

NRCS office has many tools to help producers

By **ERICK PETERSON**
For the Capital Press

Natural Resources Conservation Service employees in Eastern Washington have many tools in their tool box when it comes to helping farmers and ranchers improve their land management.

Gina Kerzman, public affairs officer for the NRCS in Washington state, said the NRCS works with private landowners to help them protect and conserve natural resources. While each county has its own working group that sets goals, many of the goals are shared between regions.

Take Franklin County in southeastern Washington, for example.

"A lot of the work that we do in Franklin County is geared toward water efficiency to protect water resources," she said. The agency also takes up soil health projects and works with



Erick Peterson/For the Capital Press

Natural Resources Conservation Service soil conservationist Carolyn Edenbo and resource conservationist Glenn Riehle stand over plans at the Franklin County NRCS office in Pasco, Wash. Edenbo says that she has worked with around 30 ag producers in the past year. About half of those connections were made through the EQIP program. Riehle said that he worked on 50 contracts in 2015.

orchardists on the reduction of pesticide use.

Programs available include the Environmental Quality In-

centive Program, the flagship that offers cost-share help to landowners. These are incentive payments to help landown-

ers be able to begin programs that are otherwise cost prohibitive.

"It covers a lot of areas," she said. "It's a great program to get into some conservation practices."

She said EQIP can even assist producers in exploring no-till farming. EQIP helps with grazing management for rangeland, irrigation efficiency and nutrient management, she said.

"It's kind of our be-all program," she said.

Also, the Conservation Stewardship Program rewards landowners for already being good stewards.

"There are some that are doing conservation on their own. With help from this program,

they can be helped in furthering their efforts," she said. She calls such producers "Gold Star Stewards" and said that several farmers and ranchers in Franklin County fit this description.

Ed Teel, district conservationist in Walla Walla, Wash., oversees Franklin County and is excited about efforts made in helping producers switch from inefficient irrigation systems to sprinklers or micro-irrigation. Franklin County has special concerns, he said, and the program targets sandy soils that are prone to wind erosion. It also takes special aim at areas near salmon-bearing streams near the Columbia and Snake rivers.

When prioritizing and deciding between applications to

accept for EQIP funding, his office will favor projects on sandy ground or near fish-rich waters, he said.

He added that his office also helps producers with advice on how much water to apply to their land. Additional advice can also include the use of cover crops.

And he hopes for additional contact with producers in the future. Already, he deals with many different producers — ranchers, dryland farmers and irrigated producers all reach out to him. And he said that he is often able to find ways to help people with programs and funding regarding wind erosion, tillage practices and residue management.

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