

VT Field Office Technical Guide
SECTION III-C-1

Food Security Act Conservation System and Plan Requirements

Refer to: MANUALS: TITLE 180 - PART 512 - CONSERVATION SYSTEM AND PLANS

A conservation system designed to meet the Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HEL) compliance provisions is a combination of one or more conservation measures or management practices.

A conservation system that is being used when planting agricultural commodities on HEL cropland must meet one of the following definitions:

- provide for a **substantial reduction** in soil erosion when producing agricultural commodities on HEL cropland where a prior cropping history has been established (prior to December 23, 1985),
- permit **no substantial increase** in soil erosion when agricultural commodities are produced on HEL cropland converted from native vegetation (which in the northeastern states typically means trees) after December 23, 1985.

The conservation system shall include all treatments and measures needed to meet the HELC requirements, including treatment required:

- to result in a substantial reduction in erosion,
- to prohibit a substantial increase in erosion,
- for the control of:
 - sheet and rill erosion,
 - ephemeral gully erosion,
 - wind erosion (wind erosion is not typically resource concern in the northeast).

Conservation systems approved prior to July 3, 1996 meet these requirements provided that the USDA participant has applied and continues to actively apply and maintain the approved conservation system.

Substantial Reduction Defined:

When comparing the annual level of erosion before conservation system application to the expected annual level of erosion after conservation system application, it is necessary to compare the same portion of the field in determining if a conservation system application meets the HEL requirements.

The level of substantial reduction in erosion a USDA participant must obtain is set forth in the following table:

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IF the field...	THEN a substantial reduction...
Was used to produce crops prior to December 23, 1985, and the conservation system or plan has been approved, applied, and maintained prior to July 3, 1996,	<p>Has already been met, providing the plan or system is continued to be applied and maintained, and—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The same person continues to use the original conservation system, or revises the system to provide an equal or greater level of erosion protection. <p style="text-align: center;">or</p> • The new owner and/or operator accepts the approved conservation system or plan and continues to apply and maintain the conservation system or an equivalent conservation system.
Was used to produce crops prior to December 23, 1985, and has a conservation system or plan that has been approved after July 3, 1996,	Is a 75 percent reduction of the potential erodibility, not to exceed two (2) times the soil loss tolerance level for the predominant highly erodible soil map unit in the highly erodible field.
Has no history of crop production prior to July 3, 1996,	Does not apply. Furthermore, in no case will the soil erosion level for sodbusted land exceed the soil loss tolerance. (See NFSAM, paragraph 512.01(f).)

Note: Potential Erodibility (PE) is calculated by the following equation, using Universal Soil Loss Equation (USLE) factors: **PE = R x K x LS**

(**R** = Rainfall factor, **K** = Soil Erodibility factor, **LS** = Length/Slope factor)

Substantial Increase Defined:

When developing a conservation system for land converted from native vegetation (trees), a substantial increase in soil erosion is defined as any soil erosion level that is greater than the sustainable level (soil loss tolerance - T) of the predominant HEL soil mapping unit in the HEL field.

When determining substantial increase, the Length-Slope (LS) factor will be determined in the field.