

Buffer Initiative

get the **MOST** out of your land!!!

—economic —environmental —habitat

Fall 2008

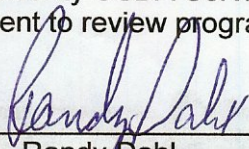
To: Fillmore County Landowners
RE: Buffer Strips

This letter has been sent to encourage you to plant vegetated filter strips/buffers on farmland around and along water resources including streams, rivers, sinkholes and wetlands. As County Commissioners, we support the efforts of the Fillmore County Soil and Water Conservation District, Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources to promote programs designed to improve our county's water quality.

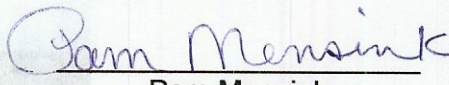
Having natural vegetation near water bodies serves several purposes. The greatest advantage is the preservation and improvement of our county's water quality. Natural vegetated barriers help reduce the amount of silt and nutrients entering waterways, reduces the impact of flooding and help to reduce pollutants entering sinkholes that can contaminate drinking water supplies. Furthermore, the County Shoreland Ordinance requires a 50' buffer of permanent vegetation along public waters unless the land has an approved conservation plan. Buffer strips also provide a safety setback for farm machinery, provide a buffer for manure and chemical spray applications and enhances wildlife habitat.

The Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) can provide financial assistance for installing filter strips/buffers on qualifying cropland adjacent to rivers, streams or sinkholes from 30 feet to 120 feet wide. CRP payments will depend on the types of soil being enrolled. Currently in Fillmore County, annual payments can range from \$131-\$198/acre for a 10 year or 15 year contract including one-time signing incentive payments. In addition, cost share up to 90% to establish the grass cover is also provided.

In summary, we fully endorse the efforts to promote the establishment of filter strips/buffers in Fillmore County. We encourage you to call the Fillmore County USDA Service Center at 507-765-3878 and schedule an appointment to review program options and eligibility requirements.



Randy Dahl
Fillmore County Board of
Commissioners
Chair



Pam Mensink
Fillmore Soil and Water
Conservation District
Chair



Photo provided by URSD/NRCS



\$\$\$ BUFFERS MAKE CENTS \$\$\$

- Guaranteed payments
- Remove lower yielding areas
- Showcases conservation
- Payments can go to landowner, renter or both
- Helps you comply with regulations

—SIGN UP TODAY—

CRP Buffer/Filter Strip

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What do I plant in the grass strip?

You have the option to seed two different types of grasses: native warm season or cool season. The most popular mix for buffers/filters is a 75% blend of native warm season switch grass with the remaining portion split between native cool season grasses such as Canada wild rye and western wheat grass. This mixture is seeded at 8 pounds/acre. The NRCS/SWCD or Farm Bill Assistance representative can provide technical assistance with CRP establishment.

2. How wide does the grass strip have to be?

Depending on the slope and other factors, you have the option to enroll a minimum of 30 feet up to 120 feet.

3. How much will it cost me to establish the grass strip?

Typically the CRP program pays up to 90% of the seedbed preparation, seed, and seeding. The Farm Service Agency determines the cost-share amount. Depending on the price of seed and if you hire a vendor to help you, total costs typically run \$70-\$100/acre to establish a filter strip with out of pocket expenses around \$10-\$12/acre. (seedbed preparation = \$10/acre, seed = \$40-\$60/acre, seeding = \$20-\$30/acre). The landowner must pay for these expenses and then reimbursed by the FSA. In some cases, watershed projects will help cover the difference.

4. What kind of maintenance is necessary?

Remember 3-2-1! For native grass plantings we recommend the following:

*Year 1--*Mow the filter strip at least **3** times during the first growing season at a height of about 8" during the months of June, July and August.

Year 2-- Mow the CRP **2** times during the months of June and August.

*Year 3--*The third year you have the option of mowing it **1** more time or burning it in the spring.

If you do a good job mowing the filter strip the first three years you should have very little weed problems the remaining years of the contract. The CRP helps pay for some of these maintenance practices.

5. When can I mow my CRP?

During the first three years of establishment you can mow it according to your conservation plan (Usually 2-3 times from June-August). After the establishment period, if you feel you need to mow it for weed control, you can mow between Aug. 1-15. You must get permission to mow from FSA after the establishment period.

6. What happens if I sell the field with CRP on it?

If the buyer is eligible (US citizen, Adjusted Gross Income, Sod/Swamp, etc.) they can continue the contract. The payment is then made in proportion to the amount of the year owned. So if the land is sold April 1st, the old owner and new owner would each get 50% of the payment for that year. If the new owner doesn't want to continue the CRP, a full refund of all payments, plus interest, and liquidated damages must be made.

7. Can I drive on it?

The answer is basically no. You are required to maintain the cover, and you must have access to the field. If continual driving disrupts the cover, no. If you drive on it once to check the cover, that would be okay.

8. How can CRP help me comply with manure and pesticide/herbicide setback laws?

In Minnesota there are minimum setback distances from open water if applying fertilizers or chemicals. A CRP buffer/filter can help you comply with those regulations.

9. Can I control access to my CRP land?

Yes, it still remains private property.

