

Contact:
Joanna Pope, NRCS Public Affairs Officer
(402) 437-4123

GOT A GULLY? FIX IT. DON'T DISC IT.

Conservation compliance requires treating ephemeral gully erosion on highly erodible land.

LINCOLN, Oct. 4, 2017 – Harvest isn't just about cutting stalks, it's about taking stock.

According to Britt Weiser, state resource conservationist with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in Lincoln, during harvest farmers should study the areas in their fields where erosion is occurring.

“If you notice rough spots in your cropland where the soil has washed away, take stock. Chances are that area is not only losing soil and productivity, but it could potentially cost you your USDA farm program benefits,” Weiser said.

Since the passage of the 1985 Farm Bill, farmers have been required to control erosion on fields that are classified as highly erodible. A non-compliance ruling can impact the benefits farmers receive from USDA agencies, such as access to federal crop insurance premium subsidies and conservation program dollars.

Each spring, NRCS conducts compliance reviews on a random selection of highly erodible fields to determine if erosion has been adequately controlled. The two factors measured for conservation compliance are sheet-and-rill erosion, and ephemeral gully erosion.

Sheet and rill erosion is generally controlled through no-till farming. Ephemeral gullies are small ditches in fields that are often smoothed out with a disc. According to Weiser, discing or smoothing gullies does not fix the problem, and it puts farmers at risk of losing USDA farm program benefits.

“Using a disc to smooth out ditches in cropland can make the issue worse, causing soil to be more unstable and susceptible to washing away. If it is necessary to smooth out a ditch, farmers should plant a cover crop or grass, or install another practice to prevent erosion from occurring.” Weiser said, “We’re telling farmers, ‘Fix it. Don’t Disc it.’”

NRCS is available to help “fix it” by providing both technical and financial assistance to install conservation practices like no-till farming, cover crops, grassed waterways, and terraces to control erosion.

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“The conservationists in our field offices are available to help farmers identify ephemeral erosion in their fields or where it may occur in the future, and assist them with applying the conservation practices that best fit their farming operations,” Weiser said.

If you discover ephemeral gully erosion this fall, visit your local NRCS office before discing any areas of highly erodible fields. For more information, visit your local USDA Service Center.

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Note to Reporters: Photos are available by contacting Joanna Pope at joanna.pope@ne.usda.gov or (402) 437-4123. Low resolution examples are shown below.



The top two photos show ephemeral erosion on cropland. The bottom photos show conservation practices that can be installed with help from NRCS to control ephemeral erosion – grass water way shown left and cover crop shown right.

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