



Conservation Practice Overview

August 2023

Terrace (Code 600)

An earth embankment or a combination ridge and channel, constructed across the field slope.

Practice Information

This practice generally applies to cropland, but may also be used on other areas where field crops are grown, such as wildlife or recreation lands.

Terraces can be installed to reduce the slope length for erosion control, intercept and conduct runoff to a safe outlet, trap sediment, retain runoff for moisture conservation, prevent gully development, and alter the land surface to improve farmability.



A variety of terrace configurations have been developed as a result of research and field experience. Four common types of terrace include—

- Broad-based—farmed on both sides and used on more uniform gently sloping fields;
- Steep backslope—a steep downstream slope in permanent cover;
- Narrow-based—steep on both sides and have permanent cover planted on both sides; and
- Flat channel or level—used to conserve moisture as well as control erosion.

Terraces require careful design, layout, and construction to provide erosion control while maintaining farmability. Terraces may be parallel on uniform terrain or vary from parallel when the terrain is undulating. Since parallel terraces are usually preferred, designs often provide for cuts and fills to improve terrace alignment.

This practice has a minimum expected life of 10 years. The operation and maintenance plan includes inspection and repair of the terraces and outlets, maintenance of terrace height and vegetation, and removal of accumulated sediment. Inspections are performed periodically and after major storm events.

Common Associated Practices

NRCS Conservation Practice Standard (CPS) Terrace (Code 600) must have a safe outlet to convey the runoff water to a point where it will not cause damage. Commonly associated conservation practices include NRCS CPSs Grassed Waterway (Code 412) and Underground Outlet (Code 620). Vegetation, if necessary, is applied according to NRCS CPS Critical Area Planting (Code 342).

For further information, contact your local NRCS field office.