

## NEWS RELEASE



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### NRCS Gives Flooded Farmers a Break

INDIANAPOLIS, June 30, 2008—The catastrophic rainfall and flooding events this June have left many Indiana farm fields in a state of demolition. The flood waters are receding and producers are in the fields evaluating damages and deciding what to do next. State Conservationist Jane Hardisty of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is giving farmers a break on conservation compliance and Farm Bill contract schedules, which may have held them back from restoring their working lands.

For damaged fields classified as Highly Erodible Land (HEL), NRCS is offering a temporary conservation compliance variance to allow producers to repair severe damage and/or replant crops. This variance is for farm fields located in counties declared Federal Disaster Areas by the President, or adjacent counties. “We recognize that farmers are going to have some major repairs that would not meet the requirements for HEL compliance, which could make them ineligible for future Farm Bill dollars. This variance will allow farmers to bring damaged land back to working condition without risking program benefits,” said Hardisty.

To meet the requirements of the HEL variance, producers will need to keep documentation of the rain event that caused damage, details of the damages, information on the repair work, and dates they replanted. Farmers should contact their local District Conservationist to ensure compliance with the variance requirements.

NRCS is also able to offer a break meeting contract deadlines. Hardisty is providing a one year extension to practices scheduled to be installed through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) or the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP). “Affected producers may not be able to meet their contract schedules for installing conservation practices this year, and this extension will allow them time to recover from flood damages without being out of compliance with their federal contract,” said Hardisty. This extension also applies in counties declared Federal Disaster Areas by the President, or adjacent counties.

State Conservationist Hardisty wants farmers to know that the agency can help. “There are several important conservation issues for farmers to consider now. As you consider your next steps we can help you stay in compliance with Farm Bill provisions and remain eligible for USDA benefits,” she said.

NRCS also offers technical assistance to help evaluate flooding problems, and to plan and design both agronomic and structural repairs to damaged fields. Some Farm Bill conservation programs can also offer financial assistance to remediate damages on farmlands. Producers with damaged conservation practices should visit their local USDA Service Center to evaluate their options.

“On farms where conservation practices failed there are options available to offer help that we can use to repair and restore their function,” said Hardisty. She also notes that in most cases, existing conservation practices withstood the flooding and helped to reduce the impact.

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