

Farm Bill's 'Swampbuster' Discourages Cropping Wetlands

LEESPORT - Farmers are being told that if they drain or farm a wetland, they will lose benefits from a large number of U.

S. Department of Agriculture programs. The question many farmers are asking is, "what is a wetland?"

According to Robert Heidecker, state resource conservationist, USDA Soil Conservation Service, under the swampbuster provision of the 1985 Farm Bill, USDA defines a wetland as soils that are covered with standing water or are water saturated most of the year, to the

extent that they grow mostly water loving plants. "Both conditions, wet soils and wetland plants, must exist for the land to be classed as a wetland," added Heidecker. The USDA Soil Conservation Service (SCS) maintains lists of wet soils and water-loving plants which make up a wetland designation.

Farm Bill, is aimed at discouraging the conversion of wetland to agricultural purposes. Many farmers have drained and planted wetlands to crops, under incentives offered through various commodity support programs.

More than one-half of the wetlands that existed when America was settled are gone. Wetlands are some of our most diverse and productive habitat for waterfowl and wildlife. They help control floodwaters, recharge aquifers and provide many recreational and environmental opportunities.

Farmers who plant a crop on an existing wetland or on a wetland that was drained and filled since December 23, 1985 will not be able to participate in most other USDA farm programs. This includes such USDA farm programs as commodity price supports, Farmers Home Administration loans, crop insurance, CCC storage payments, farm storage facility loans and conservation reserve program annual payments. Heidecker reminded farmers that eligibility will be lost not only for the wetland that is cropped, but for the entire farm operation.

For more information on Swampbuster, contact the local office or the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS). SCS Conservationists can tell you if you have wetlands. ASCS personnel can provide information about the effects of Swampbuster on USDA assistance programs.

"Eligibility may be regained any year by not planting a crop on the converted wetland," added Heidecker.

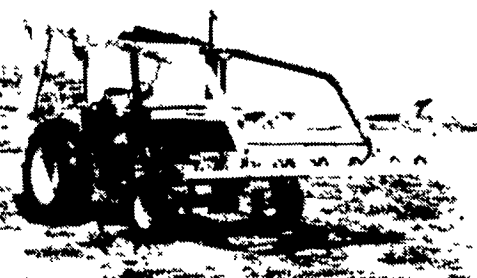
Exceptions to the swampbuster provision are (1) if the wetland was drained prior to December 23, 1985; (2) if the wetland results from an artificial condition, such as irrigation; (3) crops were planted on the wetland as a result of natural conditions such as drought; and (4) where SCS has determined that conversion would have a minimal effect on wetland values.

The swampbuster provision of the Food Security Act of 1985, commonly referred to as the 1985



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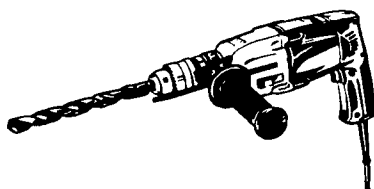


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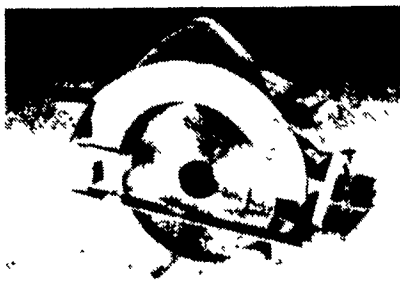
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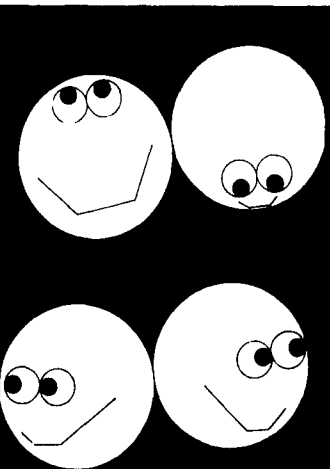
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