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SPRING IS TIME TO REPAIR SYSTEM — — —

Soil Expert Tells Means Of Maintaining Effective Terraces

Will your terrace system be effective this year?

It will if it is properly maintained, says Dewey Bondurant, state conservation engineer for the U. S. Soil Conservation Service, Des Moines.

Spring is the time to repair terraces and bring them to top effectiveness if the terraced field is to be planted to row crops this year. Terraces should be inspected and plans made now to do any needed maintenance and repair.

Bondurant said the most common need for terrace maintenance includes repairing breaks and holes, raising low spots in the ridge, enlarging or regrading the channel, and reshaping the front slope.

Farm equipment can be used for many of these jobs. But if major repairs are needed or the farm equipment is needed for farm

work, a conservation contractor should be hired for the work. Contractors often have more work than they can do in the short spring season before planting, so their services should be arranged for early.

Terrace breaks are obvious, but holes through the terrace possibly caused by rodents, are not so easily found. To repair, a wide trench should be cut in the terrace down to the level of undisturbed ground below the hole. The sides of the excavation should be flattened to slopes not steeper than one foot vertical to one foot horizontal before backfilling with well compacted earth. Breaks are repaired the same way removing all loose material from the bottom and flattening the banks before backfilling.

Channels can be enlarged by raising the terrace ridge when plowing. Systematic back-furrowing to the terrace ridge and

leaving the dead furrow in the channel each time the field is plowed will maintain adequate channel capacity. The back furrow should be thrown just short of the terrace ridge. Placing it too high on the ridge will result in a concave or dish-like front slope. Dish front slopes can be corrected by back-furrowing uphill to the low point of the dish and then reploting the entire front slope starting with the back furrow at the ridge. Low points along the ridge may also be raised by repeated rounds of plowing, throwing the back furrow to the ridge each time.

Construction equipment can also be used to restore channel capacity and to reshape concave front slopes. Both bulldozer and motor graders are well suited for this work. They are also well suited to restore heavily silted areas in the channel and reestablish the channel grade. Such repair is difficult to do with a plow although it can frequently be accomplished with a front end loader or a blade on a farm tractor.

The intakes used with tile outlet terraces are another item which may need maintenance. Intakes accidentally hit by machinery must be straightened or replaced. Trash may have clogged the openings. This will have to be removed after each rain if necessary.

Grass cover on steep back slopes may need to be seeded or reestablished, said John Maddy, Conservation Agronomist of the U. S. Soil Conservation Service. Hand broadcast seedings of bromegrass made in the winter have proved a very successful method of

seeding terrace backslopes. Seed spread on icy surfaces or deep snow will not stay in place but thin snow or frozen ground is a satisfactory seedbed for winter seeding.

Some farmers may wish to completely rebuild their terrace system rather than spend money in maintaining their old system. Older terraces may not be parallel and have sharp turns and narrow spacings. Farmers who have these old systems and are having difficulty in farming them should seriously consider rebuilding the system. Modern terrace systems are generally parallel with spacings established to make farming operations easier. Possibly the field can be diverted to conservation use this season and the terrace system rebuilt during the summer.

The district conservationist in the local Soil Conservation District can help to determine what terrace maintenance is needed. The District will also assist in revising old terrace systems and in laying out new systems. Contact them early if the work is to be done this spring.