

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

STRIPCROPPING

(Ac.)

CODE 585

DEFINITION

Growing planned rotations of erosion-resistant and erosion susceptible crops or fallow in a systematic arrangement of strips across a field.

PURPOSE

This practice supports one or more of the following purposes:

- Reduce water erosion – Resource Concern (SOIL EROSION - Sheet, rill, & wind erosion)
- Reduce wind erosion – Resource Concern (SOIL EROSION - Sheet, rill, & wind erosion)
- Reduce the transport of sediment and other water and wind borne contaminants – Resource Concerns (WATER QUALITY DEGRADATION – Excess nutrients in surface and ground waters, and Pesticides transported to surface and ground waters)
- Protect growing crops from damage by wind-borne soil particles – Resource Concern (DEGRADED PLANT CONDITION – Undesirable plant productivity and health)

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies on cropland.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

Arrangement and Vegetative Condition of Strips

Alternate erosion susceptible crop strips with strips of erosion-resistant crops or cover. Orient the strips at angles as close to perpendicular as practical, to water and wind erosion forces.

Strip Width

Strip width shall be determined by the current erosion prediction tool. Strip widths shall be multiples of the width of the planting equipment. Predictions shall account for the effects of other practices in the conservation management system.

Vegetative Cover

Vegetation in a strip cropping arrangement shall consist of crops, forages, specialty crops, or cover crops grown in a planned rotation. At least 50% of the rotation shall consist of erosion resistant crops or sediment trapping cover in any given year. Erosion resistant strips shall consist of vegetation that reduces erosion to the planned conservation objective. No two adjacent strips shall be in an erosion-susceptible condition at the same time during the year. However, two adjacent strips may be in erosion-resistant cover at the same time.

The designed crop rotation shall be followed on each adjacent strip while the point or year in the sequence of the rotation is staggered or offset to achieve the desired conservation planning objective.

A vegetative cover shall be selected that will tolerate the anticipated depth of sediment deposition.

Acceptable cover is specified by each specific purpose as stated below.

Additional Criteria to Reduce Water Erosion and Transport of Sediment and Other Water-borne Contaminants

Number of Strips

A strip cropping system shall consist of two or more strips within the conservation planning slope length or “L”.

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically and updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact the [NRCS Colorado State office](#) or visit the [NRCS Colorado electronic Field Office Technical Guide](#).

Alignment of Strips

Strip boundaries shall run parallel to each other and as close to the contour as practical.

Strip Width

The width of a strip shall not exceed the critical slope length for contouring.

If a correction strip is required, that strip may vary in width but shall be no narrower than the widest working field implement used to traverse the strip.

Where field contours become too sharp to keep machinery aligned with the contour during field operations, establish sod turn-strips on sharp ridge points and or valleys. 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.

Minimum Row Grade

Row grades for soils with slow to very slow infiltration rates (soil hydrologic groups C or D), or for crops sensitive to ponded water conditions for periods of less than 48 hours, shall be designed with positive row drainage of not less than 0.2 percent on slopes where ponding is a concern.

Maximum Row Grade

The maximum row grade shall not exceed one-half of the up-and-down hill slope percent used for conservation planning, with a maximum of 4 percent row grade.

Up to a 25% deviation from the design row grade is permitted within 150 feet of a stable outlet.

When the row grade reaches the maximum allowable design grade, a new baseline (key line) shall be established up or down slope from the last contour line and used for layout of the next contour pattern.

Headlands/End Rows

On fields where row crops and tillage are a part of the rotation, headlands/end rows with a slope steeper than the maximum allowable row grade for that field shall be maintained in permanent sod.

Additional Criteria to Reduce Wind Erosion and Transport of Sediment and Other Wind-borne Contaminants**Number of Strips**

A strip cropping system shall consist of two or more strips within the entire area prone to wind erosion.

Alignment of Strips

Strip boundaries shall run parallel to each other.

Orientation

Strips shall be oriented as close to perpendicular to the critical wind erosion direction for the susceptible period as practical

Width of Strips

The effective width of strips shall be measured along the prevailing wind erosion direction for those periods when wind erosion is expected to occur and for which the system is designed.

When the orientation of erosion-susceptible strips deviates from perpendicular to the prevailing wind erosion direction, the width of these strips shall be correspondingly adjusted using current wind erosion prediction technology.

Additional Criteria to Protect Growing Crops from Damage by Wind-borne Soil Particles**Strip width**

The effective width shall be measured along the prevailing wind erosion direction during those periods when sensitive crops are susceptible to damage by wind-borne soil particles.

The width of strips shall not exceed the width permitted by the crop tolerance to wind erosion during specific crop stage periods, using current wind erosion prediction technology. Refer to the crop tolerances to wind in the National Agronomy Manual, other accepted technical references, or other planned crop protection objectives.

When the orientation of erosion-susceptible strips deviates from perpendicular to the prevailing wind erosion direction, the width of these strips shall be correspondingly adjusted using current wind erosion prediction technology.

Number of Strips

A strip cropping system shall consist of two or more strips within the entire area susceptible to wind erosion.

Alignment of Strips

Strip boundaries shall run parallel to each other.

Orientation of Strips

Strips shall be oriented as close to perpendicular to the prevailing wind erosion direction for the susceptible period as practical.

CONSIDERATIONS

Strip cropping may need to be used in combination with other conservation practices to meet the goals of the resource management system.

To improve cropping system diversity and associated benefits, consider a crop rotation at least three years in length including at least three crop species from different plant families.

Wildlife benefits can be enhanced by selecting species and management practices that provide habitat for pollinators, wildlife, and or desired organisms.

Consider delaying mowing on sod turn-strips until after the nesting season.

To capture and manage soil moisture, select crops, crop sequence, and varieties with sufficient density and cover to intercept runoff and/or blowing snow. Manage the height of standing residues to maximize snow trapping potential,

Stripcropping can reduce airborne particulate matter (PM) emissions.

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, specialty crops, cover crops, and grass/legume forage crops.

Prior to design and layout, obstruction removal or changes in field boundaries or shape should be considered, where 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, as long as row gradient criteria are met. Account for access road widths when they must cross the field, and adjust the strip boundary on either side accordingly.

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.

Stable outlets may be necessary where runoff results in concentrated flow erosion. Acceptable stable outlets include grassed waterways, field borders, filter strips, water and sediment control basins, or underground outlets for terraces and diversions.

When the erosion-resistant strip is living vegetation, the species established on non-organic operations, should either be tolerant to herbicides used on the cropped strips or protected from damage by herbicides used on the cropped strips

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Prepare plans and specifications for each field or treatment unit according to the planning criteria and operation and maintenance requirements of this standard.

Specifications shall describe the requirements to apply this practice to achieve the intended purpose.

Record practice specifications in a Colorado Stripcropping 585 Implementation Requirements document.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Smooth or remove and redistribute sediment that accumulates along strip edges, to maintain practice effectiveness.

Mow sod turn-strips at least once a year. Harvesting is optional.

Manage erosion-resistant strips in rotation to maintain the planned vegetative cover and surface roughness.

If the strip alignment is lost due to adjacent strips being in hay or permanent cover, re-establish the original strip alignment and width as needed.

REFERENCES

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