

1982 Annual Report of Hardin

How serious is the problem of soil erosion?

by Carroll J. Hobson, District Commissioner

In my humble opinion it is very serious indeed. Erosion is having and will have serious consequences for the entire United States. It is critical for several midwestern states, among them Iowa. The soil losses in this state are monstrous and not generally understood by our people.

If our soil losses were clearly understood by all of the voters, a great deal more would be done. While progress has been made in terrace work, diversions (terraces to divert water to sage channels without erosion), dams, and waterways, millions of dollars must yet be spent in order to bring realistic solutions.

Will Minimum Tillage Save Us? No, but it sure will help us all. Even if we could not terrace another acre, minimum till would help. Land with steep slopes would have to be terraced along with the minimum till to reduce soil losses to accepted minimums. Land with shallow slopes could be taken care of entirely without terraces.

Somehow we need an entirely different philosophy on the part of all of our citizens, farmers and townspeople. Top soil is a national heritage, it needs to be preserved as much as we need to preserve the great national memorials in Washington, D.C.

It is very hard indeed to get people to be realistic about soil losses when we are suffering with high grain surpluses. The obvious sensible alternative would be to have a national program to rest 10 to 20 percent of our land at all times. National emergencies only would

be excepted. I know this is much easier said than done. Many business interests are satisfied with all our production.

No matter, I feel confident that if the severity of the soil losses we are sustaining here in Iowa were understood by everybody we would insist on solutions.

Let's all read, study, and truly understand what it means to lose our most productive lands to erosion. I know of no grandparents who want their grandchildren to go hungry.

Farmers test no-till with rental equipment

DES MOINES—In 1982, 1,600 Iowa farmers rented planters to find out if no-till or strip-till would work on their farm, according to William Brune, state conservationist with the USDA Soil Conservation Service (SCS).

Brune said most farmers agree reducing tillage can save soil and cut operating costs. However, many farmers are not willing to buy equipment unless they know it will work on their farm.

Farmers planted about 30 acres each with rented planters, limited mainly by demand for the equipment. Charges for renting usually were between \$5 and \$10 per acre, for four- or six-row units. Farmers were usually expected to provide fuel, seed and chemicals, but some planters were supplied with tractors and operators.

"WE'RE CONFIDENT that once farmers see a few acres of no-till growing on their farm, many will grow all their crops without using tillage," says Brune.

No-till may not replace other conservation practices, but it will have a significant impact on soil erosion. "Switching to no-till will reduce erosion, but it may take a combination of soil conservation practices to get erosion down to acceptable levels, especially when steep slopes are farmed."

In 1982, 182 planters were available for rent in 72 counties, more than twice as many as could be rented in 1981. In addition to the planter rental program, more than 300 farmers were willing to do custom planting with conservation equipment.

IN 85 counties farmers who tried no-till or strip-till were eligible for incentive payments through the local Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service office or county SCS district office.

Of the planters rented, 144 were owned by dealers, 24 by farmers, 11 by soil conservation districts, two by a bank and one by the county conservation board.

Most planters were for no-till with only a few set up for strip-till. With either system, no tillage is needed before or after planting, except for one or two passes with a cultivator after planting.

For information on renting a no-till or strip-till planter, farmers can contact their county extension office, a local soil conservation district office or farm equipment dealer.

Support soil conservation - join the Cooperator Club

In the past year the District Commissioners have been able to sponsor events such as Soil Stewardship Week, Conservation Trade Fairs, and No-Till Information Meetings, and Fair Exhibits. The funds to sponsor these events come directly from contributions made to the Cooperator Club.

To join the Cooperator Club fill out the coupon below and send it to us with your contribution.

We would like to thank those who have contributed this past year and ask that you join again this year. Your tax deductible contribution will be appreciated.

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Hardin County Soil Conservation District Commissioners — Front row, left to right: Martin Broer, vice chairman, and Gary Walters, chairman. Back row, 1 to r: Jim Tidman, treasurer, and Caleb Knutson. Not present, Carroll Hobson and Harry Lawless.



Soil Conservation Service Office Personnel — Front row, left to right: Valerie Gerdes, soil conservationist; Steve Manternach, district conservationist; and Melinda Schwarck, state clerk. Back row, 1 to r: Fred Rosenkrans, part-time technician (W.A.E.), and Earnest Hoffa, state engineering aide. Not present, Susie Reece, part-time clerk. Fort Dodge area office personnel include Dennis Pate, area conservationist; Daryl Carpenter, agricultural engineer; Chuck Wright, civil engineering technician; and Boyce Nerhus, area clerk.

Percent ground cover, what does it mean?

With all the talk about conservation tillage, no-till, minimum till, ridge till, till plant planting systems, it's easy to get confused. The important point to remember is that crop residue left on the soil surface after planting protects the soil from soil erosion.

How do you know what percent of the ground is covered with residue after planting? The easiest way is to measure it.



IN THE ABOVE 8" DISTANCE—4
STALKS ARE COUNTED (X) WHICH
GIVES 50% RESIDUE COVERAGE

Place your measuring tape on the soil surface perpendicular to the planted row. Begin at one row and end at an adjacent row. Count the inch marks that have residue directly under them. See above diagram.

For example, if you have 36" rows and eighteen of the inch marks have residue under them you would have 50% of the ground covered with residue.

A minimum of 8-10 samples should be taken for reliability. Measuring should be done after planting.

Have you noticed erosion in your fence line?

If you notice erosion in fence lines like this you know you have an erosion problem. The problem however is not limited to just the area where the gully is.

Gully problems like this often mean that you are losing soil from the slopes in your field also. Soil lost from the surrounding hills has settled out in the fence line causing a build up in the fence which often takes years. Just as slowly as the fence line fills up the productivity from the sloping area is being reduced.

The best way to solve problems like this is to control the soil movement to the fence line. Reducing soil loss above the area will not only help control your fence line gully but it will also mean that you are extending the productivity of soils.

If your farm has problems like this and you want to solve them let our office know. We can give you an idea on what your soil loss is and suggestions on how to control it. The solution may be as simple as contouring or using conservation tillage and waterways. Or it might require terraces contouring conservation tillage. The solution is up to you. You decide what system of conservation practice that best fits your objectives.



Control soil movement to your fence line.



Contouring combined with crop residue can do an excellent job of controlling soil loss. These two conservation practices combined along with grassed waterways make up the resource management system for this field.

Val Gerdes moves to Winnebago County

For the past two years I have been working in Hardin County helping people to recognize soil erosion and how to control that erosion. Many of you have helped me as much as I have helped you. To you and all my friends in Hardin County I now say farewell. March 21, 1983 I started as the Soil Conservationist for Winnebago County.

I am glad to have had the opportunity to work with the Hardin County Conservation District Commissioners. I have enjoyed the tillage tours, programs, and activities they have sponsored very much. I wish them continued success in their efforts to treat soil erosion and get it under control. Their conservation tillage programs will continue to be very effective.

The commissioners have had an excellent Soil Conservation Service Staff to support them. District Conservationist Steven Manternach is one of the best in the state. Training under his supervision is a privilege. Earnest Hoffa, the technician for the office and Fred Rosenkrans have provided the cooperators of Hardin County with excellent service in the past, I'm sure this will continue. I thank them and the District Clerk, Melinda Schwarck for their guidance and support.

I hope the people of Hardin County continue to use the service and leadership of the District Commissioners and the Soil Conservation staff.

The job of reducing soil erosion is a very large one. With the cooperation of you people and the Soil Conservation District and Soil Conservation Service I am sure it can be accomplished. Best of luck in all your efforts.

Thank you for your cooperation in the past.

—Val Gerdes

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