

By Gene Heathers Civil Engineering Technician Natural Resources Conservation Service

The last 12 months have brought heavy rains and several storms to many of our southwest Nebraska farms.

With the increase in rain, we are also seeing an increase in erosion.

The soils in our area are very prone to erosion and unfortunately the top soil layers are not very thick. If water flows for a distances of 400 to 500 feet, it will start to cut and the erosion process is alive and well.

In many cases, simply using a high residue cropping system or farming no-till will be enough to control water erosion. However, when the slopes are long or the hills are steep, residue alone is not enough to protect the field.

As we evaluate fields like this, we need to look at some additional practices to protect the resource base adequately.

One alternative is to install terraces to reduce the length of the slope.

Terraces shorten the flow of water to safe intervals and keep the runoff on the field where it can be used by crops and recharge groundwater. Terrace layouts can be very flexible and accommodating for modern farming practices and equipment sizes.

Most of the terraces built today are at least 250 to 500 feet apart, built to fit the larger equipment of today and can be straightened up to make farming easier.

Wider intervals and channels also make maintenance easier which will increase the life span of the investment. When terraces are used in conjunction with 100% no-till, intervals can be even wider apart.

There is some assistance available to help with the cost of installing terraces and other conservation work.

One of the most popular programs is the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). It is a federal government program that allows funds to be secured for natural resource improvement and protection.

The producer works with NRCS in developing and implementing a plan to address the concerns. The work can be done all at once or be spread over a few years.

Another program that is available is the Nebraska Soil and Water Conservation Program (NSWCP). NSWCP is funded by the state of Nebraska and administered by the local Natural Resources District.

Agreements are generally short term and annual maximums apply to larger projects.

If you would like to have a field evaluated for erosion concerns or have any questions, contact you local NRCS office.

Now is the time to start the planning process for work to be done this fall or next spring.