

# UNL Extension: Acreage Insights

## Acreage eNews-June 2013

<http://acreage.unl.edu>

### Have Your Private Well Water Tested Now

By [Sharon Skipton](#), UNL Extension Water Quality Educator



Many of us thought it would never warm up this year. It's finally warm. More importantly, the soil is finally warm, which makes this the perfect time to have your private well water tested.

State and federal regulations do not require you to have your private water supply tested. It is recommended that you voluntarily have your private water supply tested annually for bacteria and nitrate contamination. Why now? Coliform bacteria are most likely to be found during periods of wet weather when the soil is warm. In addition, runoff and excess soil moisture can carry contaminants into shallow groundwater sources or through well defects. Therefore, this is the perfect time to have your water tested.

There is no single test to determine the safety of drinking water. Testing for bacteria and nitrate does not guarantee the water is safe, as other contaminants could be present. Aquifers, which supply groundwater, are vulnerable to many types of contamination. Contaminants can enter aquifers and groundwater from septic systems, landfills, fertilizer and pesticide use, sewage, animal waste, fuel storage tanks, and many other sources. Even distant contamination can negatively impact a water supply given time, as groundwater moves slowly. In addition, some contaminants are introduced to groundwater from naturally occurring sources such as the rock and minerals that make up the aquifer.

It would be costly, and in most cases unnecessary, to have your private water supply tested for the nearly 100 contaminants for which public water supplies are required to test. You must decide if you want to have your water tested for contaminants in addition to bacteria and nitrate and, if so, which contaminants are of concern.

In general, consider having tests done for other substances when specific contamination is suspected. This might be the result of a spill, backflow, use of product in close proximity to the well, or other such event. If any contaminant is detected in a nearby private or public well, consider having your water tested for the contaminant.

Many Nebraska laboratories offer testing services including water analyses. The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services approves laboratories to test drinking water samples. Not all laboratories are approved to test for all drinking water contaminants. Approval must be obtained for each specific contaminant. The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services can provide information on request regarding all laboratories located and approved in Nebraska, and can provide information on the specific contaminants for which each is approved. They can be reached at 402 471-8407 or [laurie.wieting@nebraska.gov](mailto:laurie.wieting@nebraska.gov).