Ag Progress Visitors See That Erosion Repair Methods Don't Always Have To Come From A Book

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ROCKSPRING (Centre Co.) — With an infusion of soil and stone cover, conservationists can repair waterways and diversions that have been damaged by large rain- or snowstorms, according to Joel Myers, state agronomist with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS).

Myers spoke to about two dozen visitors Wednesday afternoon during a conservation tour at Ag Progress Days.

According to the state agronomist and conservationist, steep, highly erodible fields at the Ag Progress Days site at the Russell E. Larson Ag Center in Rockspring were effected by drenching rains in the spring. The long-duration event created water seepage from a terraced area on a slope along the back hills of the Ag Progress site to a waterway.

The purpose of the waterway is to allow amounts of water to drain from the hilly areas at the site, downslope, without eroding the topsoil.

While the damage was not severe, some damage can be expected during long-duration, heavy rain events.

Myers showed tour-goers a water collection basin dug with a drainage pipe. The pipe area is deep enough to collect sediment and allow the water to be diverted down the hill without eroding soil. The pipe outlet system controls events that create long-duration water flow.

Myers said, "It's often difficult to get water from the terrace to the waterway without having a little bit of a problem."

The seepage caused ruts and some erosion, but nothing significant to warrant emergency repair. Some sections were still muddy but the grass was gradually returning, and some additional repair at the site is warranted.

One way to prevent further damage is to stack bales of straw where seepage begins to occur at the waterway. Ultimately, stones and soil can be used to regrade the site.

Myers demonstrated the crop terracing system in place, normally planted to field crops with buffer strips on the steeper slopes. However, because of ever-present deer damage and other problems, the site was planted no-till to regular buckwheat as a cover crop.

The diversions in place help to control the "seep flow," noted Myers. The seep flow is the layer of water that rides over the soil surface as it makes its way downslope.

A combination of no-till and buffer strips work in large part to stem erosion on the steep hillsides at Ag Progress. Myers noted that the use of a buffer strip at the end of a field will control erosion from the end rows.

"There are a lot of things you can do that are not necessarily written in the books that will work," Myers said, for stemming erosion or performing repairs to erosion control systems.

An important conservation system includes buffer strips, planted on the steep parts of the slope in a reliable grass mixture. Ag Progress uses a timothy mixture, although any grass would be acceptable, according to Myers. The buffer strips should be a minimum of 15 feet wide.

To determine the width of the slope, conservation technicians use the formula of 10-20 percent of the width of the cropland. A higher percentage of slope width provides better protection of soil.

During the tour, Myers noted

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