

EVERY ACRE COUNTS

production practices for greater profitability

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Habitat Conservation Foundation Contributes \$1 Million to Fund New Project at SDSU

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. - The South Dakota Habitat Conservation Foundation alongside South Dakota State University (SDSU) and The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) announced a new project today. Every Acre Counts is designed to give agricultural producers new ways to manage low producing acres while increasing their bottom line.

"Ag producers in South Dakota care about the land and we realize that our practices have far-reaching impacts for agriculture and conservation. Every year, producers, like me, are faced with tough planning decisions. The opportunity to develop partnerships like this demonstrates the importance of our ag industry in South Dakota and our dedication to land stewardship," stated Christine Hamilton, President of the South Dakota Habitat Conservation Foundation. "This successful collaboration will result in new knowledge about profit margins with various combinations of practices, and outcomes that improve overall land and conservation management."

"The primary focus for this project will be the optimal use of marginal lands impacted by wet conditions, saline or sodic soils, and eroded areas such as hilltops," stated Barry H. Dunn, SDSU President. "Millions of acres of cropland across South Dakota are impacted by these challenges, with over 7 million acres impacted by saline conditions alone. The financial burdens of attempting to produce crops in these marginal areas can be negative to a producer's bottom line. And, together, we want to change this."

Four regions of South Dakota have been selected to kick start the project. Moody, Lake and Minnehaha counties with eroded and wet areas; Brown, Spink, Clark and Day counties with saline/sodic and wet areas in addition to Edmonds, Potter and Faulk; and Aurora, Brule, Buffalo and Jerauld counties with saline/sodic and eroded areas.

SDSU will work with selected landowners in each of the four regions and their crop and financial consultants to precisely characterize the technical metrics of their existing operations and generate an accrual-based economic analysis. That information will then be incorporated into a profit mapping software to pinpoint and quantify marginal acres. In addition, federal, state and local

habitat and conservation programs will be used to leverage funding.

The vision is to build out from the initial adopters to recruit neighbors and create a critical mass of participants in each of the four regions, stated Dunn. Focusing the work in these specific areas enables a greater efficiency in delivering the programs to surrounding landowners, producing easy, but effective outreach.

“Marginal lands can delay farming operations from planting to harvesting for days or even weeks, potentially impacting profitability on the good ground,” stated Jeff Zimprich, State Conservationist for NRCS, Huron, SD. “By considering the capability and thus the profitability acre-by-acre versus field by field, producers will increase the efficient use of all inputs. This project is designed to benefit the economic stability and environmental sustainability of South Dakota agriculture.” If landowners are interested in learning more, particularly those in the four regions where the project will begin, please contact the project directors, Anthony.Bly@sdstate.edu or Matthew.Diersen@sdstate.edu.

“We hope this initiative will demonstrate that additional returns are possible as a result of adopting the right mix of conservation practices in the appropriate parts of our fields,” concluded Hamilton.

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