

Carbon-credit deal may be temporary

THE market for carbon credits may not be around forever.

A similar cap-and-trade market developed regarding sulfur dioxide emissions in the acid-rain debate a number of years ago, says Dale Enerson, North Dakota Farmers Union carbon-credit program leader.

Over time, the cost of credits or offsets became high enough to force companies to place scrubbers on smokestacks, replace the highest-emission plants and build newer low-emission facilities. Lowered emissions resulted from the market-based sulfur dioxide allowances trading, and acid rain and its damage were lessened. That may hold true for carbon emissions as well.

In addition, increased energy efficiency and possibly the hydrogen economy may further reduce carbon emissions.

In the meantime, if you can adopt economically successful and environmentally sound land-management practices that reduce or offset carbon emissions and can get paid for it, it creates a "win-win" for all involved.

about \$1.40 per acre for no-till and \$2.60 per acre for grass stands, less the aggregation fee.

In addition, each year 20% of the proceeds due will be placed in an escrow account that will be paid in a lump sum at the end of the contract. This provides an incentive for producers to complete all terms of the contract. There are also penalties for early termination of land-management practices.

■ **Why are the terms of contracts for five to six years?** Due to the nature of the pilot-program status of the Chicago Climate Exchange and the turnover in land ownership or rental agreements, a five- to six-year contract seems to be most practical. It is NDFU's hope that these contracts will be rolled into extended contracts for additional years.

Soil scientists indicate that carbon amounts may gradually increase for 20 to 30 years or more under some practices. As a result, there likely will be longer or different contract terms in the future for carbon storage in wetlands, native ranges, manure digesters and forestry stands.

■ **Do you have to soil test to prove you are storing carbon?** If the practices of no-till cropping and grass seeding are indeed carried out during the contract, sequestration or storage of carbon at the agreed upon amounts is assumed to have occurred. No beginning or ending soil-testing protocols are needed to fulfill the contract requirements, just certification and verification that the practices are implemented.

■ **Does Conservation Reserve Program land qualify?** Carbon credits can be earned on land that has been no-tilled and seeded to grass previously. The only restriction on grass-seeding credits is that the grass stand had to be established no earlier than Jan. 1, 1999, as set by the Chicago Climate Exchange. Unfortunately, many of our state's CRP stands were planted earlier than that. They will be ineligible for credits at this time under current contracts.

Dakotas help lower erosion

GIVE yourself a pat on the back. Soil erosion is down 43% nationwide, and Dakotans are leading the way. Soil erosion was down as much as 50% in the region that includes North Dakota and South Dakota.

"This remarkable decrease in soil erosion can be attributed to the extraordinary efforts by America's private landowners to conserve and protect agricultural lands," says Mike Johanns, U.S. secretary of agriculture.

The information comes from USDA's National Resources Inventory, a statistical survey of natural-resource conditions and trends. Recently, NRI reported that total soil erosion from nonfederal cultivated and noncultivated cropland in the United States decreased 43% between 1982 and 2003. Sheet and rill erosion decreased 42%, and wind erosion decreased 44%.

"This report underscores the value of cooperative conservation through partnerships with our farmers and ranchers, who are among the best stewards of the land," Johanns says.

Here's how the erosion decline breaks down:

■ **Sheet and rill erosion (removal of layers of soil by rainfall and runoff):** decreased from an average 4 tons per acre in 1982 to 2.6 tons per acre in 2003.

■ **Wind erosion:** decreased from 3.3 tons per acre in 1982 to 2.1 tons per acre

Key Points

- USDA inventory shows dramatic drop in soil erosion since the early 1980s.
- Erosion declined the most in the region that includes the Dakotas.
- The decline was accomplished with voluntary conservation efforts.

in 2003. The data also shows that in 2003, 72% of the nation's cropland was eroding below soil-loss tolerance rates compared with 60% in 1982.

Leaders are here

The Missouri and the Souris-Red-Rainy/Upper Mississippi river basins — approximately 50% of the nation's cropland — experienced the most significant reductions in total erosion from 1982 to 2003. In the Missouri River Basin, which includes sections of Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming, and all of Nebraska, the average rate of soil erosion fell 3 tons per acre per year.

In the Souris-Red-Rainy/Upper Mississippi River Basin, which includes sections of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota and Wisconsin, the rate fell 2.5 tons per acre per year.

For more information on the study, go to www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/nri.



Answer the call, and help us out

THIS is not a sales call..." begins an annual summer conversation we have with our readers. It's that time of year again. We are conducting our annual farm practices survey and hope you can spare a few minutes to participate. This survey helps our editors understand your needs and write more meaningful articles that pertain to your farm operation.

When we call, please answer and help us out. We'll be making calls through the summer.

Thanks for your time.

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Calendar of Events

July

11: North Central Research Extension Center Pulse Day, Research Center, Minot, N.D. Contact: Kent McKay. Phone: (701) 857-7679.

12: Crops and Soils Day, Northwest Research and Outreach Center, Crookston, Minn. Web site: www.prairieagcomm.com/calendar/calendar.cfm.

12: Crop Tour, Hettinger Research Extension Center. Phone: (701) 222-0128. Web site: www.ndpealenti.org/upcoming.html.

13: Centennial Field Day Celebration, Dickinson Research Extension Center, Dickinson, N.D. Contact: Frank Kutka or Roger Ashley. Phone: (701) 483-2348. Web site: www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu/dickinso/events/centennial.htm.

14: Williston Research Extension Center Field Day, Williston, N.D. Contact: Neil Riveland. Phone: (701) 774-4315.

18: Carrington Research Extension Center Annual Field Day, Carrington, N.D. Contact: Blaine Schatz. Phone: (701) 652-2951.

19: North Central Research Extension Center Field Day, Minot. Contact: Jay Fisher. Phone: (701) 857-7679.

21-29: North Dakota State Fair, Minot, N.D. Contact: Dean Aakre. Phone: (701) 231-8595. Web site: www.ndstatefair.com.

August

1-3: Farmfest, Redwood County, Minn. Contact: Darren Winfield at (800) 827-8007. Web site: www.farmfest.com; click on "Farmfest."

15-17: Dakotafest, Mitchell, S.D. Phone: (800) 827-8007. Web site: www.farmfest.com; click on "Dakotafest."

31-Sept. 4: South Dakota State Fair, Huron. Contact: Susan Hayward at (800) 529-0900. Web site: www.sdstatefair.com.

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