Conservation Cropping Rotation Fact Sheet

Applicable to conservation practice - 328

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service – Wyoming **September 2007**

What is conservation cropping rotation?

Crop rotation simply means growing different crops in a recurring sequence on the same piece of land. This may include alternating production from a high residue producing crop (such as small grains or corn harvested for grain) with a low residue producing crop (like dry edible beans, potatoes or summer fallow). It may also involve a grass – legume hay crop in the rotation.

How it helps the land

The effect a crop rotation will have on the land varies with the capability of the soils; the type of crops grown; how the crops are grown; and how the crop residue is managed. Crop residue increases soil moisture, which increases crop yields and residue production; therefore a crop residue management system that retains a high level of residue can tend to be self-perpetuating. High residue crops such as small grains or corn for grain are often the key to a good rotation. Good stands are needed to produce high yields, increase profit, return more organic matter to the soil, manage moisture, improve or maintain soil tilth, and to effectively control wind and water erosion. Alternating grasses and broadleaf; and warm season and cool season crops help break up pest cycles and reduce potential herbicide resistance. Rotations can also benefit wildlife by providing a variety of food and cover.

Planning considerations

- Crop selection, including varieties, will influence the amount of residue produced.
- Crops can be generally categorized into high and low residue producing groups.

High Residue Crops		Low Residue Crops	
Barley Corn for Grain Forage Millet Legumes (Alfalfa, Alfalfa/grass mixture, Alfalfa for seed, Grass for seed, Clovers, Sainfoin, Birdsfoot Trefoil)	Millet for Grain Oats Rye Sorghum for Grain Sudan Grass Triticale Wheat	Camelina Canola Carrots Corn for Silage Dry Beans Mint Mustard Onions Peas - Dry or Green Potatoes	Rape Seed Radish Safflower Sorghum for Silage Soybean Sugar Beets Sunflowers Turnips Vegetable Crops

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- Crops can also be categorized by growth into following groups:

Cool Season Grass	Warm Season Grass	Cool Season Broadleaf	Warm Season Broadleaf
Wheat, Winter & Spring Barley, Oats, Rye	Corn, Sorghum, Sudan grass, Millet	Field peas, Alfalfa, Sugar beets	Edible beans, Potato, Safflower, Sunflower

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