

Water Sustainability Fund Final Report

To: Nebraska Natural Resources Commission

From: Jennifer Swanson, Nebraska Association of Resources Districts (NARD)

Subject: Water Sustainability Fund Final Report

Project Title: Producer Connect Nitrogen Water Management Tool

Grantee: Nebraska Association of Resources Districts (NARD)

Reporting Period: August 2023 – July 2025

WSF Grant Number: 10077

Report Date: July 18, 2025

1` Project Overview:

The Nebraska Association of Resources Districts (NARD) in partnership with Longitude 103 and with funding support from the Water Sustainability Fund (WSF), initiated the development of Producer Connect-a digital platform aimed at empowering agricultural producers with tools to optimize inputs, enhance profitability, improve water quality, and increase irrigation efficiency.

The project was designed to simplify required crop reporting through the NRDs and be a tool for producers to help make nitrogen and irrigation management decisions. Through phased development and broad stakeholder engagement, Phase 1 of Producer Connect has been completed.

Project Activities & Accomplishments

Phase 1: Planning and Initial Development (August 2023 – April 2024)

- Contracted with Longitude 103 in September 2023 to begin app development.
- Formed a steering committee composed of NRD representatives and stakeholders to guide the app's design and function.
- Held three steering committee meetings to review progress and provide direction.
- Shared project goals and development progress through presentations at the 2023 NARD Annual Conference and the 2024 NARD Legislative Conference.
- Completed development of an alpha version of the app.
- Developed a preliminary Outreach Strategy in preparation for launch.

Phase 2: Testing, Refinement, and Stakeholder Engagement (April 2024 – April 2025)

- **April–June 2024:** Demonstrated the app to NARD leadership and the steering committee. Alpha version shared with NRDs for early testing and feedback.

- **August 2024:** Met with Lower Elkhorn NRD to review functionality and gather user-specific feedback.
- **September 2024:** Held a demo with project partners and hosted a public webinar highlighting the role of NRDs in water management and the benefits of Producer Connect.
- **October–December 2024:** Presented at the Nebraska Water Center Conference and engaged the Nebraska Cooperative Council.
- **January–March 2025:** Continued steering committee meetings to refine rollout strategy and platform enhancements; demonstrated the platform at the NRD Managers Meeting.
- Finalized an Outreach Strategy, created targeted social media content, and drafted a producer sign-up letter.
- Completed and operationalized **Phase 1 of Producer Connect.**

Evaluation of Project Benefits

The WSF grant application outlined several expected benefits. Below is an assessment of progress toward each goal:

Proposed Benefit	Result	Status
Empower producers to optimize agricultural inputs	Delivers farm-specific insights and personalized nitrogen recommendations through an intuitive step-by-step data entry process, enabling optimal nitrogen and irrigation.	<i>Ongoing</i>
Simplified Water Reporting	Makes submitting flow meter readings easy by allowing producers to upload photos via mobile devices, saving time and improving data accuracy for water management decisions.	<i>Achieved</i>
Enhance agricultural profitability	Encourages fertilizer application at agronomic rates to maximize profitability and maintain crop yields	<i>Ongoing</i>
Supports Sustainability	Acts as a critical tool in balancing agricultural productivity with environmental stewardship, aligning irrigation with fertilizer use to optimize yields and reduce ecological risks.	<i>Ongoing</i>
Integrated Management	Facilitates combined management of nitrogen and water recognizing their interconnected effects on crop health and groundwater protection.	<i>Achieved</i>

Proposed Benefit	Result	Status
Facilitate producer-NRD collaboration	Steering committee input, NRD demos, and trainings ensure the platform meets the needs of both producers and NRDs.	<i>Achieved</i>
Create a scalable and maintainable tool	Platform development was structured to allow future feature expansion, with Phase 1 completed and Phase 2 activities planned.	<i>Achieved</i>

Next Steps

- Begin producer sign-up and onboarding.
- Continue enhancement planning with the NRDs.
- Promote Producer Connect at events like Husker Harvest Days.
- Use Producer Connect to collect 2025 crop reports for the NRDs.

Conclusion

Producer Connect has laid a strong foundation for transforming the way Nebraska’s agricultural producers and NRDs manage water-related data and practices. The WSF investment has accelerated the creation of a functional, scalable, and collaborative platform that directly supports sustainable water use and conservation goals across the state. Phase 1 is now complete, and Phase 2 will focus on adoption, training, and continued feature enhancements. With continued support and engagement, the platform is expected to deliver lasting value to both producers and NRDs.