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Real concern lies with water erosion danger

TIMESNEWS — Although reports say wind erosion of farm fields is bad in some parts of the state, the soil conservationist for Benton County does not believe that is as great a worry as the potential for severe water erosion.

Wind erosion looks serious, Benton Soil Conservationist Floyd Peters says, but it's not nearly as serious as the water erosion we could have.

Peters said wind erosion may take 1-2 tons of soil per acre, which he says is not nearly as serious as the 10-13 tons per acre per year that many fields will lose to water erosion.

The way to hold the soil against the ravages of wind and water is to follow good conservation practices. To prevent wind erosion, Peters said some sort of minimum tillage leaving about 3,000 pounds per acre of crop residue on top the soil is recommended. (He said 3,000 pounds per acre is about half the residue left from a crop.)

Peters said he does not believe Benton County has had much trouble yet with soil blowing from area fields.

Protecting against water erosion also requires the use of proper conservation practices. Peters said the fencerow to fencerow plowing that is permitting the soil to blow this winter leaves the soil vulnerable to serious washing this spring. Peters maintains farmers need to use the land with care, recognizing that certain land should never be plowed up and is best left under trees or grass.

The Soil Conservation Service provides assistance to farmers in

designing, implementing and following soil conservation practices. Some financial assistance is also available.

Areas in northcentral and northwest Iowa have reportedly been experiencing considerable blowing of soil from fall plowed fields recently, due to the dryness of the soil from a rainless fall, and because fields have not been covered by snow.

In some areas, blowing soil has reportedly blinded motorists and banked in ditches. The problem was created by an exceptionally dry and mild fall that gave farmers time to plow additional acreage. (Fall tillage generally gives a nicer seedbed and better yields, than does spring plowed land.) The lack of rainfall has left plowed fields without enough moisture for the surface to freeze to hold the soil particles against the wind.

Northwest and northcentral areas of the state did not receive the snow that fell over Benton County last Sunday.

The dryness in January leads some farm observers to speculate about what is ahead for the coming crop season.

It will take spring rains to replenish the soil moisture. Little moisture is added to the soil by snowfall.

Peters agreed the dryness is serious, but he said he advises farmers to continue preparing for the coming season as if normal rainfall would come. "Nobody can tell at this point whether it'll rain or not. It could start raining in April and not quit till the Fourth of July," he reminds.

And it is such periods of rain that Peters feel farmers need to be most concerned about.