

POWESHIEK COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

P.O. Box 216

March, 1989

Malcom, Iowa

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COST-SHARE FUNDS AVAILABLE

State cost-share funds are available from the Poweshiek County Soil & Water Conservation District for many soil and water conservation practices. Such practices include: terraces, water and sediment control basins, contour farming, contour stripcropping, no-till farming, grassed waterways, diversions, grade stabilization structures (erosion control dams), permanent seeding and tree planting.

Funds are available now for spring and summer work. The cost-share rate is 50% of the estimated cost or the actual cost, whichever is smaller. Work must meet SCS specifications.

FSA COMPLIANCE CONSERVATION PLANS VOLUNTARY

Approved soil conservation plans are needed on farms with highly erodible fields before December 31, 1989 for these farms to remain eligible for many USDA programs. Such programs include the feed grain and storage programs of ASCS, loans of FmHA and crop insurance of Federal Crop Insurance Corp., among others.

Most farmers have developed such plans already. They are voluntary for those who want them. PLEASE CONTACT THE OFFICE IF YOU WANT ONE AND HAVE NOT STARTED ONE YET. Conservation plans basically include an agreement on future crop rotations, tillage, row direction and leaving grassed waterways where necessary. Seeded headlands or field borders are needed along fences in some places where contour farming or across slope farming are part of a conservation system. Except for sodbuster fields, compliance plans do not require the starting of the plan right away.

Alternative conservation systems allow for soil losses which exceed the tolerant soil loss rate established by the District. These meet the requirements of the 1985 Farm Bill. They allow more rowcropping or more tillage than would be allowed if the soil loss was kept at tolerant rates (usually 3 or 5 tons per acre per year).

FLAGS, MEASURING SCALES AND HAND LEVELS FOR SALE

As a service to landowners and operators in Poweshiek County, the District has for sale red wire flags in bundles of 100 each. These are suitable for marking field divisions, etc. Area measuring scales are available for use in estimating the acres of fields as shown on ASCS or similar photos. Hand levels will soon be for sale. They will be useful to persons who wish to lay out their own contour lines, etc. Contact the office for more information (515-528-2065).

MEASURING CROP RESIDUES

Most compliance plans written for the 1985 Farm Bill show a certain amount of crop residue must be left after planting of a crop. An easy, reliable way to determine the percent of ground covered by residue is to take measurements. This should be done as soon after planting as possible.

Stretch any line with 100 equally divided marks on the line across a representative area of the field, at an angle to the planted rows. Fifty foot cable transect lines are available for this. A tape measure or a nylon rope with 100 knots 6 inches apart would also work.

To determine percent ground cover, walk along the stretched line and count the number of marks that have residue underneath them. The number of marks is the percent ground cover.

An alternative method is to use a 25-foot nylon rope with 50 knots, spaced at one every 6 inches. In this case, each point with residue equals 2 percent ground cover. Take at least 3 measurements in different areas of the field.

WHAT IS SODBUSTER?

There is much confusion about what is meant by sodbuster as it refers to the 1985 Farm Bill. It simply means growing a commodity crop on an area that was not cropped or considered cropped any year of the years 1981 through 1985. The area must also be classified as highly erodible.

These areas need approved conservation plans developed for them before they are cropped in order for landowners and operators to remain eligible for certain USDA programs. The plans show how soil losses will be controlled to rates acceptable under the Farm Bill. Plans take effect when the land is planted to a commodity crop.

There is much rumor that any field left seeded 5 years will come under the sodbuster provision of the Farm Bill. This is not so. Remember, it pertains to how the land was used in the key years of 1981 to 1985.

WETLANDS AND SWAMPBUSTER

Wetlands are areas with certain soils that have water-loving plants growing on them. Don't drain and grow annually tilled crops on wetlands or you may lose your eligibility on most USDA farm programs. A person does not lose USDA program eligibility if annually planted crops are planted on wetlands without altering or draining them.

Please check with SCS before draining or altering questionable areas.

SOME COMPLIANCE PLANS WAITING TO BE SIGNED BY OWNERS

Compliance conservation plans need to be signed by the landowner to remain eligible for USDA programs. They also need to be signed by the district conservationist of SCS and the soil and water conservation district to be considered approved. There are a number of them in the Poweshiek District office which have been developed by someone such as the tenant or manager, but have not been signed by the owner. They are not considered completed or approved plans.