

By Nate Jenkins

Upper Republican NRD

The Upper Republican NRD has extended the deadline to apply for cost-share funds that significantly reduce the cost of soil-moisture probes for farmers. The new deadline is June 7.

Application forms are available on the front page of the NRD website at www.urnrd.org or can be picked up at the NRD office at 511 East Fifth St. in Imperial.

Completed forms can be dropped off at the office, mailed to the office at Upper Republican NRD, PO Box 1140, Imperial, NE 69033, scanned and emailed to natejenkins@urnrd.org, or faxed to 308-882-4521.

A \$50,000 grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust grant, combined with URNRD dollars, are being used to provide cost share on the soil-moisture probes.

A grant received last year from the Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART Water and Energy Efficiency Program will also help fund the program.

Under the program, farmers can be reimbursed for up to 2/3 of the cost of soil-moisture probes used in 2013. Reimbursement will be capped at \$3,000 per probe that is purchased, and \$1,500 per probe that is leased.

Proper use of soil-moisture probes can reduce water use by two to four inches per irrigated acre without yield reductions.

The Nebraska Environmental Trust Board announced funding for the project at its meeting April 4 in Lincoln. This is the first year of grant funding with a potential for second-year funding totaling \$50,000.

The project is one of 134 receiving \$24,247,260 in grant awards from the Trust this year. The Nebraska Legislature created the Environmental Trust in 1992.

Using revenue from the Nebraska Lottery, the Trust has provided more than \$199 million in grants to over 1,600 projects across the state. Anyone can apply for funding, which is used to preserve, protect and restore natural resources for future generations.

There was strong interest in a similar cost-share program for probes last year.

The goal of the program is to increase the number of people that are exposed to use of the probes using the funds. As a result, enrollees in this year's program must not be signed up for the program launched by the NRD last year or are receiving cost share for probes under Natural Resources Conservation Services Programs.

Reimbursement under the new program will be limited to two probes per person for 2013.

There are no restrictions on what types of soil-moisture probes can be used. The probes must be used within the Upper Republican NRD.