

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

**STRIPCROPPING, FIELD**  
(acre)  
**CODE 586**

**DEFINITION**

Growing crops in a systematic arrangement of strips or bands across the general slope (not on the contour) to reduce water erosion. The crops are arranged so that a strip of grass or a close-growing crop is alternated with a clean tilled crop or fallow.

**PURPOSES**

To help control erosion and runoff on sloping cropland where contour stripcropping is not practical.

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

This practice applies on sloping land where crops are grown.

Although this practice may be applicable on steeper slopes and/or in areas with higher 10-year-frequency, single storm EI values, it will be less effective in achieving the purpose(s) of the practice on slopes exceeding 15 percent and in areas with 10-year storm EI values greater than 140. (EI = total storm energy times the maximum 30-minute intensity).

The practice has the greatest impact where cropped or fallow strips having less than 10 percent cover are alternated with close grown and/or grass/legume strips (Cover-Management Condition 1-2), or strips of *residue management, no/till/strip-till* with 75 percent or greater surface cover (Cover-Management Condition 3). [Cover-Management conditions are described in Chapter 6, *Predicting Soil*

*Erosion by Water, A Guide to Conservation Planning with the Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation (RUSLE)*. 1997. USDA Agricultural Research Service, Agricultural Handbook No. 703].

The practice is not well suited to rolling topography having a high degree of slope irregularity.

**CRITERIA**

**General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes**

**Alignment of Strips**

Where more than one strip boundary will be placed on the hill slope, strip boundaries shall run parallel to each other

All tillage and planting operations will follow parallel the strips.

These strips shall be wide enough to allow the equipment to be lifted and/or turned and meet the same rows across the turn strip. Mow sod turn strips and *grassed waterways* at least once each year. Avoid mowing or harvesting during the primary nesting period of April 1 through June 15<sup>th</sup>.

**Strip Width**

Base strip widths on the slope length used for erosion prediction. Erosion-prone strip widths shall not exceed 50 percent of this slope length or 150 feet whichever is less. The erosion-resistant and erosion-prone strips shall be of equal width.

## STRIP SPACINGS FOR ARKANSAS

| Percent Slope | Maximum Width<br>(feet) |
|---------------|-------------------------|
| 1 – 2         | 100 – 130               |
| 2 – 4         | 90 - 100                |
| 4 – 8         | 70 – 90                 |
| 8 – 12        | 60 - 80                 |

\*Width of grass strips should not be less than 15 feet and 30 feet for sericea.

**Minimum Ridge Height**

The ridge height shall be designed to reduce soil erosion compared to that of rows oriented up and down the slope. As a minimum, this practice shall be designed to achieve a 0.5-2 inch ridge height during the period of the rotation that is most vulnerable to soil erosion. Ridge height design will be determined using RUSLE.

The minimum ridge height criteria is not required for close-grown crops, such as small grains, when runoff is reduced compared to that of rows planted up and down the slope. As a minimum, plant height shall be at least 6 inches high and the spacing between plants within the row shall not be greater than 2 inches.

The minimum ridge height criteria is not required where the practice *residue management, no-till/strip-till* is used on the contour if at least 50 percent surface residue is present between the rows after planting.

**Critical Slope Length**

The critical slope length for contour stripcropping is 1.5 times the critical slope length determined for contour farming. A contour stripcropping layout shall not occur on a slope longer than the critical slope length unless supported by other practices that reduce slope length below critical (e.g., diversions, terraces). The computation of critical slope length shall be determined using RUSLE.  
Stable Outlets

All runoff from *contour stripcropping* shall be delivered to stable outlets, such as *grassed*

*waterways, field borders, water and sediment control basins, or underground outlets for terraces and diversions.*

**Headlands/End Rows**

On fields where row crops and tillage are a part of the rotation, keep headlands/end rows in permanent sod where their grades would be steeper than the criteria set forth for strip boundaries.

**Additional Criteria to Reduce Sheet and Rill Erosion****Arrangement and Vegetative Condition of Strips**

Alternate strips of erosion-prone crops or fallow (Cropland Cover-Management Conditions 4-7) down the slope with strips of erosion-resistant cover (Cropland Cover-Management Conditions 1-3). If condition 3 is utilized as one of the erosion resistant strips, at least 75 percent surface residue cover shall be present. The erosion resistant cover shall be present during periods when erosion is expected to occur.

No two adjacent strips shall be in an erosion-prone condition at the same time during the year. However, two adjacent strips may be in erosion-resistant cover at the same time.

A vegetative cover shall be selected that is tolerant of the anticipated depth of sediment deposition and potential pesticide damage.

**Additional Criteria to Reduce Transport of Sediment and Other Water-borne Contaminants****Arrangement and Vegetative Condition of Strips**

Erosion-prone crop or fallow strips shall be managed as Cropland Cover-Management Conditions 3-5. Erosion-prone strips shall be alternated down the slope with strips of erosion-resistant cover that meet Cropland Cover-Management Conditions 1-2. The erosion

resistant cover shall be present during periods when erosion is expected to occur.

No two adjacent strips shall be in an erosion-prone condition at the same time during the year. However, two adjacent strips may be in erosion-resistant cover at the same time.

A vegetative cover shall be selected that is tolerant of the anticipated depth of sediment deposition and potential pesticide damage.

## CONSIDERATIONS

The *conservation crop rotation* on stripcropped fields should be consistent with the farm enterprise crop mix and/or associated livestock operation. These will influence the proportion of row crops, close growing crops, and meadow crops.

To avoid wide fluctuations in acreage of different crops from year to year, fields having identical crop rotations can be set up that are nearly equal in size and have offset years of rotation commencement. The number of fields needed to produce a nearly constant acreage of each crop for each year in the rotation is equal to one half of the years in the rotation. Even-year rotation lengths are preferable to odd-year rotation lengths for ease of design.

Protect areas of existing or potential concentrated flow erosion by any one or more suitable conservation practices, such as *grassed waterways, water and sediment control basins, diversions, terraces, or underground outlets*.

Design and install the strip layout to best facilitate operation of all machinery used on the strips. To avoid point rows and partial machine passes, lay out strip widths to have some multiple of full width passes by all farm implements, even at unavoidable constrictions. Prior to design and layout, *obstruction removal* or changes in field boundaries or shape should be considered, where possible and feasible, to improve the effectiveness of the practice and the

ease of performing field operations across the slope.

Prior to layout, inspect the field to find key points for commencing layout or getting a full strip width to pass by an obstruction or ridge saddle. Whenever possible, run the strip boundary parallel with fence lines or other barriers. Account for access road widths when they must cross the field, and adjust the strip boundary on either side accordingly.

When the slope length used in erosion prediction exceeds the critical slope length for the cover-management condition that best characterizes the field to be field stripcropped, establish structures, such as *diversions* or *terraces*, to reduce slope length below the critical slope length.

When this practice is used in combination with *diversions* or *terraces*, coordinate the strip layout with the diversion or terrace grade and spacing so that strip boundaries will parallel terraces wherever possible within the criteria for row grade. Where grass-back or narrow-base terraces are used, allow for the uncropped width along the terrace so that the same strip width is maintained for all strips in the field.

Retaining as much crop residue as possible on the soil surface by using residue management practices can maximize critical slope lengths. Certain tillage practices, such as uphill plowing and deep tillage with heavy implements, can also be used to increase random roughness, allowing deposition to occur in depressions between soil clods and increase critical slope length. However, if the most erosion-prone strips of the field are kept very rough, in high ridges, or under heavy residue most of the year, there is little need for stripcropping as an erosion and sediment control practice. Little sediment will be delivered to the protective cover strips.

Field Stripcropping may need to be used in combination with other conservation practices

to meet the goals of the conservation management system.

## **PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS**

Specifications for installation and maintenance of Field Stripcropping shall be prepared according to the Criteria, Considerations, and Operations and Maintenance described in this standard, and shall be recorded on specification sheets, job sheets, narrative statements in conservation plans, or other acceptable documentation.

## **OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE**

Conduct all farming operations parallel to the strip boundaries except on end rows that have gradients flatter than the criteria set forth in this standard unless the end rows are in cover-management condition 3.

Substituting a crop different from one called for in the planned crop rotation, or adjusting the crop rotation due to failed crops or loss of stand, is acceptable, provided neither situation allows two adjacent erosion-prone strips.

Sediment accumulations along the upslope edge of protected strips may need to be smoothed periodically.

When headlands/end rows are in permanent cover, renovate as needed to keep ground cover above 75 percent. No-till renovation of headlands/end rows is recommended but in any case should only include the immediate seedbed preparation and reseeding to a sod-forming crop with or without a nurse crop. Maintain full headland/end row width to allow turning of farm implements at the end of a tilled strip to double back on the same strip.