



What are Contour Buffer Strips?

Contour buffer strips are narrow strips of perennial herbaceous vegetation established on the contour and alternated down the slope with wider cultivated strips that are farmed on the contour.

Purpose

Contour buffer strips slow runoff, trap sediment, reduce sheet and rill erosion and remove sediment, nutrients, pesticides and other materials from runoff as it passes through the strip. They are most effective when used in combination with other conservation practices like residue management.

Where the practice applies

- On cropland where sheet and rill erosion are problems.
- Where contouring is practical. They are unsuitable in fields with irregular, rolling topography.

Requirements

Recommendations include a minimum buffer strip width, with strips placed along the contour and farming operations that follow the approximate contour grade. Cultivated strip widths are determined by slope, soil type, field

conditions, erosion potential and equipment width.

Other Considerations

- Cultivated strip widths may be adjusted, generally downward, to accommodate machinery widths.
- Cropping between the buffer strips, including tillage, rotation and crop residue use, should be acceptable to the soil and site conditions.
- Buffer strips can be used as turn areas if care is taken to minimize disturbance to soil and vegetation.
- Waterways and diversions are needed where runoff concentrates and erosion is a problem.
- They may be part of a wildlife habitat program.
- They can be established between terraces to enhance treatment of the hill slope.
- A ratio of cultivated to buffer strip width of between 9:1 and 4:1 is desirable.
- When planning for wildlife, adjust buffer width and plant species to meet the needs of the target species.

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Wildlife

When planning for wildlife, adjust contour buffer strip widths and plant species to meet the needs of the target wildlife species. Increase widths to 30 feet or wider depending on the requirements for nesting and escape cover of the target wildlife species. Avoid mowing during nesting periods.

Operation and Maintenance

- Perform all farming operations on the contour.
- Control weeds the year of establishment with timely applications of herbicides or with early clipping before seed heads appear.
- Mow buffer strips to maintain appropriate vegetative density and height for trapping sediment.
- Sediment. Prevent disturbance during the primary nesting season for wildlife.
- Fertilize according to soil test recommendations.

- Control all noxious weeds as identified by state and local laws. When possible, delay use of control measures until after August 1st to protect nesting wildlife.
- Reseed any areas that are damaged by herbicides, equipment or unusual rainfall events.
- Redistribute sediment accumulations as needed to maintain uniform sheet flow along the crop / buffer boundary.
- Control rodent infestations that adversely affect the cover.

Specifications

Site-specific requirements are listed on the specifications (job) sheet. Additional provisions are entered on the job sketch sheet.

Specifications are prepared in accordance with the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide. See practice standard Contour Buffer Strips, code 332



Requirements for establishing contour buffer strips include a minimum buffer strip width, with strips placed along the contour and farming operations that follow the approximate contour grade. Cultivated strip widths are determined by such variables as slope, soil type, field conditions, climate, and erosion potential. Cultivated strip widths may be adjusted to accommodate machinery widths. Buffer strips can be used as turn areas if care is taken to minimize disturbance to soil and vegetation. Waterways or diversions are needed where runoff collects and concentrated flow erosion is a problem. Contour buffer strips can be established between terraces to enhance treatment of the hill slope. A ratio of cultivated width to buffer strip width of between 9:1 and 4:1 is desirable. For reducing sheet and rill erosion, buffer strip width must be at least 15 feet for grasses or grass-legume mixtures and at least 30 feet for legumes alone.

Contour Buffer Strips – Job Sheet

Landowner _____ Field
number _____

Purpose (check all that apply)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reduce sheet and rill erosion | <input type="checkbox"/> Reduce transport of sediment and other water-borne contaminants downslope, on-site or off-site |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Enhance wildlife (target species): | |

Layout	Strip 1	Strip 2	Strip 3	Strip 4
Cultivated strip width (feet)				
Buffer strip width (feet)				
Buffer strip length (feet)				
Area in buffer strip (acres)				

Plant Materials (species/cultivars)	Seeding Rate (lbs/acre of pure live seed)	Seeding Date
Strip 1:		
Strip 2:		
Strip 3:		
Strip 4:		

Soil Amendments and Fertilization	Strip 1	Strip 2	Strip 3	Strip 4
Lime (tons/acre)				
N Fertilizer – (lbs/acre)				
P ₂ O Fertilizer – (lbs/acre)				
K ₂ O Fertilizer – (lbs/acre)				

Site Preparation

Prepare a firm seedbed. Apply lime and fertilizer as indicated by soil testing.
Additional requirements:

Planting Methods

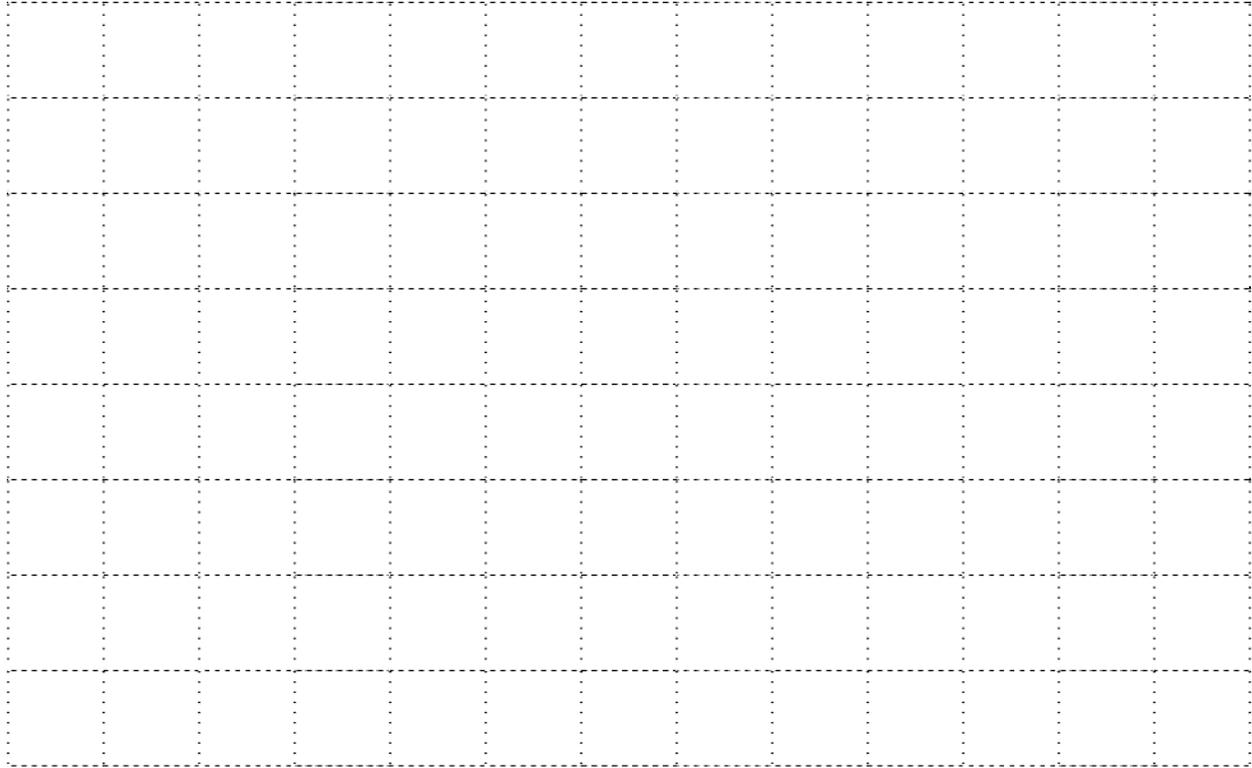
Drill grass and legume seed _____ inches deep uniformly over area. Establish vegetation according to the specified seeding rate. If necessary, mulch newly seeded area with _____ tons per acre of mulch material. A small grain crop may be needed as a companion crop at the rate of _____ pounds per acre (clip or harvest before it heads out). Additional

requirements:

Contour Buffer Strips – Job Sheet

If needed, an aerial view or a side view of the practice can be shown below. Other relevant information, complementary practices and measures, and additional specifications may be included.

Scale 1"= _____ ft. (NA indicates sketch not to scale: grid size=1/2" by 1/2")



Additional Specifications and Notes:

Operation and Maintenance

Maintain original width and length of contour buffer strips. Harvest, mow, reseed, and fertilize as necessary to maintain plant density and vigorous plant growth. Inspect after major storms, remove trapped sediment, and repair eroding areas. Shut off pesticide sprayers when turning on a buffer strip. Additional requirements:

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