

Consider Alternatives

Conservation has been part of most farm operations for many years. Now soil conservation measures have been tied to farm support payments by the 1985 and 1990 Farm Bills and environmental restrictions on agriculture are not likely to relax in the future. Some old conservation practices are getting another look as possible tools for erosion control.

Sometimes factors beyond the farmer's control can put his soil and water resources, as well as his income, at risk. Low yields caused by weather or pests can make it difficult to maintain enough crop residue to meet erosion control goals. A system with a variety of conservation practices can help make erosion control less reliant on a single practice.

Strip cropping was a common method for both wind and water erosion control. Larger equipment and weed problems led to the removal of many strip systems. Now farmers are looking at strips again as a way to get needed erosion protection with

lower crop residue requirements. With crop residue management it is possible to use wider strips than some of the older systems. Current tillage techniques and available weed controls also help make strips more feasible.

For water erosion, farm-over level terraces and alternate strips of grain and fallow can both provide excellent protection and more water is held on the fields for crops to use. Some studies have shown that increased yield on the terrace berm and just downhill of the terraces offsets any yield reduction in the channel. Terraces also help control the gully erosion that strips or crop residue alone can not stop.

Field windbreaks, cover crops, grass strips and cross slope farming are some other conservation practices that will reduce soil loss and provide more flexibility in crop rotations where low crop residue yields are a problem.

Your local Soil Conservation Service office can provide more information about these tools and how they may fit into your conservation plan.

SWCD holds annual meeting



Ed Weber, ODA-NRD

The Morrow SWCD held its 1992 Annual Meeting on January 13, 1993 in conjunction with Heppner's Town and Country Days. The program was presented by Ed Weber, Oregon Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Division. Mr. Weber explained "The Unique Connection" which focuses on the fact that ODA is the only state agency with 45 Oregon SWCDs with local boards who can be consulted in implementing laws passed by the legislature concerning natural resource management.

Mr. Weber also talked about future concerns over wind erosion. Currently the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) is in the process of beginning implementation of the 1990 Clean Air Act. This involves establishing and regulating clean air health standards. Weber stated, "this may impact agriculture in those areas prone to wind erosion such as north Morrow County."

MORROW



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1992 Annual Report

MSWCD Supplement to the Heppner Gazette-Times, March 10, 1993

Chuck Nelson named 1992 Outstanding Cooperator



Chuck Nelson

Chuck Nelson was named Morrow SWCD's 1992 Outstanding Cooperator and continues a longstanding tradition in his family which began with his father, Norman, and uncle Alfred, who shared the prize in 1956. His cousin, Ken, won in 1985.

Nelson farms 3,100 acres of wheat/fallow ground, most of which is leased from relatives and neighbors. He is the third generation Nelson on this farm, which was started by his grandfather in 1913.

Newspaper articles lining the wall of Nelson's shed tell the story of a family who built terraces, sod waterways and diversion dams and used nitrogen fer-

tilizer long before it was common. Many of the sod waterways are still in place today. No moldboard plows have been used on his fields since 1918 because all tillage is designed to incorporate the latest in conservation farming machinery and techniques. A total of 19.66 miles of terraces have been built on the land that Nelson operates.

Chuck and his wife Lisa, a son Justin, and a daughter Courtney are active partners in the farming operation. His philosophy on conservation farming is early seeding and minimum tillage that is maintained by chemical fallow and good conservation practices.

Other innovations on Chuck's farm include earth dams for draw

bottoms and maintenance of 1,000 pounds of straw or stubble cover for each winter crop.

Chuck was also honored as the Morrow County Wheat Growers Conservation Farm of the Year for 1992. A tour and barbecue were held in June giving Nelson the opportunity to show off his outstanding conservation efforts.

All county winners tour the state and judge other winners in the competition for the state conservation farm. Nelson Farms was chosen as the Oregon State Winner. A tour and barbecue will be held this year the last week of June.

Chuck Nelson was also selected to receive the "Take Pride In America" (TPIA) sign. (See related story)

SWCD seeds Bombing Range

The Morrow SWCD contracted with the U.S. Navy to reseed approximately 200 acres on the Navy Bombing Range that was burned by a lightning caused fire in August 1991. In addition to seeding a Secar blue bunch grass and Sherman big bluegrass mixture using Miller & Sons' no-till drill and a rented tractor, about two miles of electric fence was constructed to prevent grazing the area for two growing seasons.

A large area was left unseeded but excluded from grazing and a small seeded area is subjected to grazing as well as a large area that

was not seeded so that range conditions can be monitored and compared for future seeding projects. It has been proposed that the SWCD contract with the U.S. Navy to reseed 200-500 acres every year to replace annual grasses with introduced and native perennials for better forage. Most every year some burning occurs on the Bomb Range and it would be these areas that would be reseeded. In addition some consideration has been given to prescribed burning small areas of big sagebrush in Juniper Canyon to improve the grazing.

Normal streamflow predicted

Near normal streamflow is forecast for this spring and summer in northeastern Oregon. The mountain snowpack this year is much better than it was last year, according to the "Basin Summary of Snow Course Data" provided by the Soil Conservation Service. According to the report, on February 1, 1993, Arbuckle Mountain Snow-Tel Pillow had a reading of 20.5 inches of water content compared to 10.1 inches last year and 147 percent above the 13.9 inch average. Madison Butte Pillow readings are also above average with 10.4 inches of water content compared to 1.3 inches last year which is 208 percent above the average of 5 inches.

This report is provided by the Heppner Field Office of the Soil

Conservation Service and includes readings from sites throughout Oregon.

RAINFALL DATA

IONE	
Jul-92	1.15"
Aug-92	0.17"
Sep-92	0.40"
Oct-92	1.26"
Nov-92	1.98"
Dec-92	1.98"
Jan-93	1.98"
Total 8.91"	

HEPPNER	
Jul-92	1.6"
Aug-92	0.40"
Sep-92	0.40"
Oct-92	1.80"
Nov-92	2.15"
Dec-92	1.45"
Jan-93	1.0"
Total 8.8"	

Make "Residue Measurement" A Daily Routine

The critical erosion period for much of the Pacific Northwest cropland is between November and April. This time frame is when 70 percent of the annual precipitation occurs and 70 percent of the damage from wind occurs. A tillage program that leaves 30 percent residue cover can reduce soil erosion from water and wind by 50 to 75 percent.

Farmers can measure their own crop residue to ensure they will have the amount of residues available to provide optimum cropland protection.

When residues are laying flat and randomly distributed the line transect method is the easiest field

procedure to estimate percent residue on the surface. A 100 foot or 50 foot measuring tape, or knotted rope with knots uniformly spaced should be used. Select an area that is representative of the whole field. Avoid field edges, areas of tillage overlap or areas where weeds, insects or other factors have reduced production. An accurate estimate of residue can be obtained by averaging three to five representative locations.

Anchor one end of tape and lay it diagonally across the crop rows. Measure the residue by counting the number of foot marks or "hits" that are directly over a piece of residue. Count on-

ly that residue large enough to intercept raindrops. Do not move the tape while counting. Count residue at foot marks from the same edge of tape. Always look straight down at the foot mark.

On a 100 foot tape the total number of residue "hits" will be a direct measurement of the percentage of residue cover. On a 50 foot tape with the marks or knots uniformly spaced at the foot marks the number of "hits" will need to be multiplied by 2 for percent of residue.

If your field measurements differ significantly from the amounts in your conservation compliance plan, you should contact your local Soil Conservation office for assistance.

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