

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD
RESIDUE MANAGEMENT, SEASONAL

(Ac.)

CODE 344

DEFINITION

Managing the amount, orientation, and distribution of crop and other plant residues on the soil surface during a specified period of the year.

PURPOSES

- Reduce sheet and rill erosion
- Reduce soil erosion from wind and associated airborne particulate matter
- Manage snow to increase plant available moisture
- Harvest and utilize renewable bioenergy feedstocks
- Provide food and escape cover for wildlife

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

The practice applies to all cropland, including cropland where biomass is removed for biofuel feedstocks.

Seasonal residue management includes managing residues of annual crops from harvest until the residue is:

- Buried by tillage for seedbed preparation
- Removed by grazing, or
- Mechanically removed

The practice also includes the management of residues from biennial or perennial seed crops from the time of seed harvest until regrowth begins the next season.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

Uniformly distribute all residues over the entire field.

Equip combines or similar harvesting machines with spreaders capable of

redistributing residues over at least 80 percent of the working width of the header.

Residues shall not be burned.

Limit tillage operations during the residue management period to undercutting tools such as blades or wide sweeps that minimize residue flattening or burial when available.

Additional Criteria to Reduce Sheet and Rill Erosion; Reduce Wind Erosion; and Harvest and Utilize Renewable Bioenergy Feedstocks

Determine the amount and orientation of residue needed to reduce erosion within the soil loss tolerance (T) or any other planned soil loss objective using current approved erosion prediction technology.

Limit partial removal of residue by means such as baling, grazing, or other harvest methods to retain the amount needed to meet the erosion control objective. Maintain remaining residue on the surface through periods when erosion has the potential to occur, or until planting, whichever occurs first. Account for the effects of other practices such as contouring, cover crops etc., in the management system when estimating erosion.

Additional Criteria to Manage Snow to Increase Plant Available Moisture

Trapping Snow. Crop stubble standing height during the time significant snowfall is expected to occur shall be:

- at least 10 inches for crops with a row spacing of less than 15 inches;
- at least 15 inches for crops with a row spacing of 15 inches or greater.

The heights shall be present over at least 50 percent of the field.

Limit fall field operations that disturb residue to undercutting type tools. The operations are to be done as close to perpendicular as possible to the direction of prevailing winds during the time that significant snowfall is expected to occur.

Additional Criteria to Provide Food and Escape Cover for Wildlife

Determine the amount of residue, height of the stubble, and length of the management period necessary for meeting habitat requirements for the target species or wildlife population using Illinois Technical Note Number 18.

CONSIDERATIONS

Removal of plant residue by baling or grazing may have a negative impact on resources. These activities should not be performed without full evaluation of impacts on other resources.

Production of adequate amounts of crop residue necessary for the proper functioning of the practice can be enhanced by selection of high residue producing crops and crop varieties, by the use of cover crops, and by adjustment of plant populations and row spacing.

When planting into a clean tilled seedbed, completing the tillage and planting in a single operation or by performing primary tillage no more than three days before planting can minimize exposure to erosion; and in limited moisture areas, can conserve moisture for germination.

Leaving standing stubble taller than the 15 inch minimum will increase the amount of snow trapped.

Leaving one or two rows of unharvested crop standing at intervals across the field can enhance the value of residue for wildlife habitat. Unharvested crop rows have the greatest value when they are adjacent to other cover types, such as grassy or brushy areas or woodland.

In areas that are in non-attainment for PM10 (particulate matter less than 10 microns) and for other areas with particular sensitivities to dust, residue cover is especially important and should ensure that off-site PM levels are below critical thresholds, including maintenance of proper visibility.

NRCS, Illinois

September, 2011

Consider the relationship between crop residues and soil fungi or organisms. Adequate residue will provide food and habitat to beneficial soil flora and fauna, which positively impacts: soil aggregate stability, moisture retention, infiltration, fertility, and breakdown of inorganic compounds.

No-till planting annual spring small grains appropriate for the climatic zone in the fall, that winter-kill, will provide additional cover and/or feed for wildlife, grazing animals, soil erosion protection, and water (snow) retention without adding additional weed control measures.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Specifications for establishment and operation of the practice shall be prepared for each field or treatment unit according to the Criteria described in the standard.

Specifications shall be recorded using Illinois Job Sheet Residue Management 329,345, 346, narrative statements in the conservation plan, or other acceptable methods.

Plans and specification shall document:

- Field number and acres
- Purpose(s) for this practice
- Crop residue to be managed
- Method(s) of how the residue will be managed (harvest, grazed, tilled)
- Time periods when the residue will be managed (harvested, grazed, tilled)
- Amount of residue removed by harvest, grazing, or tillage
- Amount of residue to remain after a planned residue harvest, grazing, or tillage

The data above may also be documented in a RUSLE 2 printout.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Evaluate the effectiveness of the planned residue management to ensure the planned purpose(s) are being achieved. Adjust the management or choose an alternative technology if the management is not achieving the planned purpose(s).

REFERENCES

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- Renard, K.G., G.R. Foster, G.A. Weesies, D.K. McCool, and D.C. Yoder, Coordinators. 1997. Predicting soil erosion by water: A guide to conservation planning with the Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation (RUSLE). U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Handbook No. 703.
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