

Field Borders: A Good Neighbor Policy

WEST CHESTER (Chester Co.) — This spring, concern and pressure from neighbors bordering farm fields have run almost as high as water and mud levels.

As commercial and residential development continue to move closer to cropland, it becomes increasingly important to sustain good neighbor relations.

This can be difficult during particularly wet seasons, as runoff from farm fields makes its way onto neighboring properties. A simple and effective way to reduce runoff problems is for farmers to maintain field borders on farm ground adjacent to developed areas.

Field borders are also known as filter strips or buffer strips. These terms all refer to a strip of vegetation established at the edge of a field.

Their main purpose is to control erosion and remove nutrients, sediment, and pollutants from runoff by filtration, infiltration, absorption, and adsorption. As water is

slowed down through these vegetated areas, evaporation is enhanced, reducing the amount of water which passes through, and pollution is further deterred by organic decomposition and volatilization.

Besides serving as nutrient, sediment and chemical filters, field borders serve many functions. They can help to stabilize road banks and berms. In field entrances and areas with heavy machinery traffic, they can provide a stable place for travel lanes and turnarounds. These areas usually have compaction problems anyway, and are therefore less productive for cropping.

A well established filter strip along adjacent woodlands can reduce competition from woods and also provide food and cover for wildlife. And perhaps most importantly, these areas can maintain a comfortable distance between landowners. Neighbors are protected from spray and manure "drift," and they will often feel

better at spreading time knowing there is a physical separation between their property and manured ground.

In planning to establish a field buffer, several factors should be considered. Slopes and soil should be evaluated, and vegetative species should be determined with these in mind. Time of year for establishment of vegetation, as well as the need for irrigation should also be considered. Visual aspects and fire hazards are important, too. Borders being used as turnrows or travel lanes should be established to bluegrass, fescues, perennial ryegrass or other vigorous grass sod. They will also need to be wide enough

to accommodate farm equipment. Field borders should always be a minimum of 29 feet wide. Borders established to reduce woodland competition and improve wildlife habitat should be a maximum of 50 feet wide, and should not be established to grasses alone, except warm season grasses, and not tall fescue.

Field borders are relatively easy to establish and maintain, and the effort will be well worth the return. Peaceful relations between farmers and their neighbors benefit the whole community. For more information and technical guidelines, contact Lori Sandman at the Chester County Conservation District, (610) 696-5126.

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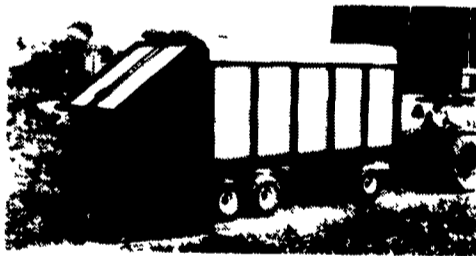
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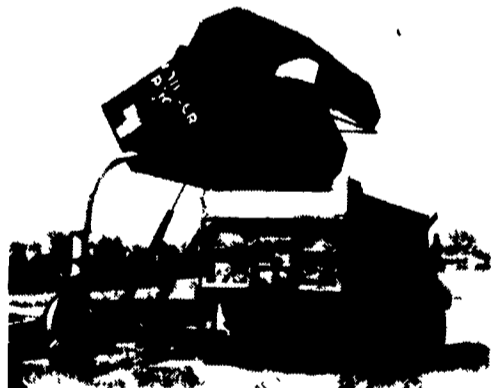
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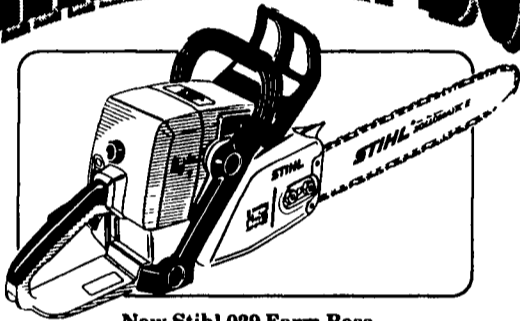
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