

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

INFORMATIONAL ACTIVITIES

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Can help stop pollution with soil conservation 6-11-70

There is pollution in Davis County.

The problem probably isn't as pressing as the problems of highly populated areas, but Davis County farmers do contribute in some ways to our pollution problems.

One of the most serious forms of pollution is water pollution. Not only is this caused by industry, but also by hard rains on sloping cropland which moves top soil with animal waste, commercial fertilizers and chemicals into our streams.

Much of this type of pollution can be controlled by proper soil conservation methods and the Davis County Soil Conservation District is promoting and aiding the implementation of such methods.

Particular emphasis is being placed on soil conservation practices as next week's Soil and Water Conservation Week.

Runoff from farm land places deposits in our streams and also makes the water unfit for livestock and wildlife to drink.

The soil terraces, according to Verle Arnold, soil conservationist for Davis County, is one of the most effective ways to control this runoff.

When hard rains come, this type of terrace controls the runoff until it reaches the tile out-

lets, leaving the soil, fertilizer and chemicals in the field.

Several of these terraces have been installed in Davis County. Thus far, they are located on farms of Allen White, Stanley Baughman, Willard Hubbart, Harry Battin, Millard Mulcahey, LaVern Weibrenner, Dean Amstutz and Richard Birchmier.

Erosion is the worst single enemy of the farmer. It is ugly, wasteful and unnecessary. Water erosion robs valuable topsoil, destroys fertility of the land, takes away roads and bridges and covers other good land with silt.

Although water erosion is serious, farm conservation planning covers several areas. The purpose of such planning is to use each acre of agricultural land within its capability and to treat the various areas according to their need for protection and improvement.

Land capability maps (soil maps) are available for farms in Davis County.

According to C. Iles Heady, chairman of the Davis County Soil Conservation District, the aim of a farm conservation plan is to control erosion, maintain or improve productivity and provide grain and forage for the individual farmers' livestock needs.

What is involved in a conservation plan?

- Tillage operations on land that have slopes over four per cent are contoured. Those with more severe erosion hazards have contour strip cropping applied or are terraced.

- There are some areas that can be cropped intensively to row crops. When this is done, it is necessary to keep vigil on weed and insect populations and tillage conditions. When these become a problem the fields are seeded to a grass-legume combination and are left seeded one or two years.

- Grassland management includes rotation grazing, weed and brush control, fertilization and renovation and seeding to adapted varieties of grasses and legumes. In this area, trefoil-brome grass and alfalfa-orchard grass are most common.

- Wildlife is given consideration, especially as it pertains to wildfowl—either in farm ponds or in fields. Odd areas, permanent fence rows, etc., are left for wildlife habitat and mowing of these areas is delayed until after ground nesting birds have hatched to provide habitat for them.

- Timberland in Davis County—when properly managed and protected from grazing—can result in profitable land use and add

to scenic beauty.

Contour farming and improved pastures are expected to play greater roles in Davis County farming in the future.

Heady said farming in southeast Iowa sees contour farming, like the tile outlet terrace as a useful tool to use in helping to solve some of the problems of water erosion and pollution.

By using contour practices in tillage and planting as well as cultivation, the flow of the water off the land is slowed. This reduces the amount of silt reaching major streams. By reducing and slowing the water flow and siltation, the amount of chemical residues reaching major rivers, streams and lakes is reduced.

Contour farming may also help provide more food for our burgeoning population in the future. Heady said it can make it more feasible to raise food products on land not suitable for crops otherwise.

"As we use contour farming, especially in our area, we are conserving natural resources so vital to our welfare and survival," Heady said. "Each pound of soil we can save for future generations will strengthen the chances for a productive society."

Turning unproductive crop-

land into new or improved pastures is seen as having a double benefit in Davis County. It helps control erosion from hilly areas as well as improving the farm economy.

Heady said that much of the land in Davis County, because of soil, slope or erosion conditions, are better suited to grass than row crops. These acres often yield more profit per acre in pasture than when in corn and other crops.

The increasing numbers of cow-calf beef herds in the county create a need for new and improved pastures. Applying fertilizer, adding legumes such as birdsfoot trefoil and controlled stocking with cattle have increased beef production.

Heady said grasses and legumes tie down the soil with their roots. They increase the rate and amount of water that will soak into the soil.

Conservation, in general, has another benefit to farmers. It can increase the value of the farm. Heady said that a prospective buyer looks for land that his eye tells him will grow a good crop and lend itself to good field arrangement.

Waterways that are crossable with machinery are more appealing than ditches which must be

detoured and divide the land into smaller fields.

A steep slope contoured, strip cropped or terraced also allows the farmer to operate his machinery on the level. There is no better way to show the value of land than have a good crop of any variety," Heady said.

The activities of the Davis County Soil Conservation District are no longer confined to the farm. The Iowa Legislature has made official that cities and towns are included in each soil conservation district.

Heady said regardless of where we live, we all have a stake in soil and water conservation. Loss of topsoil from heavy rains, wind erosion, polluted air from dust storms, threats of siltation of our lakes, all mean heavy economic losses to the farmer and city resident.

He continued that communities and state and local governments are asking the Soil Conservation Service and soil conservation districts to take on new and broader functions.

These include assistance in community planning, orderly changes in land use, multiple use of resources, water supply and development and protection, soil and water management on non-agricultural land, watershed

and entire river basin planning, wildlife and recreational developments, conservation education and many others.

There are many agencies involved in soil and water conservation besides the U. S. Soil Conservation Service, which provides technical assistance.

The State Soil Conservation Committee directs the activities of Iowa's 100 soil conservation districts. The Extension Service provides educational assistance. The Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service and the Farmers Home Administration are both active in the soil and water conservation programs.

In Davis County 383 farmers participated in the conservation program of the ASC.

Emphasis on local involvement and broad public benefits were the key points of the 1969 Agricultural Conservation Program (ACP) and continue in the 1970 program. Specific pollution-abatement responsibilities were added for 1970.

Last year under the program conservation measures on Davis County farms, there was a total investment of approximately \$232,376. ACP cost sharing accounted for about one-half of this amount and producers matched or exceeded the public

investment with their own resources.

Conservation practices carried out on participating farms in Davis County included permanent vegetative cover, \$36,104; limestone, \$9,309; forestry trees and shrubs, \$1,117; control of shrubs, \$4,469; water impoundment reservoirs, \$18,426; pipeline water facilities, \$2,784; sod waterways, \$12,490; terraces, \$6,481; erosion control, dams, \$22,732; open drainage, \$1,411; underground drainage, \$131; land shaping or grading, \$660; and beautification, \$67.

Vern K. Henderson, chairman of the ASC committee, said that sometimes people misunderstand this conservation program. It is designed to help assure protection of land resources for the future.

"Frequently farmers take short-term losses in installing conservation practices in order to provide for long range benefits which they themselves may not directly profit from," he said. "This occurs, for instance, when farmers give up part of their cropland to provide for conservation structures and for water retention to reduce erosion and prevent stream siltation and sometimes to prevent flooding of downstream communities.