

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

**IRRIGATION LAND LEVELING**

(Ac.)  
CODE 464

**DEFINITION**

Reshaping the surface of land to be irrigated, to planned lines and grades.

**PURPOSE**

To facilitate the efficient use of water on irrigated land.

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

This standard applies to the leveling of land irrigated by surface or subsurface irrigation systems. The leveling is based on a detailed engineering survey, design, and layout. This standard does not apply to Precision Land Forming (462) or Land Smoothing (466).

**CRITERIA**

Planned work shall comply with all Federal, State, and local laws and regulations. Laws and regulations of particular concern include those involving water rights, land use, pollution control, property easements, wetlands, preservation of cultural resources, and endangered species.

Land to be leveled shall be suitable for irrigation and for the proposed methods of water application. Water supplies and irrigation deliveries to the area to be leveled shall be sufficient to make irrigation practical for the crops to be grown and the irrigation water application method to be used.

Soils shall be deep enough that, after leveling, an adequate usable root zone remains that will permit satisfactory crop production with proper conservation measures. Limited areas of shallow soils may be leveled to provide adequate irrigation grades or an improved field alignment. The finished leveling work must not result in exposed areas of highly permeable

soil materials that would inhibit proper distribution of water over the field.

All leveling work shall be planned as an integral part of an overall farm irrigation system to enhance the conservation of soil and water resources. The boundaries, elevations, and direction of irrigation of individual field leveling jobs shall be such that the requirements of all adjacent areas in the farm unit can be met.

**Field grades.** If more than one method of water application or more than one kind of crop is planned, the land must be leveled to meet the requirements of the most restrictive method and crop. All leveling work must be designed within the slope limits required for the methods of water application to be used, to provide for the removal of excess surface water, and to control erosion caused by rainfall. Reverse grades in the direction of irrigation shall not be permitted.

**Slope for level irrigation methods.** The maximum fall in the direction of irrigation shall not exceed one-half the design depth of application for a normal irrigation. The difference in elevation across an individual border strip shall not exceed 0.1 foot.

**Slope for graded irrigation methods.** The maximum slope in the direction of irrigation, if rainfall erosion is not a significant problem, shall be as follows:

- Furrows - 3 percent.
- Corrugations - 8 percent.
- Borders for non-sod forming crops, such as alfalfa or grain - 2 percent.
- Borders for erosion-resistant grass or grass-legume crops or for non-sod forming crops on sites where water application by the border method will not be required until after good crop stands have been

established - 4 percent.

In areas where potential for rainfall erosion is great, the maximum slope for furrows shall be 0.5 percent, 2 percent for borders for sod forming grasses, and 0.5 percent for other crops.

On slopes in the direction of irrigation of more than 0.5 percent, and where leveling designs provide for increasing or decreasing slopes, the following limits shall apply:

- The change in slope in any 100-foot reach shall not exceed one-half the maximum permissible change along the length of run. However, short level sections are permissible at the upper or lower ends of irrigation runs to facilitate water control or to reduce runoff.
- The maximum permissible slope change is the difference between the flattest and steepest design slope along the length of run.

**Cross slope.** The maximum cross slope for borders shall be 0.1 foot border strip width.

The allowable cross slope for furrows and corrugations depends on the stability of the soil, the size of furrows that are to be used, and the rainfall pattern in the area. Cross slopes must be such that breakthroughs from both irrigation water and runoff from rainfall are held to a minimum.

**Slope for subsurface irrigation methods.** In areas where irrigation is practiced through ground water level control, the field surface shall be shaped to parallel the expected subsurface water elevations. The design shall be based on the desired depth from the soil surface to the elevation of the ground water.

**Surface drainage.** Farm irrigation systems shall include provisions for removing or otherwise controlling excess irrigation and storm water. Leveling designs must provide field elevations and field grades that will permit proper functioning of the planned surface drainage system facilities.

**Maximum field elevation.** All leveling work shall be designed to permit the delivery of required irrigation flows to the highest point on the field surface. Field elevations shall be at

least 0.33 foot below the water surface elevation at the point of delivery.

## CONSIDERATIONS

In the design consider the excavation and fill material required for or obtained from such structures as ditches, ditch pads, and roadways. The appropriate yardage shall be included when balancing cuts and fills and determining borrow requirements.

Consider related structures and measures needed to control irrigation water and/or storm water runoff.

Consider crops, method of irrigation, soil intake rates, field slope, irrigation stream size and resulting deep percolation and runoff when determining or evaluating length of irrigation runs.

Consider the depth of cuts and the resulting available plant rooting depths to saline soils and to shallow water tables.

In areas with sediment-laden irrigation water, consider increasing the required height of the water surface at the point of delivery.

Consider effects on water flows and aquifers, and the affect to other water uses and users.

Consider the effects on adjacent wetlands.

Investigate the potential for the existence of cultural resources in the project area and any project impacts on such resources. Evaluate the need for conservation and stabilization of archeological, historic, structural, and traditional cultural properties when appropriate.

## PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Plans and specifications for irrigation land leveling shall be site specific, and show the requirements for installing the practice to achieve its intended purpose. Site specifics include field boundaries, planned cuts and fills, earthwork volumes, cut/fill ratio, direction of irrigation, design run slope and cross slope, required water surface and location of irrigation water delivery, tailwater return/disposal, and appurtenant structures.

**OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE**

The maintenance on leveled fields includes the periodic removal or grading of mounds and/or

depressions. Land grading may periodically be needed to restore the design gradient.