

10 Low-, No-Cost Conservation Practices In Use

GETTYSBURG (Adams Co.) — Everyone benefits from soil and nutrient conservation practices. Both the environment and the farmer can win from implementing best management practices (BMPs).

However, with the economic conditions faced by the agricultural community, the implementation of some BMPs may not be financially possible for many farmers.

Nevertheless, there still exists a large arsenal of low-cost, and even no-cost, BMPs available to farmers. The following BMPs not only benefit the farmer and the environment, but they also improve public perception of farming, as well.

1. Buffer strips: Although this BMP does take some land out of annual crop production, leaving buffer strips along streams and roads can pay for themselves in soil and nutrient savings. A 10-12-foot buffer strip of permanent grass along streams, road ditches and road banks is very effective as keeping soil and nutrients from leaving the field. It can also keep one in good graces with PennDOT and local roadmasters who won't have to clean out road side ditches quite as often.

2. Contour strips: Nothing looks quite as picturesque as a field laid out in contour strips. Not only does it look nice, but contour

strips do an outstanding job of breaking up long hillsides with alternating strips of row crops and hay or small grain crops. These strips hold back water and, consequently, any soil or nutrients suspended in it.

3. Contour farming: Some fields may not be suited for contour strips, or may not need to be stripped. For these fields, planting the crops across the slope will greatly improve soil retention.

4. Plowship waterways: It never fails. Every year it will happen. Gutters and gullies in those small drainage swales. Again the problem of crossing and/or closing them exists. Simply letting those swales in grass can often solve all that. Pulling up the plows and discs and turning off the spray equipment through these areas will allow the swales to remain vegetated. The grass can then simply be mowed or cut for hay.

5. Constructed waterways and terraces: In many of the larger drainage swales, a plowship waterway may not be sufficient. These will require a constructed grass-lined waterway. That sounds like it costs money, right? Well, those costs can definitely be lowered if the farmer does the work. Many times the waterway can be constructed with farm equipment. A tractor and moldboard plow can do the job. Terraces, yet another

fine conservation practice, can also be built with a plow. If you would like more flexibility with rotations, tillage, and/or residue management, consider this technique when developing or revising conservation plans.

6. Crop rotation: Continuous row crops are becoming a thing of the past. Many farmers have realized the added benefits of including small grains and hay crops in their farming rotation. Crop rotation increases the effectiveness of a pesticide and herbicide program, improves soil tilth, and helps in balancing nutrients. It is also one of the most beneficial BMPs included in conservation plans to keep soil erosion at a minimum. To lessen the need for costly constructed BMPs, consider incorporating crop rotation to meet the needs of a conservation plan.

7. Residue management: Many people refer to this practice as "dirty farming." Although this may not look very pretty, keeping the residue from the fall harvest on the top of the ground over the winter provides an excellent mulch to lessen the impact of rain and lower soil erosion. It also retains soil moisture and saves time and money by eliminating fall tillage.

8. Nutrient management: Studies continue to prove that nutrient management is the most cost

effective means of preventing surface and groundwater pollution. It can also mean great savings for farmers. Accounting for all the nutrients applied to a crop from fertilizers, manures, sludges, and compost will prevent the over application of nutrients. For proper nutrient management two pieces of information are needed: 1) what the crop needs and 2) the amount of nutrients applied. Soil testing and manure, sludge or compost analysis will provide this information. Balancing the crop needs to the nutrients applied will lessen the potential of nutrient run-off and leaching into groundwater. Note: By regularly soil testing and accounting for nitrogen credits from legumes and soybeans, grain farmers who apply no manures can reap benefits from nutrient management as well.

9. Spot treatment of herbicides and pesticides: Although this BMP is not a soil or nutrient conservation practice, it sure can conserve money for the farmer. Scouting fields and applying chemicals only to those areas that need it, will lessen the amount used and will, consequently, lessen the likelihood of surface and/

or ground water contamination.

10. Field road maintenance: Poorly sited or badly maintained field roads can often be a major contributor to soil erosion. To lessen erosion in field roads, plan their placement carefully. Avoid poorly drained areas, steep highly erodible areas, and put them on the contour as much as possible. Avoid permanent roads when possible. This will prevent the same area from being exposed year after year. Whether permanent or temporary, always watch for gully formation in field roads and repair them as needed. Also consider stoning the field entrances to lessen the amount of soil deposited on the roads.

As public concern escalates, soil and nutrient conservation and environmentally sound farming practices will continue to be highly demanded of the agricultural community. BMPs such as those discussed here can help farmers meet that demand with very little financial burden and then we all will truly win.

For more information about these and other BMPs, contact your local conservation district or the Soil Conservation Service.

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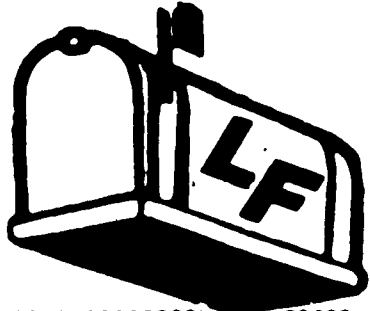
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12	4.56	9.12	11.52
13	4.94	9.88	12.48
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15	5.70	11.40	14.40
16	6.08	12.16	15.36
17	6.46	12.92	16.32
18	6.84	13.68	17.28
19	7.22	14.44	18.24
20	7.60	15.20	19.20

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