

NON-TILLAGE OPTIONS

INTRODUCTION

This section provides tools which can help farmers control soil erosion and protect water resources. When soil moves off individual fields or the farm, it takes valuable nutrients, pesticides and organic matter. Farmers cannot afford the economic loss, nor the adverse environmental impacts of allowing soil to wash or blow away.

Some conservation practices will cost money. But, money spent in a rational manner is a sound investment. Increased yields and reduced production costs will make up for short-term losses in as little as two or three years.

Conservation practices (such as those outlined in this section) allow safe removal of surplus water that falls on the land or offer protection against damaging winds. However, a good conservation plan also must include wise use of fertilizers (whether commercial or livestock manure), careful handling of pesticides, enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat and maintenance of wetlands. Conservation will protect the land and improve its production base. It also increases land value.

It is impossible to recommend a single preferred list of management options to Ontario farmers. Practices must be tailored to individual fields on each farm. Each conservation plan must meet the objectives of the individual producer.

Legislation

As with any industry, agriculture is regulated by Provincial and Federal law. Several existing statutes could apply to conservation planning:

Provincial Statutes

- Lakes and Rivers Improvement Act
- Ontario Water Resources Act
- Environmental Protection Act
- Pesticides Act
- Conservation Authorities Act
- Public Lands Act
- Drainage Act



An investigation into how much erosion has taken place on fields helps plan the best use for land.

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Federal Statutes (Take Precedence Over Provincial Statutes)

- The Canadian Fisheries Act
- Navigable Waterways Protection Act

There may also be bylaws in your local municipality which may affect your plans. It is your responsibility to ask questions first and meet all requirements and obtain necessary permits.

Land Use Capability

The first and most important step in conservation farming is using the land within its capability. Select a reasonable land use program in order to succeed in other parts of the conservation system.

Selecting a good land use for each field is partly a matter of deciding whether the field is suited for crops, pasture, woods, wildlife or recreation.

In agricultural terms, land can be classified into two broad categories, that which is suited for crop production and that which is best suited for permanent grass or trees. Although land is suited for cropland, it may still require special treatment such as contouring, simple water management, crop rotations or conservation structures. Land designated as non-cropland may be suited for pasture, woodlot or retired from farm use altogether.



Consider the alternatives when preparing a conservation plan. If necessary, consult experienced planners for help.