

Contour strips produce savings

LEBANON — "With planting just around the corner, now is the time to consider putting contour strips on your fields," says Randy McCormack, Soil Conservationist with the U.S.D.A. — Soil Conservation Service in Lebanon.

What are contour strips and how do they save you money? Contour strips are alternate strips of row

crops and hay or close growing grain crops.

Contour strips also save you money in various forms. First, contour strips reduce soil erosion by slowing down rain water as it flows down your fields.

Any soil or nutrients (fertilizer, lime, organic matter) that are carried through the row crop strips

are captured by the hay strip.

How much soil can you save?

Contour strips can reduce soil loss by 50% over farming the whole field in a row crop.

Reducing soil loss by 50% means reducing your fertilizer, lime, and organic matter losses significantly. Trouble is that most farmers can't see most of this

erosion since it's lost in thin sheets called sheet erosion or small gullies called rill erosion. In Lebanon County the maximum allowable soil loss, before production is affected, for most soils is 3-4 tons per acre per year.

How much is 3-4 tons per acre? Not much soil considering a dime's thickness of soil over an acre is 10 tons.

This 10 tons per acre loss is barely visible to the human eye. Add to the loss of soil the value of the nutrients like nitrogen (\$.25/lb.), potassium (\$.22/lb.), and phosphorus (\$.12/lb.), the soil loss value per ton of soil can approach \$15-\$20 per ton.

For example, a 30 acre field averaging 10 tons of soil loss per acre will lose about 300 tons of soil or \$4,500 in value. Contour strips may reduce soil loss down to 3-4 tons per acre per year.

Contour strips also conserve water with the alternate hay or

close growing grain strips that act as sponges to the surface runoff. If runoff can be reduced 50-75% with contour strips, increased infiltration of rainfall into the hay and corn strips means more water available during drought periods. A recent ag study concluded that for every inch of rainfall you can save from mid-July on, you'll get 6-8 bushels per acre more of corn.

Contour strips usually reduce your nitrogen application rates due to the rotation from alfalfa or clover hay into corn. This continual rotation maintains soil fertility and also soil tilth with the incorporation of the hay into the topsoil.

Now is the time to put contour strips on some of your fields! A Soil Conservation Service technician or conservationist will work with you in laying out contours to fit your field slopes and equipment. Call Soil Conservation Service today at 272-4618.

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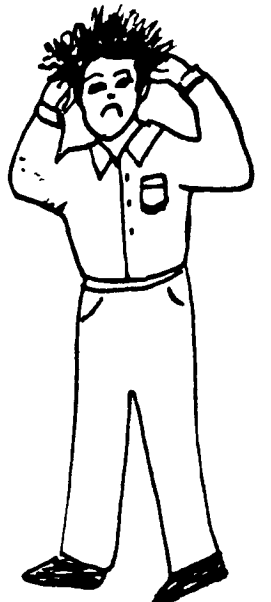
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