

Farmland sales in Dawson County drive up valuation

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Notices expected from assessor expected around June 1

Agricultural property in Dawson County continues to surpass all other types of real estate in terms of increased valuation in 2013.

Dawson County assessor John Moore said farm ground sales continue to rise in a booming market, some reaching \$8,000 an acre or higher.

“Sales have been doubling and tripling for the last three years and we can’t keep up,” Moore said.

Valuation notices are expected to arrive on or about June 1 after which property owners may decide whether to file a valuation—not tax—protest, Moore said.

Besides a significant increase in farmland values, residential property at Johnson Lake and in Lexington was reviewed and updated to reflect market value.

Moore noted that values in Lexington mark the end of reappraisals of all property in the county within a six-year period. However updates are ongoing because of market forces.

Most of the classes of property in the county seldom go three years before they need some adjustment, he said. But statutorily, he said assessors must make sure all property is inspected, and updated if needed, within six years.

Updating valuation means that appraisers review sales of similar property and establish a model

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for assessment, Moore explained, noting that he tries to maintain those assessments for two to three years if the market allows it.

“Some markets continue to go higher almost annually in Dawson County. Agricultural ground is the most striking example,” he said.

The assessor said he’s faced with managing increases on the local level.

As a result, Moore said the county was not called in for a show cause hearing this year by the Nebraska Tax Equalization and Review Commission (TERC).

Show cause action asks why a county’s value “should not be increased” and county assessors defend their valuation decisions in front of the TERC, he explained.

“Often we’re required, at the commission’s direction, to adjust assessments upwards, regardless of arguments to leave the figures alone,” Moore said.

State guidelines require that residential, commercial and industrial property show assessments at 92%-100% of market value.

After more than 25 years of assessing property, the assessor said he’s not found a way to prevent sticker shock when county residents receive valuation notices.

“I would encourage everyone to read their notice immediately so they have plenty of time to decide if they want to protest their valuation to the county board of equalization,” he said.

Residents who don’t receive a valuation notice within a few days of June 1 should check with the assessor’s office and see if the address on record is in error.

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“If you own real estate and you don’t get a notice, something is wrong and you need to let us know,” Moore said, “otherwise you might miss the opportunity to protest.”

In addition, those who receive a notice but no longer own the property are urged to return the notice to the assessor’s office or forward it to the new owner.

The notice is a way to tell property owners they have the right to question the valuation of their property whether the value changes or not.

“Levies do change annually so in a sense, it’s not the same record even though the assessor is not required to send a notice unless there is a change up or down,” Moore said. “I believe it’s better to spend the postage on a letter and notify property owners at least once a year about one of the most important concerns they have in terms of the home, business or farm they have invested in.”

Property owners must file protests using forms that are available in the assessor’s office or online at the Nebraska Department of Revenue’s property assessment division.

Moore said they can discuss their concerns with him or his staff before deciding whether or not to file. But they must submit the form to the county clerk’s office.

Specific information about properties are available at the assessor’s office where records are open to the public and online at Nebraska Assessors Online.