

FARMERS HAVE A CHOICE: GRASS OR GULLIES

Almost every farm has at least one--a natural drainageway that tends to erode. But fortunately for farmers, they don't have to accept the scars inflicted by flowing water. They can choose between grass or gullies.

Kurt Hoeft, District Conservationist for the USDA Soil Conservation Service (SCS), says grassed waterways are an excellent method of correcting gully problems and preventing new gullies from forming in natural drainage areas.

Grassed waterways are created by grading and shaping a natural drainageway to form a smooth, bowl-shaped channel. This area is seeded to sod-forming grasses.

"Runoff water that flows down the drainageway flows across the grass rather than tearing away soil and forming a larger gully," Hoeft says. "An outlet is often installed at the base of the drainageway to stabilize the water and prevent a gully from forming."

Hoeft explains the grass cover protects the drainageway from gully erosion and acts as a filter, absorbing some of the chemicals and nutrients in runoff water. Hoeft says the vegetation also provides cover for small birds and animals.

SCS provides assistance to farmers who would like to solve their gully problems. SCS conservationists and technicians help farmers plan conservation systems and also prepare designs and specifications.

Some things SCS will look for include a proper outlet for surface runoff at the bottom of the waterway, the

possible need for tile drainage to help establish vegetation in the waterway, and whether other soil conservation measures will be needed to prevent siltation.

Hoefft says that grassed waterways require only a few "courtesies" to help them in good shape. These "courtesies" include: lifting farm implements out of the ground and shutting off spray equipment when crossing them; not using them as roadways; fertilizing them as needed; periodic mowing; and avoiding planting end rows along their edges.