# Field Borders

## Nebraska Conservation Planning Sheet No. 8

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
Lincoln, NE

reprinted June1995

## What is a field border?

A field border is a band or strip of perennial vegetation established next to cropland on the outside edge of a field.

When used with contouring, contour stripcropping, cross-slope farming patterns, or terraces, it eliminates planting end rows up and down hill and provides a turning area for farm equipment.

## How it helps the land

Field borders control sheet, rill, and gully erosion at the edges of a field where end rows would run up and down hill. Field borders also provide wildlife food and cover and improve the landscape.

## Where the practice applies

Field borders should be used on the outside edges of fields to replace erosive end rows and when contours or cross-slope farming patterns cause runoff water to concentrate in areas. Field borders can complement a conservation system by eliminating end rows and providing access to the field.

## Where to get help

For assistance in planning and establishing field borders on your farm, contact your Natural Resources Conservation Service office. Also check to see if the field border areas are eligible for set-aside acreage.

## Recommended seeding for your field borders

| Species/variety | Pure Live Seed lbs/ac |
|---|---|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

**Recommended fertilizer (lbs/ac)**

| N | P | K |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

| Lime | Iron | Zinc |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

## Other considerations

- Do not plant rows parallel to field borders. Crop rows should be planted so runoff water will flow into field borders.
- Field borders provide a good source of hay production.
- They may be considered for set-aside acres if they meet certain requirements and are part of your conservation plan.
- Space needed to turn equipment should be considered when determining width.
- Consider selecting plant species that favor wildlife nesting and winter cover.
- Protecting the area from livestock will maximize wildlife benefits.

## Applying the practice

This practice is considered applied when permanent vegetation is established. Field borders must be a minimum of 20 feet wide and must be wide enough to allow you to turn your farm equipment. When establishing field borders follow these seeding guidelines:

- Smooth and shape gullies and uneven areas before seeding.
- Prepare a firm seedbed. You may need to use a roller or cultipacker to get a firm seedbed.
- Apply lime and fertilizer before seeding.
- Severely eroded areas may need trace elements such as iron, zinc, and sulfur.
- If runoff water concentrates on the area or it is severely eroded, the area should be mulched if possible. This will protect the area until grass is established. Anchor the mulch using a straight disk. Make only one trip over the mulch.
- Using a mixture of grasses works best. Select species that are tolerant to herbicides.
- Seed should be planted on a pure live seed (PLS) basis.
- Certified seed is recommended for best results. Common seed tested in accordance with Nebraska seed law can be planted.
- Drill grass and legume seed uniformly over this strip 1/4 to 1/2 inch deep on most soils, and 3/4 inch deep on sandy soils, or broadcast uniformly over the field border and incorporate with a harrow.
- Small grains may be seeded as a companion crop at the rate of 3/4 bushel per acre during the spring. Mow small grains before they head out or harvest for grain, if allowed.
- Seeding may be completed during the spring seeding period, April 1 to May 15, or during the late summer seeding period, August 10 to September 15. The seeding period for warm season grasses is November 1 to May 31. Check with NRCS for the best time to seed in your area.

## Maintaining the practice

- Mow to control weeds or shrub development. Delay mowing until after July 15 to avoid harming nesting birds.
- If vegetative cover declines due to poor nutrient levels, consider top-dressing with fertilizer. Apply 30 pounds of nitrogen (N), 20 pounds of phosphate ($P_2O_5$) and 20 pounds of potash ($K_2O$) per acre.
- Reseed or interseed as necessary to maintain desired plant species.
- Shut off pesticide sprayers when turning on a field border. Insist custom chemical applicators do the same.

*The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in its programs on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs and marital or familial status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact the USDA Office of Communications at (202) 720-5881 (voice) or (202) 720-7808 (TDD).*

*To file a complaint, write the Secretary of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C., 20250, or call (202) 720-7327 (voice) or (202) 720-1127 (TDD). USDA is an equal employment opportunity employer.*