

Prepared for: _____

Prepared by: _____

Farm: _____ Tract: _____ Date: _____



Contour Buffer Strips



DEFINITION

Narrow strips of permanent, herbaceous vegetative cover established around the hill slope, and alternated down the slope with wider cropped strips that are farmed on the contour.

PURPOSE

This practice is applied to achieve one or more of the following:

- Reduce sheet and rill erosion.
- Reduce transport of sediment and other water-borne contaminants downslope.
- Increase water infiltration.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies on all sloping cropland, including orchards, vineyards and nut crops.

CRITERIA

Surface flow from contoured crop rows must be delivered to a stable outlet. (Stable outlets include grassed waterways, terraces, diversions, sediment basins, field borders, filter strips, and other similar measures.)

The width of the cropped strip shall be designed to accommodate some multiple of full equipment width.

Buffer strips shall not be used as travel lanes for livestock or equipment.

Buffer strips are not a part of the normal crop rotation, and shall remain in the location they were originally established until they need to be renovated or re-established.

Practice boundaries shall be marked with PVC pipe or other durable, readily-identifiable marker to ensure field operator visibility.

CONSIDERATIONS

Contour farming is most effective on slopes between 2 and 10 percent. This practice will be less effective in achieving the stated purpose(s) on slopes exceeding 10 percent and in areas with 10-year, 24-hour rainfall of about 6.5 inches. The practice is not well suited to rolling topography having a high degree of slope irregularity because of the difficulty meeting row grade criteria.

This practice is most effective when the slope length on the cropped strips is between 100 and 400 feet long.

Wildlife Food and Cover. The following management activities may be carried out to enhance wildlife benefits as long as they do not compromise the effectiveness of the buffer strips:

- Establish native grasses and wildflowers as specified in the NC NRCS practice standard Early Successional Habitat Development & Management (647), Appendix 1.
- After cover is established, limit manipulation of vegetation during the nesting season (April 15-September 1) to actions necessary for control of woody or invasive vegetation.
- Manage the vegetation to sustain habitat over time according to criteria provided in the NC NRCS practice standard Early Successional Habitat Development & Management (647).

OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE

Conduct all cultural operations parallel to established row markers or to existing markers, provided the applicable row grade criteria are met.

Adequately maintain all existing and/or newly established markers in accordance with original system layout to facilitate the continuation of the contour farming system.

Width and alignment of permanent correction strips will be maintained in accordance with original design and layout. Strips shall be maintained in a vigorous and dense growth of acceptable cover. Have soil tested at least once every three years and apply needed lime and fertilizer.

Control weeds and wood growth on vegetated correction strips by appropriate methods. Mow sod turn strips and waterways at least once a year.

For wildlife benefits, do not mow during the nesting season (April 1 – August 15). **NOTE:** Removal of the cut material by haying, etc., will enhance wildlife habitat. Do not leave a stubble height of less than 8 inches when cutting native warm season grasses.

Fertilize buffer strips as needed to maintain stand density. Spot seed or totally renovate buffer strip systems damaged by herbicide application after residual action of the herbicide is complete.

Redistribute sediment that accumulates along the upslope edge of the buffer strip/crop strip interface as needed. This sediment will be spread evenly upslope over the cultivated strip when needed to maintain uniform sheet flow along the buffer/cropped strip boundary.

Monitor the contour farming system on a continuous basis and inspect for row breakovers and/or excessive scouring along row furrows.

NOTE: Measures should be taken to correct any problems detected as soon as feasible and practical.

Additional Operation and Maintenance requirements specific to this Plan:

SPECIFICATIONS

Purpose (Check all that apply):			
<input type="checkbox"/> Reduce sheet and rill erosion	<input type="checkbox"/> Increase water infiltration		
<input type="checkbox"/> Reduce transport of sediment and other water-borne contaminants			
Planned Rotation _____			
Buffer strip layout	Buffer Strip 1	Buffer Strip2	Buffer Strip 3
Buffer strip #			
Strip width (ft.)			
Strip length (ft.)			
Acres in buffer			
Acres of Up-slope Cultivated Strip			
Slope %			
Minimum allowable row grade %			
Maximum allowable row grade %			
Species #1			
Species #2			
Species #3			
Seeding Date			
Seeding rate (PLS) (lbs/acre)			
Total Seed (lbs)			
Estimated Acres			
Lime (tons/acre) (rates based on current soil test)			
N (lbs/acre)			
P2O5 (lbs/acre)			
K2O(lbs/acre)			
Site Preparation			
Prepare a weed-free, firm seedbed. Apply lime and fertilizer (in accordance with a current soil test, if needed) at time of seedbed preparation, and incorporate into the top 3 to 6 inches of soil.			
Planting Methods			
Drill grass and/or legume species or mixes _____ inches deep uniformly over the area. May include small grain or a summer annual as a nurse crop at the rate of _____ pounds per acre. Note: Clip or harvest the nurse crop before it has an adverse effect on the growth of the permanent species.			