

Contour Stripcropping

Nebraska Conservation Planning Sheet No. 6



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What is stripcropping?

Contour stripcropping is a system of growing crops in approximately even width strips or bands on the contour to reduce soil erosion. The crops are arranged so that a strip of perennial vegetation (legumes, grasses) or a small grain crop is alternated with a strip of row crop, or low residue crop.

How it helps the land

Contour stripcropping is very effective for reducing sheet and rill erosion and controlling wind erosion. It can reduce soil loss as much as 75 percent, depending on the type of crop rotation and the steepness of the slope. Strips planted to perennial vegetation can provide food and cover for wildlife.

Where the practice applies

Contour stripcropping is a conservation option for any cropland where sheet, rill and/or wind erosion are a problem.

Where to get help

For assistance in planning and establishing your contour stripcropping system on your farm, contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service office. Ask NRCS for a short video segment, "Points to Consider in Contour Stripcropping." It's part of a video series called "Conservation On Your Own" and will show you how to establish your own contour stripcropping. Remember to look at your conservation plan for other specifications.

Requirements of contour stripcropping

Here are the maximum strip widths and rotation to be used in your fields.

Field # / Tract _____

Strip width _____

Rotation _____

Field # / Tract _____

Strip width _____

Rotation _____

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Strip width _____

Rotation _____

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Strip width _____

Rotation _____

Strip widths may be adjusted, generally downward, to accommodate machinery widths.

For crop rotations:

A = alfalfa

O = oats

C = corn

SB = soybeans

W = wheat

GS = grain sorghum

Applying the practice

This practice is considered to be applied when the above strip widths are in place and the most conserving crop has been planted at least once in the field.

Here are tips on planning your system:

- Estimate how many acres of each crop you want every year.
- Make sure your crop rotation allows for alternating row crops or low residue crops with small grains or perennial vegetation.
- Be sure herbicide carryover won't be a problem.

- Decide if you want to remove fences to get longer rows.
- You can do some planning by sketching out your strips on paper and labeling the crop in each strip year by year for the next five to seven years.

Other considerations

- On sloping ground it is important to plant field borders in places where there would normally be end rows running up and down hill. This reduces erosion that may occur in these areas and provides important travel lanes during haying or grain harvest.
- Leave grass turnstrips where turns become sharp. Turn strips should be wide enough to make a turn with tractor and equipment.
- To be most effective, not more than half the area in stripcropping should be in row crop or low residue crop any one year. Strips of crops like corn, grain sorghum, soybeans, sunflowers, potatoes, sugar beets, and all other row crops and/or low residue crops must be alternated with strips of perennial vegetation (legumes, grasses) or small grains. To balance the acres of crop production, the years in the crop rotation divided by 2 should equal the number of stripcropped fields or units. The fields or units should be as close to the same size as possible. Example: A corn, corn, oats, alfalfa, alfalfa, alfalfa (CCOAAA) rotation would work best with three fields or units of equal size.
- Contour stripcropped fields may have odd areas. Odd areas should be tilled and planted parallel to adjacent strips. This will help runoff water move slowly off the field. Odd areas can also be used for hay production or wildlife habitat.

- If strips are not the same length, plant from the longer strip to the shorter one; otherwise, plant from the bottom strip up.

Maintaining the practice

Care should be taken to maintain strip widths. If perennial vegetative crops should fail or be winter killed, adjustments may be made to your rotation. Contact your NRCS office before making those changes.

Use care in applying chemicals and in operating tillage equipment to avoid damaging an adjacent strip.

Grassed waterways will need to be established and/or maintained. They are important for safe disposal of excess surface water. Lift tillage equipment and turn off spraying equipment when crossing waterways.