

# Sinkholes — Potential Environmental Threats — Strain Farmers' Patience, Money

(Continued from Page A22)

treating sinkholes. These standards and specifications were used to a great extent to help seal a sinkhole which developed in Clinton County.

What concerns many is what happens to the sinkholes after they form.

"There is a lot of trash that seems to be getting dumped in some of these sinkholes," said Benton, "such as old pesticide cans and oil cans and whatever else that goes into a trash heap. There is probably a potential there for some of those that aren't filled to be a physical hazard."

As a result, NRCS put together a standard and specification for treating sinkholes. They are based on drainage area and sinkhole type. But they are used as a guide, and can be modified to the existing site conditions.

Benton assisted in selecting a large sinkhole for treatment in Clinton County. The sinkhole appeared in a diversion.

The site for the sinkhole repair proved to be a "classic site" for a video demonstrating how a sinkhole is repaired. That video is available from the Clinton County Conservation District office.

Sinkholes can be particularly troublesome if they occur at a construction site. One such sinkhole opened up on the site of a manure storage pond under construction. (More on how the sinkhole was repaired will appear in the next article in the series.)

Can potential sinkhole sites be located beforehand? That proves difficult, according to Benton, because of the soil characteristics. Ground-penetrating radar can detect some cavernous areas in sandy soils, but the high clay content common to soils in limestone areas limits the depth of penetration needed to detect any subsurface cavities.

Why sinkholes occur is not always understood. "It seems like everywhere I've seen them, there's no real definition as to why they occurred," said Benton. Sinkhole formation may have little or nothing to do with a drainage area. Where they will occur is unpredictable.

Those who build in potential sinkhole areas — and in Lancaster County alone, there are many of them — must remember to use caution before disturbing or moving soil. "You've got to be careful — you've got to be looking for those things," said Benton. "If you're working in a limestone area and you're digging below the surface, you should anticipate you might run into some of those problems."

Remember, sinkholes are direct conduits to the water supply of a farm or a municipality. The following guidelines should be used if a sinkhole is discovered:

• Do not pour hazardous chemicals into a sinkhole.

• Do not rinse out containers that once held hazardous chemicals or mix hazardous chemicals near a sinkhole.

• Do not dump trash into a sinkhole.

• Do not use sinkholes as outlets for drainage systems. The nutrients carried from crop fields in the drainage systems can be channeled directly into the groundwater.

Cleaning up a site should remain a high priority for farmers who have a sinkhole. But where can a farmer seek financial assistance?

Neither the Chesapeake Bay program administered by the conservation district nor the ACP program administered by the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) has cost-share monies available for correcting sinkhole problems.

In the case of the Cumberland County sinkhole that developed at the site of a manure storage pond, the farmer had to pay about \$1,000 for materials and labor.

"We really haven't got the financial support to repair sink-



A sinkhole opened up in this pasture in Columbia County. Sinkholes can pose challenges during cleanup and maintenance, but are repairable.

holes," said Benton. "That would be the real incentive for farmers to utilize our expertise and experience."

Editor's Note: Select farmers in the Lancaster County Mill Creek Project area can have their sinkholes repaired free of

charge under a new education program. More about that program next week in part two of the sinkhole series.

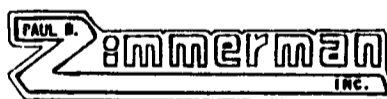
## Crop Feed Grains Eligible For Farmer-Owned Reserve

LEESPORT (Berks Co.) — "Producers can now place 1994-crop corn, sorghum barley and oats into the farmer-owned reserve (FOR)," said Richard Troutman, acting chairman of the Berks Farm Service Agency (FSA) Committee. "Producers can earn quarterly storage payments of 26.5 cents per bushel for corn, sorghums and barley, and .20 per bushel for oats."

Producers must file intentions to place grain in the reserve by April 30 at the local office of the FSA, formerly the

Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS). Although filing an intention does not obligate a producer to place grain in the reserve, a nine-month Commodity Credit Corporation price support loan agreement must be executed before the intention is filed.

"Producers may not obtain the FOR loan until the expiration of a nine-month nonrecourse price support loan," Troutman said. "For further information, producers should contact the local FSA office at the Berks County Ag Center."



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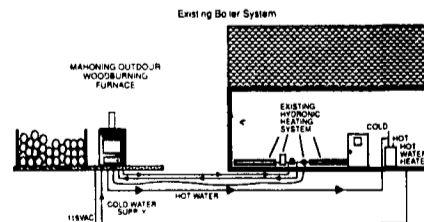
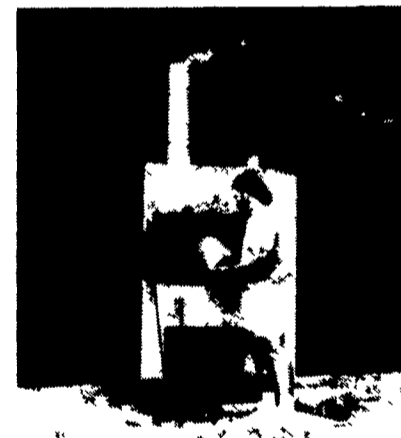
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