

## Contour Farming

### Virginia Conservation Practice Job Sheet

330



#### Definition

Aligning ridges, furrows, and roughness formed by tillage, planting and other operations to alter velocity and/or direction of water flow to around the hillslope.

#### Criteria

##### Minimum Row Grade:

Crop rows must have sufficient slope to ensure runoff water does not pond and cause unacceptable crop damage.

##### Maximum Row Grade:

Field slope length and steepness (“LS”) values shall be determined for each area to be treated and shall then be used as the basis for determining maximum design row grades.

At least 75% of cropped area to be contoured shall have rows with a maximum design grade of either (a) 2% or (b) ½ of the field slope steepness, whichever is less.

The remaining 25% or less of cropped area to be contoured shall have rows with a maximum design grade of either (a) 3% or (b) ½ of the field slope steepness, whichever is less.

The maximum allowable design row grade is only permitted within 150 feet of a stable outlet.

##### System Layout

When any row grade reaches the maximum

allowable grade, a new baseline shall be established for layout of next contour pattern.

Where field operations will converge between two non-parallel contour baselines, establish correction strips seeded to permanent vegetation.

Planned contour row curvature must not be too sharp for machinery to follow the row effectively. Establish sod turn strips on sharp turns or otherwise modify the system as needed.

Distances between contour baselines and/or correction strips may be adjusted to the nearest multiple of width of implements used in field.

##### Row Markers

Permanent row markers will be established to help guide the farmer in maintaining design row grades during field operations. A minimum of one permanent row marker shall be established.

Row markers may consist of sod correction strips, field boundaries, hedgerows, fence lines, access lanes, terraces, etc.

##### Stable Outlets

All concentrated runoff from furrows in contouring systems shall flow to properly-designed stable outlets. Stable outlets include grassed waterways, field borders, filter strips, etc.

##### Minimum Ridge Height.

For crops with row spacing greater than 10 inches, ridge height shall be at least two (2) inches. For all other crops, minimum ridge height shall be at least one (1) inch.

The above minimum ridge heights are not required for any crop that is no-tilled in accordance with the applicable Virginia Practice Standard (Code 329).

**NOTE: This summary does not address all requirements and considerations in the VA Contour Farming Conservation Practice Standard (VA-330). Consult the Conservation Practice Standard for further details.**

**General Information**

Client: \_\_\_\_\_ County: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Field Office: \_\_\_\_\_ Contract #: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Farm #: \_\_\_\_\_ Tract #: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Field # and acreage: \_\_\_\_\_

**Client’s Purpose(s)** (check all that apply)

- Reduce sheet & rill erosion.  
 Reduce transport of sediment, other solids and the contaminants attached to them.

**Practice Specifications**

**Follow all specifications and recommendations below for practice installation & implementation.**

**Fields to be Contoured – List & Description**

*Identify fields or conservation management units (CMUs) to be contoured. Provide LS values and design row grades for each.*

Field or CMU ID or description	Field slope LS values		Planned row grades	
	Slope length (ft.)	Slope steepness (%)	Minimum row grade (%)	Maximum row grade (%)

**Detailed Map or Sketch – See Attached**

*Standard requires a map or sketch showing the following minimum elements: (a) Location and type of permanent row markers; (b) Location and type of stable outlets; (c) Locations with 150 feet of stable outlets suitable for maximum allowable row grades.*

**Permanent Row Markers – Establishment Plans / Designs**

*Include all specifications for establishment of sod correction strips or other permanent row markers, such as strip width, type of vegetation, planting recommendations, etc. Refer to attachments as needed.*

**Stable Outlets – Establishment Plans / Designs**

*Include all specifications for establishment of grassed waterways, field borders, filter strips, terraces, or other stable outlets designed to handle concentrated flow from contour system furrows. Refer to attachments as needed.*

**Crop Management – Specifications & Recommendations**

*Specify crop rotation, residue levels, ridge heights, etc. necessary for contouring system to function as planned. Refer to attachments including Cropping System Description & Evaluation Spec Sheet as needed.*

**Additional Specifications & Recommendations**

*Include additional requirements or recommendations for successful design, installation, and implementation, including complementary practices. Refer to attachments as needed.*

**Operation & Maintenance (O&M)**

**Carry out all of the following actions to ensure that the planned contouring system functions as intended after initial installation & implementation.**

**Minimum O&M Requirements:**

1. Conduct all tillage, planting, and other field operations parallel to established row markers in order to maintain planned row grades.
2. Retain and maintain all row markers in accordance with the original system design and layout. In particular, retain the original width and alignment of permanent sod correction strips.
3. Maintain a vigorous stand on permanent sod areas. Use mowing heights and other management appropriate to the species selected. Control weeds and woody growth, soil test, and lime/fertilize as needed.
4. Continuously monitor the contour farming system for row breakovers and/or excessive scouring along row furrows. Take steps to correct any problems detected as soon as possible.
5. Maintain diversions or terraces installed in conjunction with a contour farming system in accordance with their respective original design, layout, and construction.
6. Periodically inspect and maintain grassed waterways, field borders, filter strips, turn strips, or other measures used to receive and convey runoff from the field and/or used to facilitate equipment operation.
7. Carry out key crop management recommendations necessary for successful performance of the overall contouring system. This includes implementing planned crop rotations and maintaining adequate ridge heights.

**Additional O&M Recommendations**

*Provide any additional practical guidance for actions to ensure the long-term effectiveness of practice.*

**Planner Certification**

The Contouring Farming practice planned in this job sheet fulfills minimum requirements of Virginia NRCS Conservation Practice Standard 330.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Certification of Practice Completion**

The Contouring Farming practice planned in this job sheet has been completed and maintained according to Virginia NRCS specifications (indicate in Practice Specifications any changes to planned activities and acreage).

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

