

# '77 Is Conservation Deadline

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The law says that erosion and

sedimentation control plans for each farm are to be prepared by a person trained and experienced in erosion and sedimentation control methods and techniques. The law does not stipulate the kind of training and experience required by the people who draw up the plans.

Soil specialists with the Soil and Conservation Service, an arm of the USDA which works very closely with state and local governments, are the most obvious people to do this kind of work. However, in Lancaster County alone there are some 6000 farms, only 1500 of which have completed conservation plans. The local SCS has a considerable backlog of farm conservation plans to be completed.

Too, an increased work load is being heaped onto the local office by municipal governments trying to cope with an explosion in environmental legislation. Nationally, the SCS is faced with a lack of funds and a reduction in its staff.

Outside the SCS, there are very few soil conservation specialists working anywhere, including civil engineering firms. Orval Bass, director of the local SCS office, said his group plans educational sessions on soil conservation with local civil engineers and municipal governments. Engineers and township supervisors, however, would not be trained to prepare

farm conservation plans. There will continue to come from Bass' office. Bass advised farmers who want conservation plans to contact him as soon as possible, because it may be a long time before the plans can be drawn up.

While the law does say something about the qualifications of the people who will be preparing conservation plans, it mentions nothing about the people who install conservation practices. This, too, is a difficult job calling for special skills.

A spokesman for DER's Bureau of Water Quality Control, told LANCASTER FARMING that he thought farmers would be able to install their own conservation practices. He said he hadn't realized that it was a difficult thing to do. He also said that he had never heard of REAP (Rural Environmental Assistance Program), which has been one of the best-publicized victims of the administration's budget cutting.

There is a shortage of conservation contractors, a fact which is expected to hinder the installation of conservation practices on farms in Lancaster County.

If farmers can get plans for their farms, and if they can get contractors to help them implement those plans, they will still be faced with the problem of paying for the work. REAP is dead but not forgotten. Some observers feel that REAP may yet be the Lazarus that makes the administration a believer in the Congressional prerogative to spend the money it appropriates. A new REAP bill has passed the House and is expected to go through the Senate, too.

If the President vetoes the bill, and if Congress cannot then override that veto, a lawsuit is expected to bring the matter into the courts. If REAP stays dead, there will likely be no conservation aid to farmers, either from the federal or state governments. REAP had been paying up to 80 percent of the cost of installing conservation practices.

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