

All that rain washed away almost all of that topsoil 7/8/90

USDA: Erosion worst since '74

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A 300,000-ton chunk of Black Hawk County is missing.

But don't bother calling detectives, unless one of them is a soil sleuth.

Soil erosion in June was the worst in six years, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Soil Conservation Service.

J. Michael Nethery, state SCS director, says torrential June rains tore away at least 60 million tons of topsoil from Iowa farmland.

"The earlier rains saturated the soil and caused some severe erosion," he said.

"But the storms that moved across the state these past two weeks hurt the most."

Parts of Northeast Iowa received more than 2 additional inches of rain last week, bringing totals since April 1 to nearly 3 inches above normal. Waukon in Allamakee County was hit with 5.72 inches.

The gully-washers uprooted freshly planted corn and soybeans, taking farm chemicals and hopes of normal yields downstream with them.

The rains also carried away tons of rich topsoil.

Tama County apparently took the biggest hit.

A survey of county soil conservation offices showed that Tama farmers had an estimated 294,000 acres that each lost 20 or more tons of soil.

Nethery said no one avoided the

record losses.

"We even had erosion in north-central counties that seldom see that kind (of problem)," he said.

But Bill Brewer, spokesman for Iowa Agriculture Secretary Dale Cochran, said it could have been worse.

"Generally speaking, Northeast Iowa came out of it pretty well, compared to some of the southern counties," he said.

Silver linings aside, the SCS says the storms undid much of the progress farmers have made in controlling erosion in the last decade.

Water erosion on Iowa cropland dipped from 8.2 tons per acre in 1982 to about 6.5 tons per acre in 1987, he said, giving credit to advances made in planting and tillage techniques and terrace construction.

Brewer said June's rate was nearly four times the 1987 figure.

"The bad thing is, much of the damage to those terraces and such are not one-shot deals," he said. "Now they'll get it every time it rains."

The SCS estimates that as much as a quarter of the terraces across the state were damaged at a cost of about \$3 million.

Terraces are designed to hold runoff from deluges that usually occur once every decade.

"The erosion is going to make the fields rougher to farm this year with all the small gullies it created," said Jim Ayen, SCS conservationist.

"About the only positive thing that comes from rains like this is that a landowner can see where a grass waterway is needed."