

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Before Chopping Corn, Check with NRCS for Conservation Alternatives**

The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is encouraging farmers to visit their local USDA office before implementing any farming operation changes needed to address the drought and excessive heat, said Acting State Conservationist Jon Hubbert, in Des Moines.

“Conditions are creating situations where some producers are now faced with critical changes to their operations,” said Hubbert. “We are here to help with those decisions. We can help minimize the future effects of our current drought and protect farmer’s conservation compliance status.”

One of these decisions is whether to chop corn for silage on highly erodible land (HEL) or land enrolled in the Conservation Stewardship Program, he said. Some producers may also be considering grazing drought-damaged crops. In either case, producers should seek advice from their local office to ensure they stay in compliance with their conservation plan. In many cases, producers may ask their local office for a variance because of these extreme conditions.

“Our field staff can discuss management options and provide producers alternatives for maintaining the required ground cover after silage is harvested or when the corn yields are excessively low,” said Hubbert.

Good conservation may require cover crops after chopping corn on HEL ground. During these drought conditions, NRCS recommends no-till seeding a winter cereal cover crop no later than Nov. 1, and when weather conditions are most favorable for germination. This will help provide adequate cover during the critical spring erosion period and must be maintained until April 1. However, grazing is allowed during the winter as long as a minimum of height of four inches is maintained.

Weather conditions may also prevent some producers from installing engineered practices such as dams, grassed waterways and sediment control basins. If a producer’s conservation program contract calls for one these practices to be installed this year, they should also consult with the local office before going forward.

“These practices cost a lot of money and we don’t want to see them fail. One of the biggest concerns is a lack of soil moisture that would prohibit proper compaction,” said Hubbert. NRCS can advise landowners and contractors on optimum moisture levels to achieve the best outcome.

“I can’t encourage our customers strongly enough,” said Hubbert. “Please come see us. We want to help you best manage this year’s drought conditions while protecting your options for 2013 and your eligibility for USDA benefits.”

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