



# LEWIS & CLARK

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## NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Small Grain Incentive Program**

In an effort to promote small grains as a way to address a variety of natural resource concerns, the Lewis & Clark Natural Resources District (LCNRD), the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Pheasants Forever, Inc. (PF) are partnering to offer an incentive payment to producers who add a small grain to their crop rotations. The payment can supplement incentives already available through NRCS programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

Small grains can help improve soil health, especially when followed by a cover crop. Because small grains are planted in the fall or early spring and harvested by late summer, planting a cover crop to follow the small grain, is very feasible. With this cropping sequence, living roots will remain in the soil nearly year-round, which promotes beneficial soil organisms and results in improved soil structure and increased organic matter. Small grains can also help improve water quality by reducing runoff of soil-bound nutrients like phosphorous into surface waters and by scavenging nutrients such as nitrate that can leach into groundwater. More diverse crop rotations can also reduce input costs by breaking life cycles of pests and diseases and by reducing water demand. Finally, other crops, such as corn and soybeans, will generally produce higher yields when grown in rotation with small grains than they would if planted continuously or in two-crop rotations.

Wildlife species benefit from the presence of small grains on the landscape. Gamebirds such as pheasants are known to nest in fields of winter wheat, oats, and other small grains. Small grains can serve as brood cover for chicks because they provide overhead cover from predators, shade, space to move, and insects for food. Wildlife may benefit in the winter if tall stubble is left standing or a cover crop is planted that will provide thermal cover and/or food.

Landowners or tenants operating farmland within the LCNRD are eligible for the small grains incentive payment. The payment is \$8 per acre during the year a small grain is grown. Payments are capped at 160 acres per producer except in wildlife priority areas identified by the NGPC. Requirements of the program are that the small grain crop must be planted early enough to reach a sufficient height for nesting cover (about 10 inches) by mid- to late-May. The field should not be harvested before July 15<sup>th</sup> to prevent the potential destruction of nests. Slight flexibility in planting and harvest dates could be allowed for inclement weather conditions if a biologist is consulted beforehand. Post-harvest field management is at the discretion of the producer, but the NGPC may provide an additional \$2 per acre payment for wildlife-friendly practices such as leaving tall stubble or planting an approved cover crop that would serve as winter cover.

Funding is available on a first-come, first-served basis. Interested producers should visit the LCNRD office in Hartington or their local USDA Service Center in Hartington, Bloomfield, or Ponca to complete a Notification of Interest form. Informational brochures are also available at these locations. For questions about the program, contact NGPC biologist Jason Thiele at 402-370-0010 or [jason.thiele@nebraska.gov](mailto:jason.thiele@nebraska.gov).

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