for new MRBI and NWQI watersheds and source water protection areas for fiscal 2021. See NRCS website for a list of the watersheds for MRBI and for NWQI.

Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative

This year, NRCS will make available \$17.5 million to producers in 13 states: Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, South Dakota, Tennessee and Wisconsin.

MRBI supports each state's nutrient loss reduction strategy with overall goals of improving water quality, restoring wetlands and enhancing wildlife habitat while ensuring economic viability of agricultural lands along the nation's largest river. The nation's largest hypoxic zone, or low-oxy-

gen area, sits at the mouth of the Mississippi River.

Since its launch, MRBI has:

Helped producers implement conservation on nearly 1.5 million acres

Reduced sediment loss by 2.1 million tons

Reduced phosphorous loss by 4.1 million pounds

Reduced nitrogen loss by 16 million pounds.

National Water Quality Initiative

Additionally, NRCS will make available \$38.9 million this year through NWQI. The Initiative is a partnership among NRCS, state water quality agencies and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to identify and address impaired water bodies through voluntary conservation. Through the Initiative, NRCS provides targeted funding for financial and technical assistance in small watersheds most in need and where farmers can use conservation practices to address impaired surface water. In 2019, NWQI was expanded to include protection of both surface and ground sources of drinking water.

Participating in MRBI and NWQI

NRCS accepts applications for conservation programs year-round, but applications are ranked and funded by enrollment periods that are set locally. Producers interested in technical and financial assistance should contact their local NRCS field office.

Water quality is improving in NWQI watersheds. State water quality agency partners report that 27% of NWQI monitoring watersheds show an improvement in water quality in at least one of the NWQI-monitored pollutants (based on 2016 data). Further, 81% of these improvements can be attributed to or associated with agricultural conservation practices implemented by farmers and ranchers.

Since its launch, NWQI has:

Helped producers implement conservation on 825,000 acres

Reduced sediment loss by 850,000 tons

Reduced phosphorous loss by 2 million pounds

Reduced nitrogen loss by 9.6 million pounds

Participating in MRBI and NWQI

NRCS accepts applications for conservation programs year-round, but applications are ranked and funded by enrollment periods that are set locally. Producers interested in technical and financial assistance should contact their local NRCS field office.

NRCS wants public input on RCPP

CHAMPAIGN — USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) seeks public comments on its interim rule for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), which helps partners develop and implement unique conservation solutions that engage farmers, ranchers and forest landowners. The rule — now available on the Federal Register — takes effect on publication and includes changes to the program prescribed by the 2018 Farm Bill.

"Through RCPP, we co-invest with partners to implement projects that demonstrate innovative solutions to conservation challenges and provide measurable improvements and outcomes," said NRCS Chief Matthew Lohr. "We look forward to making available this improved, more flexible program to partners."

State Conservationist Ivan Dozier welcomes input on the program, which has been successful in Illinois. "This program has been a great one for our agriculture and conservation partners here in Illinois. We want to hear what you like about it, what new ideas you have, or how we can make RCPP even better for solving problems in a collaborative way," Dozier added.

The 2018 Farm Bill made RCPP a stand-alone program with its own dedicated funding, simplifying rules for partners and producers. Additionally, the 2018 Farm Bill reduces the number of funding pools

and emphasizes partner reporting of conservation outcomes.

The updated program also expands flexibility for alternative funding arrangements with partners and availability of watershed program authorities to projects outside critical conservation areas.

Submitting Comments

NRCS invites comments on this interim rule through April 13 on the Federal Register. Electronic comments must be submitted through regulations.gov under Docket ID NRCS-2019-0012. All written comments received will be publicly available on regulations.gov as well. NRCS will evaluate public comments to determine whether additional changes are needed. The agency plans on publishing a final rule following public comment review.

Applying for RCPP

Eligible partners include private industry, non-governmental organizations, state and local governments, water districts and universities. Leveraging of NRCS funding is a key principle of RCPP. Partners are expected to make value-added contributions to amplify the impact of RCPP funding.

NRCS will make available \$300 million for projects in fiscal 2020. The agency anticipates making the first alternative funding arrangement (AFA) funding announcement in March, with the fiscal 2020 RCPP Classic announcement following in summer 2020. For more information, visit the RCPP webpage.



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Make safety your first priority when emptying grain bins

AMES, Iowa – Following the wet and late harvest of 2019, several Midwest states are on the edge of a dangerous cliff when it comes to emptying their grain bins. Conditions are aligning to create the potential for tragic accidents and grain suffocation deaths to occur when grain bins start to be emptied.

It is common knowledge that quality harvested grain placed in storage, coupled with a best management practice of caring for grain, yields quality grain leaving storage for market. Inversely, either poor quality grain being placed in storage or poor management practices for caring for grain leads to spoiled grain leaving storage grain facility system.

Getting spoiled grain out of storage always poses an increased safety risk for entrapment and suffocation to a farm operator and worker. There are years of documentation that illustrate the direct connection from spoiled grain leaving storage to a tragic grain entrapment and the resulting fatality.

“Grain’s tremendous force that holds victims in grain, and the speed that entrapment occurs are often misunderstood,” said Charles Schwab, professor of agricultural and biosystems engineering with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.

Schwab says it’s important to shift attention once the operator determines that unloading the grain is becoming difficult. The priority of “getting the grain out” should switch to “keeping everyone involved safe.”

However, there is still time and a strong likelihood of acceptable weather to alter the grain storage conditions, before leading to more problematic conditions that put people at risk of entrapment and

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—Charles Schwab, professor of agricultural and biosystems engineering with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.

loss of life.

Dirk Maier, professor in agricultural and biosystems engineering at Iowa State, said that evaluating CO2 concentrations can be effective in monitoring stored grain quality and early detection of grain spoilage. A hand-held CO2 sensor, available from several retailers, can be used at exhaust vents or access ports for measuring concentrations.

“CO2 concentrations around 450-600 parts per million (ppm) are a safe range to continue storage, 600-1,500 ppm indicates onset of mold or moisture infiltration, and 1,500-4,000 ppm is a severe condition,” Maier said.

These measurements can assist farmers in identifying grain bins that need immediate attention.

Maier offers the management tip that when you locate a grain bin with a CO2 concentration range above 600 ppm and increasing from week to week, use the proper weather conditions and aeration fans to bring the condition back into acceptable range.



Getting spoiled grain out of storage always poses an increased safety risk for entrapment and suffocation to a farm operator and worker.



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