

Dry weather forces better irrigation management

By Larry Lutz

Editor's note: This is the last of a three-part series on irrigation and its development in Nebraska.

Recent weather conditions are forcing farmers to consider alternatives to their irrigation plans, according to a university irrigation specialist.

Les Sheffield, assistant to vice chancellor of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources and extension coordinator for irrigation, said three consecutive years of dry weather in Nebraska have caused farmers to increase the number of wells they have drilled. This has increased the amount of water they use for irrigation.

A lack of rain doesn't necessarily mean a serious decline in the underground water supply, Sheffield said. Irrigation management, especially irrigation in a manner that puts water back into the ground can mean no reduction in the water supply, he said. Although university studies show only about 13 inches of water are needed to irrigate most fields during a summer season, many farmers are using 20 to 28 inches, he said. During irrigation, about 10 to 15 per cent of the water used goes back into the ground under proper management, he said.

The main conflict for water rights has developed over the question of using water for irrigators or allocating it for domestic use. In some cases, according to Steve Oltmans, manager of the Lower Elkhorn Natural Resource District, irrigators are depleting ground water wells used for domestic purposes.

This points out the fact that Nebraska's groundwater is no longer inexhaustible, he said.

Sheffield cited legislation which was written to deal with this problem. LB577, passed by the 1976 Unicameral, provides for a water control board to be established Oct. 5 at public hearing in Scottsbluff. The board can declare a water control area for water allocation and, as a last resort, can declare a one-year moratorium on well drilling in the area.

Faced with these restrictions, farmers are turning to a number of alternatives, enabling them to continue their high crop yields, he said.

The most popular alternative has been better management of existing irrigation systems to control the rate of water flow and measure the moisture in the soil.

Another method to deal with the water problem has been for farmers to plant crops that don't require as much water as others. They are planted on a rotational basis with other crops.

Technological advances have made irrigation adaptable to almost any type of field. Center pivot systems can

operate in fields of uneven topography and systems have been developed with arms as much as one-half mile long.

Another new system, recently developed by a Nebraska manufacturing company, has a hydraulic system attached to the arms, allowing them to move independently.

Irrigation manufacturers also are cashing in on the irrigation boom. Sheffield said there are at least 25 companies in America manufacturing systems to be sent overseas. Among them are approximately six to eight Nebraska based firms, exporting to South Africa, U.S.S.R., Libya the Sudan and Peru.

Faculty seeks privacy safeguards

By Tom Eaton

Safeguards for confidential faculty information will likely be an issue at the November meeting of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP).

Mel Forde, UNL AAUP chapter president, said faculty members have expressed concern about the confidentiality of workload information and professional fees. The emergence of a state computer network for employee payroll information has added to their concern, he said.

The computer network, called the Nebraska Employee Information System, was planned to start in January, but is behind schedule. The university and the State Department of Administrative Services (DAS) have argued over UNL's role in the system. The argument remains unresolved.

If the university becomes a part of the system, then professional fees may again become an issue. Last spring, the Nebraska Supreme Court ruled that the fees, for services outside the university, were private information. Because of this the state cannot demand the informa-

tion or release it to the press.

"Two people this week have expressed concern about the statewide computer concept. They said they are concerned that all the information would be available to anyone in the Department of Administrative Services who wanted to press the key," Forde said.

Stanley Matzke, DAS director, said in a legislative Appropriations Committee meeting that it would be illegal for a state employee to release any confidential information in the system.

The faculty members also were concerned about the security of confidential information stored in the UNL computer. Results of a faculty workload study are stored on tape at the UNL Computer Center.

The study, made last year, shows the number of hours spent on research and teaching. Forde said Steven Sample, executive vice president for academic affairs, has said all possible steps were being taken to assure confidentiality, but that it would be possible for someone familiar with the computer to get the information.

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