

# Core4 Better Soil. Cleaner Water. Greater Profits. Brighter Future.

## Conservation for Agriculture's Future



### Contour Stripcropping

Crop rotation and contouring combined in equal-width strips of row crops (usually corn and soybeans) planted on the contour and alternated with strips of oats, grass or legumes.

### How it works

Crops are arranged so that a strip of meadow or small grain is alternated with a strip of row crop. Not more than half a field can be planted to row crops. Meadow slows runoff, increases infiltration, traps sediment and provides surface cover. Ridges formed by contoured rows slow water flow which reduces erosion. Rotation the strips from row crops to legumes allows nutrient-needy crops to benefit from the nitrogen added to the soil by legumes. This practice combines the beneficial effects of contouring and crop rotation.

### How it helps

- Contour stripcropping reduces soil erosion and protects water quality
- Contour stripcropping may help reduce fertilizer costs

### Planning ahead

- How many acres of row crops do you need?
- Does your crop rotation allow for alternating row crops with small grains and forages?
- Will herbicide carryover be a problem?

### Tech notes

- Row crop strips need to be nearly the same width as small grain or meadow strips. A 10% variance is allowed.
- The proportion of row crops, close growing crops and meadow crops should be consistent with the farm enterprise crop mix. Even-year rotation lengths are preferable to odd-year rotation lengths for ease of design. The number of fields needed to produce a nearly constant acreage of each crop for each year in the rotation is equal to one half of the years in the rotation.
- Plant grass or legume field borders instead of end rows and establish waterways as part of your stripcropping system. Field borders shall be wide enough to turn equipment without additional end rows.
- Key lines used for laying out strips should not exceed a 2% slope, except within 100 feet of an outlet where the grade can be 3%.
- Strip widths may be adjusted downward to accommodate your equipment width for even rounds, and to accommodate any correction strip needed to keep strips within prescribed row grade limits.
- Stripcropping is not as effective if crop strips become too wide, especially on steep slopes.
- All runoff shall be delivered to stable outlets, such as grassed waterways, field borders, etc.

### Maintenance

- Keep the strip widths consistent from year to year
- Always farm parallel to the strip boundaries.
- If a meadow crop fails or is winter killed, NRCS can help you make adjustments in your rotation schedule.