UPPER ELKHORN The Oracle

"Making Wise Decisions Concerning Our Natural Resources"
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Natural Resources District

Spring 2026

Bazile Groundwater Management Area to Host Regenerative Ag Field Day on July 17th

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The Bazile Groundwater Management Area is hosting a Regenerative Ag Field Day on Friday, July 17th, from 10 a.m. to noon. The site is located near McLean - three miles west of the Highway 81/20 junction and a quarter mile north of 552nd Road.

This field day is the perfect opportunity for producers in northeast Nebraska to see regenerative ag in action and connect with like-minded producers. Explore a field where corn is planted with alfalfa. Learn real-world strategies from regional experts on topics such as boosting soil health, improving nutrient cycling, reducing inputs, and adapting when circumstances change.

Featured speakers include Junior Pfanstiel, Outside the Box Agronomy, who will discuss the theory, process, and goals of converting to regenerative agriculture practices. Pfanstiel will be joined by Zack Smith, The Stock Cropper, who will discuss converting sunlight to dollars and increasing ROI by putting livestock back on the landscape.

A free lunch, optional, will be provided after the event at "The Breakroom" in Randolph, NE. Limited spots are available! The deadline to register is Monday, July 6th. Producers interested in attending can find the registration link at https://bit.ly/BGMAFieldDay26, on the attached QR Code, or by calling Marcus, BGMA Coordinator, at 402-371-7313.

This field day is sponsored and produced by Outside the Box Agronomy; Center of Rural Affairs; UNL Extension; Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE); Nebraska Department of Water, Energy, and Environment; and the Lewis & Clark NRD; Lower Elkhorn NRD; Lower Niobrara NRD; and the Upper Elkhorn NRD.

The BGMA Project is an ongoing joint effort by the Lewis & Clark, Lower Niobrara, Lower Elkhorn, and Upper Elkhorn NRDs, and the Nebraska Department of Water, Energy, and Environment to curb the rise in nitrate concentrations. By offering educational opportunities, establishing demonstration sites, and providing cost-share for select Best Management Practices (BMPs), one of the Project's goals is the widespread adoption of BMPs across the area. BMPs give the producer more efficient control over inputs while reducing the environmental impact. If anyone is interested in adding BMPs to their operations, contact BGMA Coordinator Marcus Blunck at 402-371-7313 or mblunck@lenrd.org, or your local NRCS office.

Are You Crediting Nitrogen in Your Irrigation Water - It's Free

In a continuing effort to protect, maintain and improve our groundwater quality, the Upper Elkhorn NRD would like to encourage all irrigators to credit the nitrogen which may be in their irrigation water. This is a simple process which involves having your irrigation water sampled and running the results through the following formula. Example for an irrigation water sample which tested 10 ppm: 2.72 X Irrigation Water Sample Results divided by 12 will equal the Pounds of N/per 1 inche of irrigation water applied.

2.72 X 10 ppm/12 = 2.26 Pounds of N per 1 inches of irrigation water applied.

Please don't forget to credit your Nitrogen!

Spring Tree Planting and Weed Barrier Installation Follow-Up

Did the NRD Plant trees this spring or install Weed Barrier for you?? What you should do next!

- Make sure that your seedlings are heeled in after planting by pressing the soil in around the seedlings with the sole of your shoe.
- Keep the seedlings watered especially in the drier weather patterns.
- Check weed barrier after high wind and rain events. Either may expose the edges of the fabric and cause it to become loose. Make sure edges are covered with soil.

Program Compliance Reminders:

In order for Cooperators within the Upper Elkhorn NRD to participate in district cost share programs, participate in the expansion or transfer of groundwater irrigated acres or qualify for a new or replacement well permit they must be in compliance with the Upper Elkhorn NRD Groundwater Management Plan Rules and Regulations.

Producer Programs to be held at the Sandhills Expo

Check out the Producer Programs Agenda inside this edition of the UENRD Newsletter!

Scheduled for Wednesday, June 17, at the Rock County Community Center Meeting Room.

Don’t Toss ‘Em - Battery Recycling Event

North Central RC&D to Host at Sandhills Ranch Expo

Most of us have them – old batteries tucked away in a kitchen drawer, sitting on a workbench, or piled in a box in the garage. While it may seem harmless to toss an old battery in the trash, that small item can create a serious problem. Improper disposal has become a growing safety concern.

When batteries are crushed, punctured, or exposed to water in garbage trucks, transfer stations, or landfills, they can spark fires. Facilities across the country have reported increasing numbers of battery-related fires, many linked to lithium-ion batteries commonly found in cordless tools, rechargeable household items, and electronics. In addition to the fire risk, batteries contain materials that can contaminate the soil and water if they are not managed properly.

With battery use continuing to increase and recognizing these concerns, Nebraska recently adopted the Safe Battery Collection and Recycling Act, which will establish a statewide battery recycling network and place new restrictions on disposing of many batteries in landfills starting in 2028. Before the program is fully implemented, several locations across the state have been selected to serve as test collection sites.

The North Central Nebraska RC&D is among the first organizations helping roll out battery recycling opportunities across Nebraska. Battery collection boxes will be available at the RC&D booth in the Rock County Community Center during the Sandhills Ranch Expo in Bassett, Nebraska. The event will be on June 17th from 10:00 am – 7:00 pm, and June 18th from 10:00 am – 4:00 pm.

Items accepted include rechargeable batteries up to 11 pounds and under 300 watt-hours, commonly found in power tools, digital cameras, and gaming controllers. Battery types accepted are lithium-ion, small sealed lead acid, nickel cadmium, nickel metal hydride, and nickel zinc. Single-use batteries including lithium primary, carbon zinc, alkaline, and coin/button batteries will also be accepted along with all types and ages of cell phones.

No damaged or defective batteries, no batteries that are part of a recall, no wet-cell, or car, batteries, and no batteries weighing over 11 pounds or exceeding 300 watt-hours will be accepted. A battery identification and safety guide is available at www.batterynetwork.org. Details can also be found at www.northcentralrcd.com, or by calling 402-340-1530.

“Most people don’t realize that tossing a battery in the trash can create a fire long after it leaves their home,” said Carla Stagemeyer, North Central RC&D Executive Director. “As more rechargeable batteries find their way into everyday items, it’s important to give people a safe and convenient way to recycle them.”

Old batteries my not take up much space, but they shouldn’t be overlooked. Residents are encouraged to take advantage of this collection opportunity. Proper disposal helps reduce fire risks, keeps hazardous materials out of landfills, and ensures batteries are handled the right way from start to finish. It’s a simple step with a big impact.

NORTH CENTRAL NEBRASKA RC&D

Regenerative Farm Field Day

Saturday, July 18, 2026
88471 475 Ave, Atkinson, NE
8:30 AM – Breakfast
9:00 AM – Welcome
10:00 AM – Infield Learning
12:00 – Lunch
1:00 PM –

Family Friendly Events

- Inflatable Bounce Houses
- Hands on soil discovery
- Looking at soil under a microscope

Looking at farming through a different lens according to nature.

- How do we build soil health that leads to human health and resiliency
- Diverse crop rotation and alternative crops to corn and soybeans
- Opportunities for returning livestock to the land
- Local economic growth through a more integrated operation
- Lowering inputs in a conventional or organic operation
- Roller crimping crops for improved weed control, soil cover and water conservation

Speakers include:

Jessie Poessnecker – Regenerative Farmer
Mac Trotter – Regenerative Farmer
Rion Naus – We Grow With LLC
Zack Smith – Stockcropper LLC
Ed Baumgartner – Bass Hybrids
Lynn Hoover – Ocean Blue Ag
Blake Merritt – Core Bio Ag
Sara Paxton – Nourish Health Coaching

Reminder:
New Groundwater Irrigated Expansion Acres and All Transfered Acres Must Be Re-Certified with the UENRD the First Year After They are Watered

Upper Elkhorn NRD Hosts Natural Resources Festival for Area 5th Graders

The Natural Resources Festival, hosted by the Upper Elkhorn NRD, was held April 9 in O’Neill. Approximately 100 fifth grade students from the area attended the festival to learn more about water quality, aquifers, watersheds and wildlife through interactive games and presentations. Professionals from the Upper Elkhorn NRD, Lower Elkhorn NRD, Lower Niobrara NRD, Lower Loup NRD, UNL Extension, Bazile Groundwater Management Project, Nebraska Game & Parks and Natural Resources Conservation Service worked with students to make them aware of how important our natural resources are and how to protect them.



Reminder:
Irrigation Water Samples are required once every 4 years to remain in compliance with the Upper Elkhorn NRD GWMP Rules and Regulations.

Sandhills Ranch Expo - Bassett, Nebraska

2026 Ranch and Natural Resources
Wednesday June 17th
Community Building Meeting Room @ Sandhills Ranch Expo

10:30-11:30
Alternative Ranch Income - Conservation Programs Carbon Credits & Regenerative Ag Roundtable
Casey Foster, Jeff Steffen, Jessie Possnecker (Local Producers)

11:30-12:30
Nitrate & Water Quality Update – Nitrate and Health Concerns
MNNRD/UENRD & Krista Brown-UNMC

12:30-1:00
2026 Weather Outlook
Eric Hunt Meteorologist

Lunch Break

1:30-2:00
Nitrate Toxicity in Cattle – Screwworm/Asian Longhorn Tick Update
Becky Funk Veterinarian

2:00-2:30
Water Quality Task Force – One Red Funding Update – NDWEE Programs
Brittany Bartak (Yield Plus Ag) & Alexa Davis (NDWEE)

3:00-3:30
Forage Options and Grazing Management During Drought
Brittany Bartak (Yield Plus Ag) & Mitch Stephensen (UNL)

3:30-4:30
Wildfire Preparedness & Recovery – Rock and Brown County Fuels Reduction Funding & Activities
Nebraska Forest Service & Mitch Stephensen (UNL)

ProducerConnect

Sign up for Producer Connect Now

The Upper Elkhorn NRD is excited to introduce Producer Connect. This platform is taking the place of the previous annual report platform. Producer Connect is available as a web and mobile based application and will allow producers who farm in multiple participating NRDs to complete their reports in one location. The UENRD started utilizing Producer Connect for the 2025 crop reports.

Producer Connect is live and operators and/or landowners can sign up today. To activate your account go to https://app.producerconnect.com/ or use the link on the UENRD website and click register now; or scan the QR code. When registering please include all associated entites and make sure to select all NRDs you operate in. After registering the NRD will have to verify your account.

If you have not completed your 2025 crop reports, contact the office for help setting up you account. The UENRD is no longer accepting paper annual reports. If you need assistence to complete your reports, call and set up an appointment with NRD staff. 2026 reports are live and producers can add their N applications to their fields as they are applied. Please contact the UENRD with any questions at 402-336-3867.

Attention Chemigators!! Annual Inspections are Underway

The UENRD has the responsibiliy of conducting annual inspections of Chemigation sites. This consists of:

- Inspecting the Mainline Check Valve
- Inspection Port
- Low Pressure Drain
- Chem Injection Check Valve
- Interlock
- Drain hose

We will also be conducting Spot Inspections for Irrigation sites to make sure the site has a working slam valve to protect the groundwater from being contaminated. Remember, any fertilizer, chemicals or pesticides being pumped through an irrigation system is required by state statute to have Chemigation equipment and a permit!

We will try to work with cooperators as best we can to schedule Chemigation inspections. So when making an appointment, please do not cancel. This causes a gap in the inspectors day and leads to late season inspections. If you would like to be pro-active, you can contact the UENRD office at 402-336-3867 to schedule your Chemigation inspections.

Upper Elkhorn Natural Resources District

Upper Elkhorn NRD Awards 2026 Senior Scholarships

Each year the Upper Elkhorn NRD awards three scholarships to graduating high school seniors in the district. These are students who have chosen to pursue a career in a field related to agriculture, natural resources or the environment. This year's recipients are Shaylie Kester of Summerland Public School; Clair Krysl of Summerland Public School; Kayde Ramm of Stuart Public School; and, alternate Jenna Funk of Summerland Public School. Dana and Candice Kester will be supporting Shaylie as she is planning a career in Agribusiness while attending Wayne State College. Clair Krysl, the daughter of Josh and Melissa, is planning a career in Animal Science and is planning to attend Northeast Community College. Kayde's parents are Justin and Megan Ramm, and he has chosen to pursue a career in Livestock Management while attending Southeast Community College. The 2026 alternate, Jenna Funk, with the help of her parents Bob and Maria, is planning to study Business Administration/Agribusiness at Wayne State College.

Scholarship winners will receive a scholarship in the amount of $500 to help defer costs during their first year of College. The Upper Elkhorn NRD would like to congratulate the 2026 Senior Scholarship Winners and wish them good luck in achieving their future goals.

	Nebraska Nitrogen Use Efficiency (NUE) Program	Nitrogen Reduction Incentive Act (NiRIA) Program
Purpose	Encourage corn producers to consider all major sources of nitrogen when evaluating efficiency of nitrogen management	Encourage producers to reduce the use of commercial fertilizer.
Expectations	Achieve a NUE of 1.0, or under, per bushel.	Verify a reduction in nitrogen fertilizer application rates as the lesser of 40 pounds per acre or 15% of their baseline application rate.
Long-Term Benefits	Improving NUE can deliver meaningful economic and environmental benefits without sacrificing productivity.	Save money and time on nitrogen applications, in addition to environmental benefits.
Incentive	$15/acre	$10-15/acre depending on region
Crops Covered	Corn	Corn, Sugar Beet, Potato, Wheat
Enrollment Cap	Limit of 160 acres per application, but producers can have more than one application. Check with your local NRD for additional information.	
Funding Limit	$1 million statewide.	$1 million statewide.
Evaluation Data	• Producers must submit a soil sample. • If irrigated, producers must submit a water sample prior to planting. • Some districts may also require a manure sample. Check with your local NRD for additional information.	• Producers in Priority A areas can use NRD phase reports. • Producers in Priority B areas can use NRD phase reports for the prior 3 growing seasons or complete soil sampling, as established by the NRD. • Producers in Priority C areas will be required to establish a baseline level of nitrogen application, as established by the NRD, through the methods outlined for Priority B.
Enrollment	Enroll in both programs at your local NRD.	
Exclusions	**Fields** that have been (or will be) paid for the Nitrogen Reduction Incentive Act (NiRIA) program are not eligible to receive 2026 NUE payments.	

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NEBRASKA
DEPT. OF WATER, ENERGY, AND ENVIRONMENT

Nebraska CornBoard

Upper Elkhorn NRD Expanding Safe Drinking Water Program

The Upper Elkhorn NRD added $200,000 to the budget in the fiscal year 25-26 to expand it's safe drinking water program. If you are a landowner residing within the Upper Elkhorn NRD and if your drinking water exceeds the federal health standard of 10 parts per million, landowners would be eligible for cost share on a water treatment system to remove the nitrates from the drinking water. The basics of the program include 90% cost share up to $2,000 per household for a reverse osmosis system or other approved means of removing nitrates from the drinking water. The program is districtwide and requires a sample to be taken by NRD staff to qualify and you must be pre-approved before any work is to be completed. To date the Upper Elkhorn NRD has costshared to provide safe drinking water to 18 district residences.

Reminder that it is important to remember to test your private drinking water wells each year. Private wells are not monitored by the state or the NRD.

Upper Elkhorn Natural Resources District Board of Directors

Cameron Smith	Subdistrict 1 ~ Bassett	(402) 853-4679
Trevor Gotschall	Subdistrict 1 ~ Stuart	(402) 340-0686
Curtis Gotschall	Subdistrict 2 ~ Atkinson	(402) 340-5621
John Vogel	Subdistrict 2 ~ Atkinson	(402) 925-5312
Gene Kelly	Subdistrict 3 ~ O'Neill	(402) 336-3681
Marv Fritz	Subdistrict 3 ~ O'Neill	(402) 340-0747
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Tony Sanderson	Subdistrict 4 ~ Chambers	(402) 340-2501
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Kevin Blair	Subdistrict 5 ~ Brunswick	(402) 358-5430
Art Tanderup	Subdistrict 6 ~ Neligh	(402) 887-1396
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Bruce Anderson	Subdistrict 7 ~ Elgin	(402) 843-5651
Matt Beckman	Subdistrict 7 ~ Elgin	(402) 843-6045
Chris Dierks	At-Large ~ Ewing	(402) 485-2618

UENRD Board Meetings are held the 4th Monday of every month. April through October at 7:00 P.M. and November through March at 2:30 P.M.

UENRD Staff

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Denise Napier	NRCS Clerk, Neligh
Mary Zakrzewski	NRCS Clerk, O'Neill

Nitrogen Certification

There are still many operators whose Nitrogen Certification Expired 3/1/2026-- or before which have not yet completed recertification. If you are responsible for making decisions on any type of nitrogen fertilizer applications, commercial or livestock, on your operation you must be Nitrogen Certified. Recertification is required every 4 years. If you have not recertified or you need to become certified this year certification can be obtained by completing the take home test. Take home tests are available for pickup at the NRD office in O'Neill and the Neligh NRCS office.

Just a reminder to everyone who completed Nitrogen Certification this year – irrigation water samples are a requirement of certification. If you did not submit a sample prior to taking the certification class, please sample all of your registered wells as soon as you start irrigating and submit the results.

Annual Reports (for those in Phase II areas) and Nitrogen Certification are required by our Groundwater Management Plan Rules and Regulations and are necessary to maintain compliance.

For more information on Phase II Annual Reports or Nitrogen Certification visit the UENRD website at https://www.uenrd.org/ or contact the UENRD office at 402-336-3867.

The Oracle is the official publication of the Upper Elkhorn Natural Resources District. It is produced for the purpose of educating the public regarding natural resources issues. Any comments or questions should be sent to Beth Walsh, Upper Elkhorn NRD, 301 N. Harrison Street, O'Neill, NE 68763 or e-mailed to bwalsh@uenrd.org.