

SCS Outlines 'Sodbuster' And 'Swampbuster' Provisions

BY HELEN KELCHNER
Columbia Co. Correspondent
BERWICK — Under the Food Security Act of 1985, the U.S. Department of Agriculture is alerting farmers throughout the country that cultivation of certain highly erodible acreage is a serious one in which to sink a plow.

If a farmer has allowed a portion of his land to lie in sod or woodland from 1981 to 1985 and has decided since December 23, 1985 to cultivate that land — a practice termed "sodbusting" — certain considerations must be met.

He must first determine if one-third of the area or more than 50 acres comes under a "highly erodible" category. If it does, he has two options. First, he can go ahead and break out the land without having a locally approved conservation system in place. If this happens, he will immediately disqualify himself for USDA farm programs. These include:

- USDA price and income supports
- disaster payments
- crop insurance
- FHA loans
- Commodity Credit Corp. storage payments

- farm storage facility loans; — and
- other programs under which USDA makes commodity-related payments, including annual payments for the Conservation Reserve Program.

He might ask, "How will USDA know?" If he ever has a need to apply for one of the USDA programs listed above, he must certify that he has not broken out highly erodible land since Dec. 23, 1985 in order to produce crops — unless he did so under a locally approved conservation plan.

The second option to re-open such land for cultivation of crops is to develop a conservation plan in cooperation with SCS and the local conservation district. Under this option, there is no risk of losing program benefits.

At a recent SCS board meeting in Bloomsburg, Columbia County, the question arose concerning a stand of alfalfa that may not have been turned over between '81 and '85. It would have to be determined if the crop was allowed to stand for a certain pre-determined reason or if it was allowed to lay idle for no purpose.

There is another factor which

may be determined on a one-to-one basis. In the case of a farmer who has lost his eligibility for USDA programs because he broke out highly erodible land without SCS approval, he may be able to allow the land to return to its former state and then again be eligible for USDA programs. This is a very gray area and it is felt that it would be decided on individual circumstances and need.

Under the same act, wetlands have also come under close scrutiny.

Known as the "swampbuster" provision, crops produced on wetlands converted since Dec. 23, 1985 come under the same USDA program loss as the "sodbuster."

Wetlands consist of soils that are covered with standing water or are saturated most of the year and which support mostly water-loving plants. SCS maintains a list of soils and plants that define such wetlands.

Unlike "sodbusting" areas, "swampbusting" has exceptions. If a farmer or rancher:

- has made a substantial financial commitment to conversion before Dec. 23, 1985, but has not actually begun activity on

the land until after that date.

- converted wetlands that had been created artificially.
- produces agricultural commodity crops on wetlands that dried up through natural conditions such as drought.
- converted wetlands where SCS has determined that the wetland loss has minimal effect on wetland values.

If eligibility for USDA programs had been lost through improper wetland conversion, such eligibility can be regained by

abandonment of agricultural activity on such land.

Persons affected by the Food Security Act are those who are actually involved in cultivation. Responsibility for rented land falls on the "renter" or the one using the land.

For more information about sodbusting and swampbusting, contact the local office of any USDA agency, the agriculture extension service or conservation district. These agencies are listed under county name in phone book.

Berks ASC Committee Outlines Election Procedure

LEESPORT — Berks County's Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Committee has taken early steps in preparation for holding elections for county and community members later this year, in compliance with changes required by The Food Security Act of 1985.

Donald E. Lutz, chairman of the Berks County ASC Committee reported the committee has set boundaries around ASC local administrative areas that help provide farmers with effective farm program administration through local representation.

The new election procedures call

for ASC Community Committee persons in this three-area county to be elected to a staggered three-year term. Lutz said to accomplish this it is necessary to have a transition. Thus, committee persons in local administrative area (LAA) 3 will be elected to a three-year term; committee persons in LAA 1 will be elected to a two-year term and committee persons in LAA 2 will be elected to a one-year term.

A list of ASC communities, a boundary map and the number of farms within each community are available to the public at the ASCS office.

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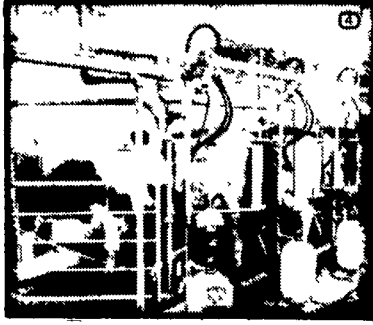
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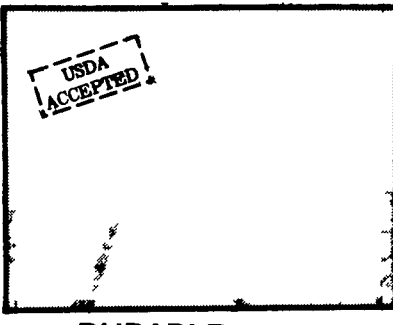
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