

Conservation program identifies objectives

The resources Conservation Act of 1977 directs that the U.S. Department of Agriculture's soil and water conservation programs be responsive to the long-term needs of the nation. USDA has addressed this requirement by appraising the soil, water and related resources and identifying seven resource areas of concern and the associated objectives. These are as follows:

Soil Resource Quantity and Quality

Reduce soil erosion on agricultural land
Retain prime and unique farmland
Maintain soil quality

Improve the condition of rangeland

Water Quality

Reduce the levels of toxic pollutants and dissolved solids
Minimize pollution from nutrients and organic wastes
Reduce sediment

Water Supply and Conservation

Increase the efficiency of water use in agriculture
Increase agricultural water supplies

Fish and Wildlife Habitat

Reduce the loss of wetlands
Increase instream water flow
Improve upland wildlife habitat

Upstream Flood Damages

Reduce upstream flood damages
Develop new technology to reduce damages
Prevent loss of wetlands and prime agricultural land

Energy Conservation and Production

Reduce energy use in agriculture
Increase energy production on agricultural land

Related Natural Resources

Increase the use of organic wastes
Reduce downstream flood losses and sediment from construction sites

Reduce the loss of prime and unique farmland to urban uses

To address the resource areas of concern, seven board strategies for program development are proposed for public consideration. These strategies represent a range of approaches to a soil and water conservation program. The approach USDA ultimately recommends may be one of these strategies or some combination of strategies. These are as follows:

Redirect Present Programs

USDA would continue its 34 existing conservation programs, but it would redirect funds and personnel toward new national objectives for conservation.

Cross Compliance

Farmers and ranchers would be required to solve conservation problems in order to receive assistance under certain USDA farm programs.

Regional Resource Projects

USDA programs would be directed toward urgent and chronic regional resource problems of national importance. Project plans would be the basis for USDA assistance.

State Leadership

State governments would develop their own conservation

programs. After approval by USDA states could receive grants to ensure achievement of national conservation objectives.

Regulation

Local, state, and national regulations would be coupled with financial and technical assistance to solve conservation problems according to USDA standards.

Conservation Performance Bonus

Bonus benefits would be paid to farmers and ranchers who voluntarily solve conservation problems on their land. Bonuses could take the form of higher support payments, cost sharing, or favorable interest rates on loans.

Natural Resource Contracts

Farmers and ranchers would receive annual payments for reducing erosion, conserving water, and applying other conservation measures.

The RCA analysis indicated that an effective soil and water conservation program is essential to prevent continued degradation of the nation's resources. Comments regarding the RCA must be received by March 28. For more information contact the SCS office in Heppner.

New hybrid characterized as 'breakthrough'

Of the introduced range plants available, very few can be characterized as a "breakthrough." Thus, when a new range plant or an old plant with improved characteristics comes along, it is worth mentioning. One hybrid which looks as though it might have real promise as a range plant is a cross between bluebunch wheatgrass (*Agropyron spicatum*) and quackgrass (*Agropyron repens*).

In a recent article, the results of a field trial were released. The hybrid was grown side by side with both of its parents. Several parameters were measured with the performance of the hybrid having some strikingly superior characteristics. Of major importance the hybrid out-produced its bluebunch wheatgrass parent remarkably (3x). Digestibility estimates show the hybrid to be quite

Farmers save water

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due increases the erosion hazard decreases. Another consideration and a major one is contour farming, parallel to the terraces within the system.

The maximum benefit to the terrace system would include all of the above practices. In addition, use of chemicals to control vegetation and reduce tillage operations would be highly beneficial. The highest compliment to the terrace structure is to provide the best management system available to a farming operation.

comparable to its parents. In crude protein, the hybrid showed greater amounts.

Studies are currently being conducted on drier sites (17.5 inches on original trial). If similar relative performance was to occur the future for range forage improvement could be exerting.

(Condensation by John Nordheim of article by Thomas E. Bedell in the GRAZIER.)

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