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Conservation value proven—

County's heavy spring rains

cause 'severe' soil losses

Mother Nature, through her above normal rains on Davis County this spring and summer, has been one of the best salesmen for the value of wise conservation practices, according to local conservation officials.

Despite the severe erosion that has been caused in Davis County by the heavy rains, Verle Arnold, district conservationist with the U.S. Soil Conservation Service, says the soil losses on fields here that are protected by various conservation measures have not been as great as they have been on unprotected fields.

And when compared with

farm fields in central and northern Iowa, Arnold says, erosion here generally has been less severe, although he still labeled it as "quite serious."

The conservationist estimated that some fields in Davis County have lost about 10 tons of topsoil per acre because of erosion thus far this year. The figure represents soil losses more than three times what is considered an "acceptable" loss, Arnold said.

Although Arnold said "a lot of acres" in Davis County have suffered from severe erosion, other fields—particularly those on which farmers have used such conservation practices and devices as contour plowing, terraces, erosion control structures, and grassed waterways—soil losses have ranged between three and 10 tons per acre.

But the amount of topsoil that has been washed from farm fields in Davis County is staggering, Arnold pointed out, since a three-ton loss on one acre represents only

about the thickness of a sheet of paper. On some Iowa farms, where losses have been estimated at nearly 100 tons per acre, about one-third of an inch of the topsoil has been eroded.

Because sheet erosion on a field doesn't scar the landscape, the extent of soil loss may not be apparent to farmers. Only when silt is piled at the foot of a hill, in the ditch alongside a road or at a fence line are many persons fully aware of the damage erosion has done, conservation officials said.

Arnold also blamed the increased erosion this year on the larger number of acres that have been prepared for row crops. Noting that grass seeding is the ideal soil preserver, he said some farmers here have plowed hillside pastures and some have even ignored contour plowing suggestions, resulting in increased chances for erosion.

Soil washed from fields has also caused another problem in some fields, Arnold said. Soil particles coated with agricultural chemicals have

been washed onto grassed waterways, killing the grasses and resulting in unprotected ditches and eventually more soil erosion there.

In other areas, these chemicals have been washed into streams and ponds.

The excessive erosion this year has prompted many farmers in Davis County to seek conservation assistance from the county Soil Conservation District and the SCS, Arnold said. Even without the big increase in these requests, he said an estimated \$250,000 worth of soil-saving practices will be installed in Davis County this summer, weather permitting.

Included in the construction plans for the summer are some 50 new erosion control structures, in addition to hundreds of feet of tile-outlet terraces. Several individual projects will carry a price tag of over \$5,000, Arnold said.

"When the guys start spending this kind of money, it's an indication that they had a pretty good year last year, and that they are getting some benefit from

conservation," he pointed out.

Despite increasing interest in installation of conservation practices, Arnold said rising costs of materials and shortages of these materials—particularly tile—has thrown a cloud of uncertainty over this year's construction plans.

The local conservationist also attributed part of the increased interest in conservation to the availability of state and federal money for cost-sharing on individual projects.

Farmers can receive up to 50 per cent cost-sharing on erosion control projects, he pointed out. And a new feature this year of the federal government's cost-sharing program provides for long-term conservation projects on farms.

Under such projects Arnold said extensive conservation work would be done over a three to 10 year period with the federal government providing money for half the cost of the work.