

Craig Derickson, State Conservationist of USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, said the NRCS is available to provide assistance to farmers and ranchers through the Drought Relief Special Initiative.

Producers in Chase County may apply for assistance Aug. 6-15, 2012.

Derickson said, "The prolonged lack of rainfall combined with excessive heat has resulted in a dramatic reduction in available forage for livestock producers and increased the risk of soil erosion on land without sufficient ground cover. The purpose of this initiative is to offer assistance to farmers and ranchers impacted by the drought."

The Drought Relief Special Initiative assistance will be available for land located in any part of a county that has been designated a D3 (Extreme) or D4 (Exceptional) drought zone, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor map dated July 24, later.

Chase County is categorized "extreme" area, so producers here are eligible.

Conservation practices available to producers through the Drought Relief Special Initiative include cover crops, critical area planting, fencing, deferred grazing, forage and biomass planting, pipeline, well and pumping stations for livestock water, range planting and more.

Interested participants are encouraged to visit their local NRCS field office to learn more about the assistance available.

"When implemented, these conservation practices will provide additional forage, improve existing forage, and help increase ground cover," Derickson said.

In addition to the Drought Relief Special Initiative, the U.S. Department of Agriculture recently announced new flexibility in managing the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP).

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced earlier this week that farmers and ranchers can modify current EQIP contracts to re-schedule planned conservation practices until drought conditions improve.

Vilsack's announcement also included expediting Compatible Use Authorization requests for haying or grazing WRP easements in drought-affected areas where such haying or grazing is consistent with the conservation of wildlife habitat and wetlands.