

## Resilient Soils and Water Quality Act

### 2025 Annual Report

This annual report is submitted in accordance with Neb. Rev. Stat. § 2-409(4), which requires the Department of Water, Energy, and Environment (Department) to report annually, beginning in 2022, the status and progress of implementing the Resilient Soils and Water Quality Act (RSWQA).

#### **Background**

LB 925 created RSWQA to:

- (1) initiate first steps to accelerate the use and scope of best practices for healthy soil management,
- (2) protect and improve soil and water quality throughout the state,
- (3) protect the public's health and enhance agricultural production and profitability,
- (4) address soil health economics, resource stewardship, and managerial and environmental issues,
- (5) increase awareness, education, and promotion of healthy soil best practices through producer-to-producer, peer-to-peer, and mentoring relationships, networking, and sharing of technical information, and
- (6) provide observational proof of healthy soil benefits through access to demonstration and research farms and data.

#### **Current Activities**

##### *Nebraska Strategic Ag Coalition (RSWQA Purpose: 1-6)*

The Department has continued to expand the electronic platform to help engage producers across the state while also promoting educational tools and technical resources through the formation



of the Nebraska Strategic Ag Coalition (NSAC or the Coalition). The Department identified and created a working and advisory group with 13 members from the Nebraska Corn Board, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Nebraska Association of Resources Districts (NARD),



University of Nebraska- Lincoln (UNL) Extension, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Rainwater Basin Joint Venture, Center for Rural Affairs, Nebraska Wheat Board, Midwest Cover Crops Council, Nebraska Soybean Board, UNL Department of Agronomy and Horticulture, Nebraska Dry Bean Commission, and U.S. Fish and Wild Life Service, each working to implement goals like those of the RSWQA. Website link:

<https://nebraskastrategicagcoalition.org/>



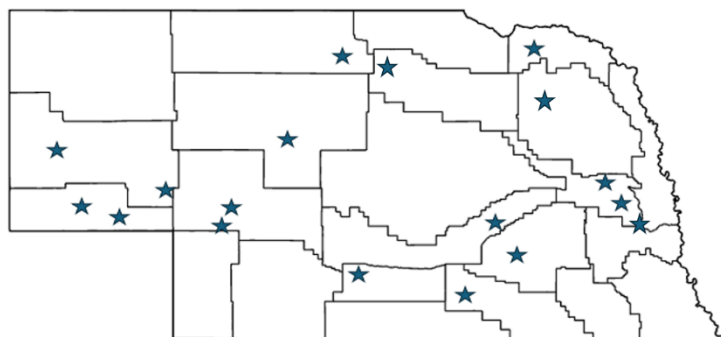
NSAC meets monthly and presented at multiple conferences and field events informing producers and agribusiness

stakeholders of the shared vision and mission promoting profitable, sustainable agriculture. The Coalition connects farmers with essential resources, peer networks, and opportunities that support resilient, profitable farming. By emphasizing best management practices (BMPs), the Coalition aims to boost soil and water health while empowering farmers with the tools needed to adopt environmentally sound practices that can lead to more sustainable long-term operations.



In 2025 the Department promoted field events partnering with other entities all across Nebraska to get producers together (Figure 1). These

events promoted exchange of soil health practices for farms and ranches such as cover



1 Map of field events co-hosted or sponsored by DWEE in 2025

crops and technology implementation. Department staff also participated in over 100 events and engaged over 600 producers this year to promote the values set forth in the RSWQA including addressing soil health economics, resource stewardship, and managerial and environmental

issues. DWEE also filmed numerous producers and agency programs to help promote cost shares and education.

### Nebraska Conservation Mentorship Network (RSWQA Purpose: 1-6)

The Department has also partnered with the Center for Rural Affairs (CFRA) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to help expand the Nebraska Conservation Mentorship Network. The network is designed to be producer-led allowing for spontaneity and flexibility. Participants choose the level of time and energy they wish to invest with multiple outlets for learning. Link: <https://neconservationmentorshipnetwork.org/>



### Nitrogen Reduction Incentive Act (RSWQA Purpose: 1-3)

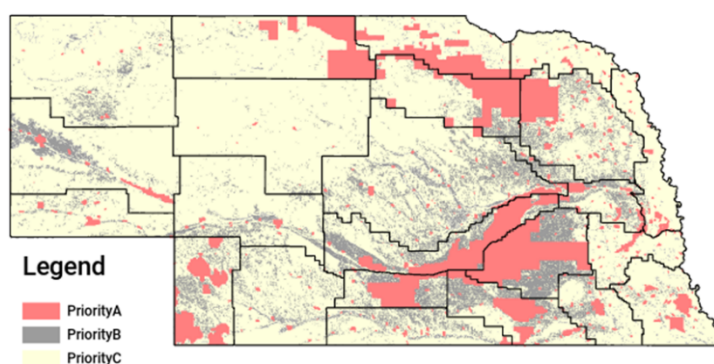
LB 1368 (2024) the Nitrogen Reduction Incentive Act, Neb. Rev. Stat. §§ 2-411 to 2-417, established a state program to provide incentives to producers for reducing the use of commercial fertilizers, named the Nitrogen Reduction Incentive Act (NiRIA) program. The

requirements of NiRIA are that producers verify a reduction in nitrogen fertilizer application rates as the lesser of 40 pounds per acre or 15% of their baseline application rate.

With funding and support from the local Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) and the Nebraska Corn Board,

the NiRIA program has been expanded into the 2026

cropping season. NRDs will pay producers an incentive payment based on their priority area, as shown in Figure 2 (Priority A- \$15 per acre, Priority B- \$12 per acre, and Priority C- \$10 per acre). Link: <https://dnr.nebraska.gov/lb-1368-nitrogen-reduction-incentive-program>

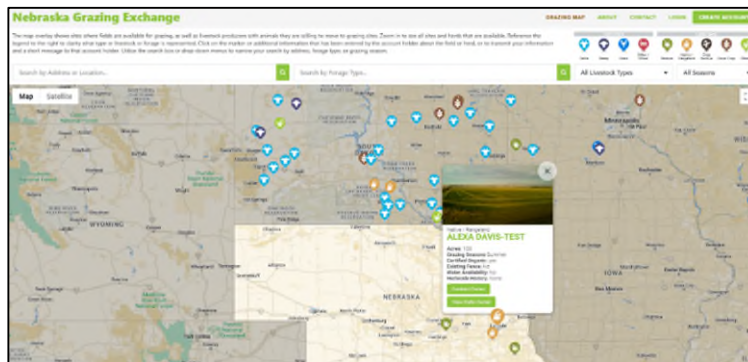


2 Priority Areas in NiRIA Program



### Nebraska Grazing Exchange (RSWQA Purpose: 1, 5, 6)

The Department continued to promote the Nebraska Grazing Exchange, an online interface that connects cattlemen with crop producers in an attempt to promote livestock grazing of cover crops as a profitable collaboration between the two groups. The Nebraska Grazing Exchange website is free to users and is a part of a nationwide effort to connect producers with producers by simply creating a pin and entering their contact information and a description of what they have to offer or what they are looking for. Link: <https://nebraskagrazingexchange.com/>



### Nebraska Soil Health Coalition (RSWQA Purpose: 1- 6)

The Department finished its contract with the Nebraska Soil Health Coalition in 2025 to help establish producer hubs across Nebraska. The Nebraska Soil Health Coalition aims to advance producer-centered education, outreach, and adoption of soil health principles to build resilient farms, ranches, and communities across Nebraska. Nebraska Soil Health Coalition website link: <https://www.nesoilhealth.org/>



### **Challenges and Obstacles to Widespread Adoption of Soil Health Practices**

While many successes have been made, there are still obstacles and challenges with widespread adoption of soil health BMPs:



- Uneven results: The effectiveness of soil health practices can vary across Nebraska's diverse climates and soil types.
- High upfront costs: Many soil health practices, especially cover cropping, involve additional costs for seed, labor, and specialized equipment.

- Uncertain economic returns: The financial benefits of improved soil health, such as increased yields and reduced input costs, can take years to materialize.
- Commodity price volatility: When commodity prices drop, profitability becomes difficult, and farmers may be hesitant to take on the additional financial risks.

It is important to acknowledge that meaningful change of this scale within the agriculture industry cannot happen overnight. Shifting long-established practices and mindsets takes time, resources, and ongoing support. However, encouraging examples of success are already emerging across Nebraska—producers are experimenting with new techniques, seeing measurable improvements in soil health, and sharing their experiences with others. These early achievements demonstrate that steady, collective progress is both possible and underway.

### **Future Activities**

Future activities of the Department include:

- Finalize changes with resources and information on the NSAC website
- Continue to promote the NSAC work at conferences such as Woman in Ag, NARD, UNL soil health conferences and other professional events
- Continue to host additional stakeholder engagement meetings
- Continue to solicit producer feedback for the NSAC efforts
- Support producer field days partnering with NRDs and other agriculture-related entities across Nebraska.

