

UNL Extension: Acreage Insights

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Severe Weather: A Sign of Spring

By [Ashley Mueller](#), Extension Educator & Disaster Education Coordinator



Photo credit: Nathan Mueller, Nebraska Extension Educator in Dodge County

The air may be chilly yet, but the signs of spring are here. We're beginning to enjoy longer days, the sounds of our favorite songbirds, and the earthy, spring scent that comes this time of year. After months spent indoors, many of us look forward to getting back outside, dirtying our hands and revving up the mower.

This time of year is also known for the return of dark storm clouds, lightening, and high winds, including an occasional tornado. The first step to becoming weather-ready is to understand the type of hazardous weather that can affect where you live and how the weather could impact you and your family.

Watch vs. Warning

According to the National Weather Service (NWS) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) a **watch** is issued to give advance notice when conditions are favorable for the development of severe weather, whether it is severe thunderstorms, tornadoes, or flash flooding. When a watch is issued for your area, it is time to take precautions and make sure you are prepared if bad weather strikes.

A **warning** is issued when severe weather is occurring or imminent. When a warning is issued for your area, you should take action immediately to protect your life, your family, and your property.

Stay Alert of the Forecast

It's unlikely that the sounds from an outdoor warning system (sirens) in the nearest community will reach your home. It's especially important to stay alert of the forecast during active weather by:

- listening to radio or television
- checking the weather forecast regularly
- purchasing a NOAA Weather Radio
- listening for Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) on your cell phone

If you're connected on social media, stay alert of the forecast by following:

- local meteorologists and news personalities
- local emergency management office
- local law enforcement officials
- #NEwx and community hashtags

Develop a Plan

Severe weather comes in many forms and your shelter plan should include all types of local hazards. In your home identify the best location to seek shelter; consider all your options. Take this a step further by conducting your own severe weather/tornado drill to practice your plan. Being prepared to act quickly could be a matter of survival.

If the situation allows, check on a neighbor by calling or sending a text message. Time and time again, NWS and social scientists have found that one of the biggest reasons people have sought shelter from a storm is because a friend or family member called to warn them.

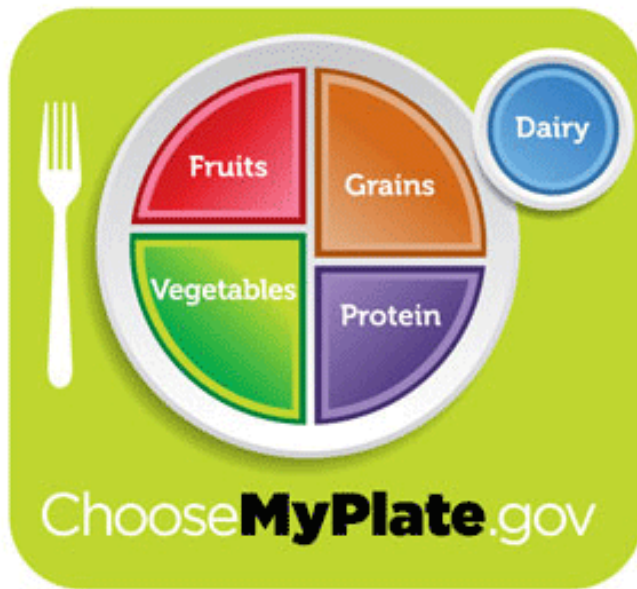
It's important to know the signs of severe weather; it can happen anywhere any time. In Nebraska, Severe Weather Awareness Week is March 23-27. During this week communities will test their communications systems, and safety information will be shared with the public through media and educational campaigns.

Sources and For More Information

- [FEMA, Severe Weather Preparedness Week Toolkit \(2014\)](#)
- [National Weather Service and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Severe Weather and Safety, Receiving Warnings](#)

Enjoy the Taste of Eating Right

By [Lisa Franzen-Castle](#), Nebraska Extension Nutrition Specialist



Social, emotional and health factors play a role in the foods we choose to eat. But the foods we enjoy are the ones we eat most. That is why, as part of National Nutrition Month®, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics encourages everyone to "Enjoy the Taste of Eating Right." Each March, the Academy encourages Americans to return to the basics of healthful eating through National Nutrition Month. Below are some tips for combining taste and nutrition to create healthy meals that follow the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Tips to enjoy the taste of eating right:

- **Try purchasing new foods at the grocery store.** When grocery shopping, make it a point to try one new fruit, vegetable or whole grain every week. Start small by picking a different type of apple, a different color potato or a new flavor of whole-grain rice until you are comfortable picking entirely new things that you've never tried or heard of before.
- **Add variety to dishes when cooking at home.** Add variety to staple dishes by varying the ways you cook them. Grill or broil the chicken you usually bake. Mash the potatoes you typically roast. Steam the vegetables you normally sauté. And get to know your spice cabinet. A pinch of this and a dash of that can add a fresh zest to an old favorite. You have about 10,000 taste buds, so don't be afraid to experiment with new flavors and foods.
- **Choose foods from the five MyPlate food groups every day.** When your daily eating plans include foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs, fat-free or low-fat dairy, beans, nuts and seeds in the appropriate amounts, you're able to get many of the nutrients you need, all with relatively low amounts of calories. Below are some tips to add nutrient-rich foods and beverages to your daily eating plan:
 - Breakfast - Make oatmeal with fat-free milk and mix in dried fruit.
 - Lunch - Make sandwiches on whole-grain bread, such as whole wheat or whole rye. Add slices of avocado, tomato or cucumber.
 - Dinner - Serve multiple nutrient-rich foods in one dish, such as hearty, broth-based soups full of colorful vegetables, beans and lean meat. Make chili with a dollop of low-fat yogurt. Serve with whole-grain breads or rolls.

- Dining out - Look for healthier choices, such as entrée salads with grilled seafood and low-calorie dressing, baked potatoes topped with salsa, grilled vegetables and reduced-fat cheese and yogurt parfaits with fruit.
- **Cooking tips to enhance the flavor of foods.** Proper food handling and storage can enhance natural flavors and minimize nutrient loss. Cook foods properly to retain nutrients and enhance flavor, color, and texture. Try these techniques to enhance the flavor of foods:
 - Intensify the flavors of meat, poultry and fish with high-heat cooking techniques such as pan-searing, grilling or broiling.
 - Use red, green and yellow peppers of all varieties—sweet, hot and dried.
 - For fuller flavors, incorporate more whole grains such as brown rice or quinoa, or experiment with amaranth and wild rice.
 - Add small amounts of ingredients with bold flavors like chipotle pepper or cilantro.
 - Add a tangy taste with citrus juice or grated citrus peel: lemon, lime or orange.
 - Enhance sauces, soups and salads with a splash of flavored balsamic or rice vinegar.
 - Give a flavor burst with good-quality condiments such as horseradish, flavored mustard, chutney, wasabi, and salsas.
- **Family meals.** Eat better, eat together. Research shows family meals promote healthier eating. Beyond preparing the meal, we sometimes forget mealtimes provide time to talk, listen and build relationships. And it's a chance for parents to be good role models for healthful eating. Below are some ideas for adding family meals to your routine:
 - Start slow - However many family meals you eat now, add one more to your weekly schedule. If school nights are too hectic, make it a weekend breakfast or lunch. After a few weeks, add another meal to your schedule.
 - Plan menus - Putting together a family meal does not have to be complicated. Let everyone choose a favorite item and build simple, delicious meals around them.
 - Have positive conversations - Dinner-time conversations have a huge impact, as you share experiences and ideas, and pass along family values. Pick topics that are positive and allow everyone to talk.
 - Turn off the noise - TV and mobile devices can create distractions that can throw off any family's mealtime. Declare mealtime a TV- and phone-free zone, except for emergencies.

Additional Resources & Links:

- [MyPlate Daily Food Plans](#). Want to know the amount of each food group you need daily? Enter your information into this website to find out and receive a customized Daily Food Plan.
- [Library of Recipes](#). Visit the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' library of recipes to help you "Enjoy the Taste of Eating Right."
- [Recipe Central](#). Enjoy healthy cooking from your own kitchen. Use recipes from our collections to get started!
- [UNL Extension Calendar](#) – National Food Days, Weeks, and Months for March.

Color Your Garden Rainbow

By [Sarah Browning](#), Nebraska Extension Horticulture Educator



Image of 'Kaleidoscope' carrot mix from The Cook's Garden.

If you're just a little bit bored with the same old round, red tomatoes, beets and radishes; or green snap beans, lettuce and zucchini squash, then liven up your garden with vegetables of a different color this year.

Most seed catalogues offer a widening variety of vegetables in unconventional colors and shapes. Though you probably don't want to give up all your old favorite standard varieties, you might want to try some of these novel varieties for a change of pace. Browsing through a selection of seed catalogues can turn up such fun vegetable surprises as those listed below.

Golden beets

- 'Burpee's Golden' beets taste delicious and golden colored flesh. Their greens are excellent cooked or in salads. (The Cook's Garden, Vermont Bean Seed Company)

Multicolored carrots and radishes

- 'Kaleidoscope Mix' carrots combines five vibrant colors – red, purple, yellow, white and orange - for a dazzling rainbow effect sure to be noticed at the dinner table. (The Cook's Garden)

- 'Park's Beauty Blend' radishes mixes 5 varieties to give you peppery-crisp globes in brilliant purple, yellow, scarlet, pink and white. (Park Seed)

White cucumbers

- 'Crystal White Pickler Hybrid' produces bright white fruits with a crisp texture and sweet flavor. Early fruit production on these semi-bush plants. Cucumbers can be harvested small as baby gherkins or full sized. (Park Seed)



Image of 'Cheddar Hybrid' cauliflower from Park Seed Company.

Orange cauliflower

- 'Cheddar Hybrid' cauliflower produces a glowing orange head, as a result of 25 times higher beta-carotene content than white cauliflower. Keep the heavy 4 to 7 inch heads untied for brightest color. (Park Seed)

Purple asparagus, kohlrabi, and cauliflower

- 'Sweet Purple' asparagus is higher in sugar and more tender than green asparagus types. Additional purple asparagus cultivars include 'Purple Passion' and 'Pacific Purple'. (Vermont Bean Seed Company, Park Seed)
- 'Early Purple Vienna' kohlrabi produces an apple-like bulb with mild delicate flavor. The outer skin is purple, but the inner flesh is creamy white with a crisp texture. (The Cook's Garden, Vermont Bean Seed Company)
- 'Graffiti' cauliflower produces big flavorful heads that deepen to purple in bright sun. When cooked, the heads turn mauve. Plants are vigorous and downy mildew resistant. (Park Seed)

Red basil

- 'Red Rubin' basil has large smooth leaves and grows to a full, dense plant. (Park Seed, The Cook's Garden)
- 'Crimson King' basil features brightly colored red foliage, with big flavorful Genovese-type leaves. (Park Seed)

Another way to spice up the garden is with less commonly grown crops, such as peanuts, okra, popcorn, Indian corn, broom corn, ornamental gourds, garlic, leeks, shallots and horseradish. Broom corn, *Sorghum bicolor*, produces corn-like kernels on a "tassel" or broom-like seed head. It's used primarily as an ornamental for fall decorations or dried arrangements.

Oriental vegetables are another possibility. As stir-frying has become popular, more catalogs are offering a selection of Oriental vegetables well suited to this use.

When trying new or odd varieties think small. Try one or two, or maybe three, new things per year, if you have space. Plant them in addition to your favorite standard varieties, so you don't risk your entire harvest if yield or quality is poor. If you find something you really like, you can enlarge your planting next year.

Seed Sources:

- [The Cook's Garden](#) (TCG)
- [Park Seed](#) (PS)
- [Vermont Bean Seed Company](#) (VBSC)

Understanding Sunscald and Winter Desiccation in Landscape Plants

By [Nicole Stoner](#), Nebraska Extension Horticulture Educator



Image of winter desiccation on arborvitae. Photo by Nicole Stoner, Nebraska Extension Horticulture Educator in Gage County.

During the winter months we tend to not worry much about our plants, but a great deal of damage can occur to them during the winter. A couple of the problems we often see in the winter would be sunscald and winter desiccation. Many of these problems may not even be noticed until the spring months and we can help prevent some of them during the fall.

Sunscald is a common problem on young trees and thin barked trees such as maples. We may notice discolored bark, cracks, or sunken areas, in the trunk of the tree and bark falling off of those trees. It is commonly found on the south and west sides of the tree and is therefore also referred to as southwest disease.

There is no cure for the tree once it develops sunscald, but many trees will heal this damaged area. Because this is an opening in the tree, other problems including insects and diseases can affect the tree. Sunscald is a problem that is easily prevented by using a tree wrap around young and thin barked trees from late fall through early spring. Also, many of our trees that are affected by sunscald are drought stressed, so maintain adequate moisture to your trees throughout the year and ensure that they go into the winter well watered to help prevent sunscald.

Winter desiccation commonly occurs on evergreen types of trees and shrubs. All trees are still transpiring, or losing water, throughout the winter months, evergreen trees are transpiring at a higher rate than deciduous trees. Winter desiccation occurs when the amount of water lost is greater than the amount of water the evergreen takes in throughout the winter months. The branches and needles of our trees will die. The damage from winter desiccation is brown needles out on the ends of branches. However, the damage from winter desiccation will not usually show up in our trees until early spring, so they will stay green through the winter.

To manage winter desiccation ensure adequate watering throughout the entire growing season. Make sure that the tree is well watered going into the fall. Also, water throughout the winter when the ground is not frozen to help the trees through a dry winter, if necessary. Winter watering should occur during the day when the temperature is 40 degrees Fahrenheit or above and is only necessary 1-2 times per month until spring.

Finally, prune out dead branches, but wait until after new growth has begun so you only remove branches that are truly dead.

March Garden To Do's

By [John Fech](#), Nebraska Extension Horticulture Educator



1. Plant cool season vegetables, like these onions, as soon as the ground is workable. But don't work with the soil while it is wet. Image by Sarah Browning, Nebraska Extension Horticulture Educator in Lancaster County.

Start garden seeds indoors for transplanting outdoors later in spring.

2. Check stored bulbs and produce for decay; discard damaged items.

3. Prune trees and shrubs, except those that bloom early in spring, while plants are still dormant. If winter injury is a concern, delay pruning until after dieback and desiccation injury can be assessed as plants come out of dormancy.
4. Remove winter coverings from roses as soon as new growth begins. Prune out dead canes and fertilize as needed. Delay pruning into live canes until after winter injury can be assessed.
5. Apply superior oil spray to control scale insects and mites when tips of leaves start to protrude from buds.
6. Plant cool-season vegetables and flowers as soon as the ground has dried enough to work. Do NOT work the soil while it is wet; wait until it crumbles in your hand. If the soil forms a solid ball when squeezed, it's still too wet.
7. Gradually harden off transplants by setting them outdoors during the daytime for about a week before planting.
8. Follow last fall's soil test recommendations for fertilizer and pH adjustment. It's not too late to test soil if you missed last year.
9. Start seeds of warm-season vegetables and flowers indoors; in western and central Nebraska, wait until the end of March or early April. In eastern Nebraska, early March is appropriate. Transplant to the garden after danger of frost has passed.
10. Watch for blooms of early spring bulbs, such as daffodils, squill, crocus, dwarf iris and snowdrops.
11. Remove old asparagus and rhubarb tops.
12. Remove winter mulch from strawberry beds as soon as new growth begins, but keep the mulch nearby to protect against frost and freezes.
13. Remove weak, diseased or damaged canes from raspberry plants before new growth begins. Remove old fruiting canes if not removed last year, and shorten remaining canes if necessary.
14. Prune grapevines and fruit trees after winter injury can be assessed.

These tips are taken from Purdue University and other land grant university extension sources.

Shearing Sheep

By [Lindsey Chichester](#), Nebraska Extension Livestock Educator



Sheep shearing. Photo by Crystal Fangmeier, Nebraska Extension Assistant in Thayer County.

Spring is generally a great time to shear sheep. Sheep grow their wool throughout the year, and shearing removes the wool annually. Weather elements should be considered when shearing sheep. After sheep are shorn, there may still be snow and freezing temperatures, in which case sheep may need additional feed to maintain body temperature and/or a place to get out of the weather until their fleece has grown back enough to provide insulation again. On the other hand, if the wool is not shorn off the sheep can get VERY hot and be uncomfortable with the weight and heat generated from the wool, especially in the summer months. If this occurs a sheep may undergo extreme heat stress, which can be life threatening.

Depending on the breed, genetics, age, and nutrition, sheep can produce two to 30 pounds of wool annually, the average weight per fleece is 7.3 pounds. Some sheep are known as wool breeds, while others are known as meat breeds. There are also some breeds of sheep that can shed their wool and do not need to be shorn. Shearing is not painful, it is just like having a haircut. However, there are instances when the sheep move and are nicked by the clippers, this is not common if a professional shearer is used.

When shorn, ewes may have lambs at their side or still be pregnant. Care should be taken to handle the ewe gently as to not harm her unborn lambs. Additionally, when shearing, care should be given to not accidentally cut her udder and/or vulva. When sheep are shorn, you can also trim their hooves, and worm or vaccinate them if needed while they are restrained.

Small sheep flock owners usually sell their wool in a pool with other sheep producers. At the wool pool the wool is sorted and packed into different lots, where the entire lot is then sold to a mill. Some producers will sell their wool to hand spinners or give it to the shearer, or even throw it away. If selling your wool, the belly and leg wool is generally separated from the remaining wool as it is usually dirty and a hair/wool mixture. It can still be used, it is just considered a lower quality. The rest of the wool needs to be kept as clean and dry as possible. White wool is more valuable than colored wool because it can be dyed any color.

In 2014, the average price for wool was \$1.46 per pound. In 2014, 26.7 million pounds of wool was harvested from 3.68 million head of sheep and lambs. Interestingly, China is the largest producer of wool, followed by Australia and New Zealand. Within the States, California is the top wool producing state, followed by Colorado and Wyoming.

There are several options when it comes to shearing. First, you can hire a professional to do it. The costs would be approximately \$4 per head for ewes and \$8 for rams. Professional sheep shears travel around in the late winter/spring months shearing large flocks of sheep, and they tend to be very quick at about three minutes per head. Next, you can do it yourself. This option does take some equipment and some practice.

Montana State University, among others, offers sheep shearing school so you can learn how to shear sheep. More information can be found at [Montana Sheep Institute - Sheep Shearing School](#).

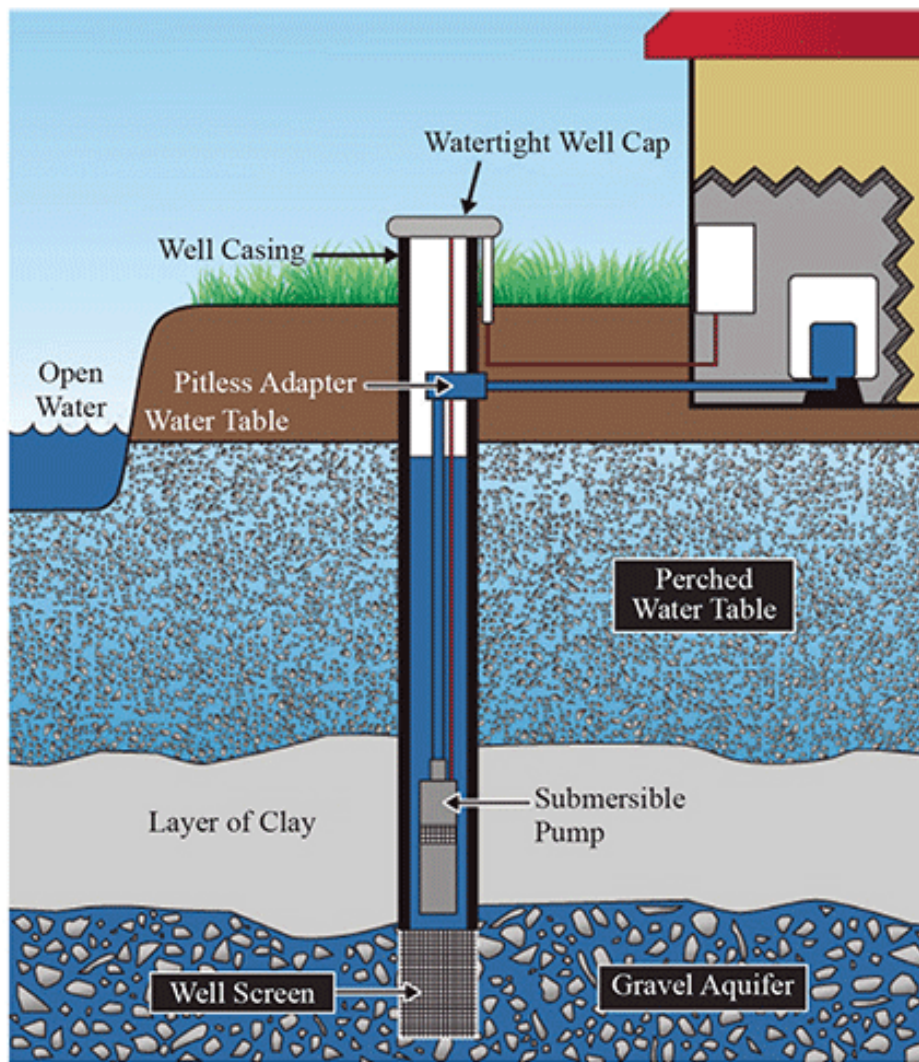
Penn State University Extension has created two videos that highlight the equipment needed and another on the step-by-step process to shear sheep.

- [Video 1 explains sheep shearing tool use and maintenance.](#)
- [Video 2 demonstrates the six sheep shearing positions.](#)

Sources: USDA NASS (2015). [Iowa Ag News](#).

Groundwater Stewardship – Protection and Conservation

By [Sharon Skipton](#), Extension Water Quality Educator



National

Groundwater Awareness Week falls in March, so this is a good time to think about groundwater stewardship. What is groundwater? It's the water that fills cracks, voids, and other openings in soil, sand, gravel, and bedrock. Why is it important? Groundwater is used for public drinking water supplies, private drinking water supplies, crop irrigation, livestock watering, manufacturing, mining, power generation, and other purposes. Private household wells, like you might have, constitute the largest share of all water wells in the United States. Irrigation accounts for the largest use of groundwater in the United States. While groundwater is a renewable resource, renewal rates vary greatly according to environmental conditions. Groundwater stewardship, including protection and conservation, is very important.

The following article by the National Groundwater Association challenges us to take groundwater protection and conservation pledges.

Groundwater protection

All people by their living habits can protect or harm groundwater — our nation and the world's most abundant freshwater supply. The first step toward protecting groundwater is to become aware of how it can be contaminated. The second step is to do your part to keep from contaminating groundwater.

Forty-four percent of the American population depends on groundwater for its drinking water supply — reason enough to act to protect groundwater. Another reason is that contaminated groundwater can harm the environment, including the ecosystems that depend on groundwater.

Groundwater Protection: Take the pledge

As the saying goes, "A journey...begins with a single step." NGWA wants to help you to take the first step on your journey to protect groundwater. We challenge you to take this pledge:

I pledge to take one or more of the following actions to **protect groundwater from contamination**.

1. Properly store hazardous household substances* in secure containers.
2. Dispose of hazardous household wastes at an appropriate waste disposal facility or drop-off.
3. Do not put hazardous household wastes down the drain or in the toilet.
4. Do not put any wastes down a dry or abandoned well.
5. If I own a septic system, service it according to local health department recommendations.
6. If I own a water well, get a yearly maintenance check to ensure sanitary seals are intact.
7. Decommission abandoned wells on site using a qualified water well contractor.

** Examples of hazardous household substances are paints, paint thinners, petroleum products, fertilizers, herbicides, insecticides, and cleaning products.*

Groundwater conservation

There is something every person can do to conserve water. Americans are some of the largest users of water, per capita, in the world. In the United States, Americans use 79.6 billion gallons of groundwater every day — the equivalent of 2,923 12 oz. cans for every man, woman, and child in the nation.

Most surface water bodies such as lakes, rivers, and streams are connected to groundwater. So, whether your water supply comes from groundwater or surface water, conservation matters.

Almost three-quarters of water used inside the home occurs in the bathroom, with 41 percent used for toilet flushing and 33 percent for bathing. The remainder of indoor water use is divided between clothes washing and kitchen use, including dishwashing, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Outdoor water use varies greatly across the country. For instance, in California, 44 percent of all household water use is outdoors, while in Pennsylvania only 7 percent is used outdoors.

Understanding where you use water most can provide hints on where the most water can be conserved.

Groundwater Conservation: Take the pledge

As the saying goes, "A journey...begins with a single step." NGWA wants to help you to take the first step on your journey to conserve groundwater. We challenge you to take the following pledge.

I pledge to take the following actions to **conserve groundwater**.

1. Repair dripping faucets and toilets; one drop per second wastes 2,700 gallons a year.
2. Retrofit household faucets by installing aerators with flow restrictors.
3. Choose appliances that are water- and/or energy-efficient, such as low-flow toilets.
4. Don't run a faucet when I'm not using the water, such as while brushing my teeth.
5. Only run the dishwasher when it is fully loaded.
6. Operate clothes washers only when they are full, or set the water level to match the load size.
7. Use a shutoff nozzle on the hose for car washing that can be adjusted to a fine spray

Five Questions Non-operator Landowners Should Ask Their Farmers about Soil Health

By Elisa O'Halloran, a webmaster and writer for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service



Jennifer VanEps.

NRCS graphic by

More farmers, ranchers and others who rely on the land are taking action to improve the health of their soil. Many farmers are actually building the soil. How? By using soil health management systems that include cover crops, diverse rotations and no-till.

And when they're building the soil they're doing something else – they're also building the land's production potential over the long-term.

But how do non-operator landowners (people who rent their land to farmers) know if their tenants are doing everything they need to do to make and keep their soil healthy? Barry Fisher, an Indiana farmer and nationally recognized soil health specialist with the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, recommends that they ask their farming partner these five questions.

1. Do you build organic matter in the soil?

Organic matter (carbon) may be the most important indicator of a farm's productivity. The amount of soil organic matter often determines the price farmers will pay to rent or buy land. Finding a farmer who is interested in building organic matter by using practices like no-till and cover crops is like finding a bank with a better rate on a Certificate of Deposit, Fisher says.

2. Do you test the soil at least once every 4 years?

Fisher says maintaining fertility and pH levels are important to your farm's productivity. Regular soil testing can give an indication of trends in soil fertility, pH and organic matter levels in each field. These tests will determine the amount of fertilizer each field needs. If a field has a history of manure application and very high fertility, a farmer could save money by planting cover crops to keep those nutrients in place rather than applying more nutrients that may not be needed.

3. Do you use no-till practices?

Some landowners like the look of a clean-tilled field in the springtime. That "nice look" is short lived, though. "The reality is a field that has bare soil is subject to erosion and loss of organic matter, since it no longer has the protective cover from the crop residue on the surface," Fisher says. "No-till farming utilizes the crop residue to blanket the soil surface to protect it from the forces of intense rainfall and summer heat. This protective blanket will conserve moisture for the crop and prevent loss of soil from wind erosion, water erosion and CO₂ (carbon) that could be burned off by summer heat."



Barry Fisher is a soil health specialist with the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service in Indiana. He and his wife also own and operate a small "never-till" grain and grazed livestock farm in West-Central Indiana. NRCS photo by Rebecca Fletcher.

4. Do you use cover crops?

"Like no-till, cover crops provide a green, protective blanket through the winter months or fallow times. The green-growing cover is collecting solar energy, putting down roots and providing habitat when the soil would otherwise be lifeless and barren," says Fisher. This habitat provides food and shelter for a broad population of wildlife above ground and beneficial organisms below ground. As the new life emerges, cover crops hold onto the nutrients left from the previous crop and in turn releases them to the next crop. The solar rays these plants collect are powering photosynthesis, taking in CO₂ from the atmosphere to produce food for the plant and the organisms living in the root zone. This same process also releases clean oxygen to the air and builds nutrient rich organic matter in the soil.

5. What can we do together to improve soil health on my land?

To improve soil health, landowners and tenants have to think in terms of the long-term. According to Fisher, the duration of the lease agreement is perhaps the most critical matter in encouraging the adoption

of these soil health management systems. "Farmers can actually build the production capacity and resiliency of their landowner's soil, but it may take several years to realize the full benefits of doing so," Fisher says. He suggests that landowners consider multiple-year leases that provide tenure security for the tenant. Longer tenures give both landowners and tenants more opportunities to improve soil health and realize the resulting longer-term production and profitability gains through sustainable conservation practices.

"Improving soil health can provide long-term, stable dividends for you, your family and your farming partner," Fisher says. "Improving soil health also can decrease the effects of flooding, make food production more resilient to weather extremes, and improve the health of water and wildlife, as well," he adds.

Fisher encourages landowners to learn more about the basics and benefits of soil health management systems and to begin the soil health discussion with their farming partner right away. "Even if you're not a farmer or landowner, everyone has a great stake in improving the health of our soil," he says.

See more at: [USDA Blogs.](#)

DriftWatch Specialty Crop Site Registry

By [Craig Romary](#), Nebraska Department of Agriculture



Nebraska DriftWatch™ is a free online registry and map for commercial specialty and pesticide-sensitive crops, which is being promoted to pesticide applicators to reduce incidents of drift.

Are you among the commercial growers currently registered in DriftWatch? (A commercial grower is one who sells a crop in some way; not growing it solely for personal use). If not, please take a minute to check out DriftWatch online at www.fieldwatch.com.

Applicators registered in DriftWatch, and who are also a member of FieldWatch, can now select specific counties from multiple states for notices when new information is added to the map. Membership also allows access to real-time map data. See www.fieldwatch.com for more information. Applicators who are registered should watch for email notices directly from FieldWatch.

DriftWatch is growing, both in the number of growers and applicators using the site (there are now 12 states and 1 Canadian province participating), but also in increased functionality. New features have recently been added for commercial beekeepers.

Beehives are now placed on the map with the click of the mouse or tap on the screen of a mobile device. When the user clicks where a hive is located, a half-acre circle appears on the map. No longer does the beekeeper draw a shape or an arbitrary outline of the hive area. In addition, beekeepers can now choose whether or not their beehives appear on the public map or if they are visible only to applicators registered in DriftWatch. Applicators who register receive email notices when new crops are added to the map.

Please take a look at DriftWatch, and consider putting your commercial crops on the map. Renewal notices to already registered growers are being sent by email now, so growers are encouraged to review and renew

your information for 2015. Logging in and renewing is required annually, but quick and easy to do. Did you renew in 2014? Please double check: a few growers were removed because this wasn't done last year. If so, please contact Craig Romary, Nebraska Department of Agriculture, at craig.romary@nebraska.gov.

Lake/Pond Management Workshops

By [Katie Pekarek](#), Nebraska Extension Water Quality Educator



Nebraska Extension, the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality, and Game and Parks have joined together to offer a series of pond and lake management introductory workshops. These workshops are free and open to everyone who makes decisions for and about lakes and ponds or anyone who wants to learn more about protecting them. If you've ever had an algae bloom, fish kill, murky water, or just want to know what's going on in the lake, this workshop is for you. There is no cost to attend the workshops, but reservations are required. The workshops will be held from 6-8pm as follows:

- Lincoln, Nebraska – March 4, Lower Platte South NRD Office
- Grand Island, Nebraska – March 12, College Park at Grand Island, Room 207
- Omaha, Nebraska – March 18, Nebraska Extension Office at 8015 West Center

Workshop topics include:

- How lakes function in Southeast Nebraska: characteristics and challenges
- Managing waters for fisheries
- Project funding and regulations
- Lake management planning
- Resolving Common Maintenance Problems (Algae, leaks, undesirable fish, fish kills, clarity, erosion, nuisance animals)
- Develop an individualized maintenance plan for your pond!!
- Project funding and regulations
- Lake management planning
- Resolving Common Maintenance Problems (Algae, fish kills, clarity, erosion, other pond animals)

To register go to go.unl.edu/lincolnpondworkshop, go.unl.edu/GIpondworkshop, or go.unl.edu/Omahapondworkshop. If you have any questions, please contact Katie Pekarek at kpekarek2@unl.edu, by calling (402) 643-2981.