

## Estimating Economic Impact of Conservation Field Borders on Farm Revenue

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### Abstract

Potential opportunity costs of conservation buffer practices were examined to determine the effects of proximity to field edge and adjacent plant community (APC) type (crop, herbaceous, and wooded) on crop yields, relative to field interiors for corn (*Zea mays*) and soybean (*Glycine max*) systems on 150 fields in Mississippi. Yield data were obtained from combines equipped with a yield monitor and Global Position System (GPS) for years 1999-2003 for three counties in central Mississippi. A partial budget format was used to develop net change in profit analyses on corn and soybean crops with and without conservation practice CP-33: Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds. Yield reductions averaged across three APC types at swath 1 (defined as one 7.32-m-wide combine header pass) were -2,963 kg/ha and -230 kg/ha compared to mean interior yields of 9,828 kg/ha and 2,498 kg/ha for corn and soybeans, respectively. Partial budget analyses for corn showed that on average, enrollment of a 7.32-m (36-ft) CP-33 border would increase net returns when next to APC-type crop, herbaceous, and wood.

### Introduction

As part of a larger investigation studying wildlife benefits of field border management practices (13), agronomic impacts on crop yields associated with four swathes (passes) of a combine in relation to plant community types and relative to field interiors were examined. Of particular interest was how mean yields changed spatially from crop edge to field interior and what effect three plant community types (crop, herbaceous, or wood) had on mean yields along the edge (swath 1) and on subsequent swathes (swaths 2, 3, and 4) further into the field. If crop yields were consistently less along edges due to edge effect, plant community type, or both, a higher economic return along field perimeters might occur with the implementation of a conservation practice such as habitat buffers for upland birds (CP-33). This study provides insight into costs and benefits of replacing lower-yielding field edges with conservation buffers.

Generally, crop yields are reduced near edges relative to field interiors and thus field edges are agronomically less valuable (5), and yields are generally presumed to be lower near edges or "headlands" than in the main body of the field (16). Several studies have shown headlands to yield significantly less than the rest of the field in cereals (1,6,16) and root crops (7). Lower crop yields on headlands have been attributed to soil compaction, poor seedbed preparation, greater weed abundance, shading by tall field boundary vegetation, and competition from tree roots (1). Fully sprayed (herbicide) headlands yield on average 18% less grain per hectare than midfield, although differences varied from a 67% reduction to a 24.9% increase in yield (1). Differences between yields from headlands and the main body of a field may be greater where soil type is more prone to compaction, and/or where the field is bordered by trees or a competitive hedge (16). Crop inputs (fertilizer) and protection (fungicide, herbicide, and insecticide) begin and end on field edges that may result in over-

and under-applications (*personal observation*). Irrigation may begin and end along edges resulting in over- or under-watering of crops. Additionally, crops adjacent to wood plant communities are frequently lower yielding than field interiors. Semple et al. (12) found that shading of field plants adversely affected crop growth and yields and the net effect of shelter and shade resulted in a 50% reduction in yield. Presence of trees at the field edge has been shown to have the greatest effect on adjacent crop yields: areas shaded by trees produced 4.4 tons/ha wheat versus areas not shaded which produced 8.1 tons/ha (15). Thus, headlands or field edges are frequently lower yielding due to stresses that field interiors lack.

A salient consideration in replacement of low-yielding field margins with buffer strips or similar practices is whether edge effects (i.e., lesser yields due to aforementioned factors) move to field interiors. In an experiment on yield of sugar beet and winter wheat, Sparkes et al. (15) reported that headland effects did not move to field interiors when field

Of the fields, 20.0% (n = 30) had crop, 41.0% (n = 62) herbaceous, and 39.0% (n = 58) wood adjacent plant community (APC) type present. Of the 104 corn fields, 22.0% (n = 23) had crop, 40.0% (n = 41) herbaceous, and 38.0% (n = 40) wood APC present. Of the 46 soybean fields, 13.0% (n = 6) had crop, 45.0% (n = 21) herbaceous, and 42.0% (n = 19) wood APC present. Of the 104 corn fields, 16.0% of edge (field perimeter) was crop APC type, 37.0% herbaceous, and 47.0% wood. Of the 46 soybean fields, 9.0% of edge was crop APC type, 40.0% herbaceous, and 51.0% wood.

For all corn and soybean fields in the study area, field border segments that had a crop APC type present, always had the same crop type as the field itself (e.g., if a corn field had all three APC types present – crop, herbaceous, and wood – the crop type adjacent to the field was always corn).

Mean annual precipitation for Clay, Lowndes, and Noxubee counties was 161.60, 159.87, 161.07, and 158.83 cm, respectively, for years 2000-2003. Mean temperatures for the three counties over the four years were least in January (-1.6°C) and greatest in August (33.9°C) (18).

### **Yield Data Collection**

GPS yield monitor crop data were obtained from combine operators in Clay, Lowndes, and Noxubee counties, Mississippi for 2000-2003. Confidentiality of all data was maintained and protected through anonymity. Data for 150 fields were downloaded from memory cards [John Deere Green Star and Ag Leader, (producers' chosen equipment)] onto a personal computer and converted to shape files. Yield data were imported into Microsoft Excel with John Deere JD Office and Ag Leader desktop computer software. Yield data were cleaned in ArcMAP 8.3 through a two-step filtering process that used query builder to eliminate erroneous points originating from various sources of errors common to GPS equipped combine yield monitors [e.g., rapid speed changes, full header width not cut, header position was up versus down, lost signal, erroneous position information, and improperly calibrated sensor, (3)].

This observational study was an incompp

ANOVA tests of fixed effects are relatively robust to deviations from normality, the mixed model ANOVA on untransformed values was used. Homoscedasticity was checked by covariance modeled with a group effect in SAS with TYPE=CS (covariance structure), and TYPE=VC (variance components). The PROC MEANS procedure (SAS Institute Inc., Cary, NC) was used to obtain mean yields for each swath and associated APC type and field interior, the ratio of mean yield for each swath to mean yield interior, and the difference between mean yield for each swath and mean yield interior. The PROC MIXED procedure (SAS Institute Inc., Cary, NC) was used to test for main effects of swath and adjacent plant community type and swath × community type interactions for the response variable yield. The LSMEANS SLICE option was used to test simple effects of APC type (crop, herbaceous, wood) within swath and effect of swathes 1 to 4 within adjacent community type on mean yield estimates. The LSMEANS PDIF option was used for multiple comparisons of least square mean estimates and standard error for yield (kg/ha) by pairwise comparisons of swath by APC type (9).

A partial budget format (8) was used to develop net change in profit analyses on corn/soybean row crop rotations with and without conservation practice CP-33: Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds. Justification for use of a partial budget (versus an enterprise budget) originates from the need to analyze a partial change being made to the overall farming operation. Partial budgets provide formal and consistent methods for calculating expected changes in profit from a proposed change in the operation, thus it compares profitability of status quo, with a new alternative (8). Additional and reduced revenue and cost components of the partial budget are identified in Table 1. A break-even equation may be specified from the table components that require that the advantages of the proposed changes be set equal to the disadvantages as follows:

$$\sum CRP_{cij} + \sum VC_{cij} = \sum GR_{cij} + \sum GOV_{cij} + \sum EST_{ciji} + \sum MNT_{ciji} + \sum COC_{ciji}, \forall_c \quad [1]$$

where CRP = CP-33 payments, VC = variable costs of crop production associated with implementing CP-33 independent of yield, GR = gross revenue from crop, GOV = government payments associated with leaving land in agricultural production, EST = prorated establishment cost of CP-33, MNT = maintenance costs of CP-33, and COC = cost of capital invested in CP-33.

In order to determine which swath and APC type combination or which swath irrespective of the APC type in which CP-33 is either an economic advantage or disadvantage, net change in profit (NCP) gross revenue was obtained by solving Equation 1 for NPC as follows:

$$\sum NPC_{cij} = \sum CRP_{cij} + \sum VC_{cij} - (\sum GR_{cij} + \sum GOV_{cij} + \sum EST_{cij} + \sum MNT_{cij} + \sum COC_{cij}), \forall_c \quad [2]$$

The net change in profit was used to identify which swathes and APC type combinations had sufficient net returns to economically outperform the alternative of implementing CP-33. Typically, CRP payments are made to the landowner, which may or may not be the producer. For this study, we assumed that the operator owned the land in production and received the CRP payments similar to Stull et al. (17). Ten-year (1995-2004) average prices for corn and soybeans were used to calculate revenues (10).

Table 1. Partial budget for calculating net change in profit analysis equation. Proposed change: enroll field margins in CP-33 Habitat buffers for upland birds.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Increased revenue CRP <sup>s</sup>	Decreased revenue GR <sup>u</sup> GOV <sup>v</sup>
Decreased costs VC <sup>t</sup>	Increased costs EST <sup>w</sup> MNT <sup>x</sup> COC <sup>y</sup>
Totals CRP + VC	Totals GR + GOV + EST+MNT+COC
${}^z\text{NPC} = (\text{CRP}+\text{VC}) - (\text{GR} + \text{GOV} + \text{EST}+\text{MNT}+\text{COC})$	

<sup>s</sup> CRP = CP-33 average payments received from enrolling field margins in the CRP.

<sup>t</sup> VC = sum of variable costs of grain production removed from operation.

<sup>u</sup> GR = sum of gross revenues of grain production removed from operation.

<sup>v</sup> GOV = sum of government payments received by the producer for crop grown.

<sup>w</sup> EST = establishment costs for CP-33 spread out over life of the buffer.

<sup>x</sup> MNT = maintenance costs of the buffer per year.

<sup>y</sup> COC = cost of capital invested in the buffer per year using average investment times interest rate of 6%.

<sup>z</sup> NPC = net change in profit gross revenue.

Variable production costs for corn and soybeans were obtained from the Mississippi State University, Department of Agricultural Economics, Blackbelt and Coastal Plain 2005 planning budgets. Specified expenses were \$694.07/ha for corn and \$290.57/ha for soybeans. Incentive payments for CP-33 included a signing incentive payment (SIP) of up to \$247.10/ha. This value amortized over 10 years (length of contract) at 6% interest provided an annual SIP payment of \$45.02/ha/year. Also included was an annual rental payment of \$80.91/ha/year for the length of the contract (10 years). The annual rental payment (\$80.91/ha) was a weighted average of county specific CRP rental rates for comparable land paid annually. Annual rental rates for CRP in Clay county ranged from \$46.95/ha to \$108.73/ha on 8,049.88 ha, for Lowndes county from \$56.83/ha to \$108.73/ha on 8,442.83 ha, and for Noxubee from \$46.95 to \$116.14 on 13,988.74 ha (Farm Service Agency, *personal communication*). The non-weighted average specific rental rate for Clay county was \$77.84/ha, for Lowndes was \$82.78/ha, and for Noxubee was \$81.54/ha. An annual maintenance fee (mowing, disking; required by CP-33 guidelines) of \$12.36/ha/year was included. Additional CP-33 incentive payments were cost-share assistance of up to 50% of the eligible reimbursable practice costs and a practice incentive payment (PIP) of up to 40% of the eligible establishment cost (2). For the CP-33 in this study, a native grass and legume mix (without lime) was used, which allowed up to a \$395.20/ha establishment cost (11). A request through the Freedom of Information Act to the national office of the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Kansas City, KS was required to obtain county specific information on government payments made to Clay, Lowndes, and Noxubee counties, MS. The calendar year final payments tables and final direct countercyclical payment tables provided by FSA for participating corn and soybean farms were used to calculate a four-year (2000-2003) average government payment paid per commodity per county per hectare per farm.

### Corn

For 104 corn fields, mean actual yield of first combine swath for three APC types (crop, herbaceous, and wood) was 30% less than mean actual yield (9,827.9 kg/ha) of field interior (Table 2). Mean yield estimates differed

significantly among swath and adjacent community type and mean yield estimates had a significant swath  $\times$  adjacent community interaction. The test of slice effect of adjacent community type (crop, herbaceous, wood) within swath on mean yield estimates was significant for swath 1, but not for swath 2, swath 3, or swath 4. The test of slice effect of swathes 1 to 4 within adjacent community type on mean yield estimates was significant for crop, herbaceous, and wood. Least square means estimates and standard error (SE) on yield reduction relative to field interior by swath and adjacent community type had greatest yield reductions at swath 1, followed by swath 2, swath 3, and then swath 4 (Fig. 2).

Table 2. Mean corn yield (ME) (kg/ha) and standard error (SE) by swath (1-4, n = segments\*) and adjacent plant community type (crop, herbaceous, wood), and percent yield reduction (PYR) for 104 corn fields compared to rest of field in Clay, Lowndes, and Noxubee counties, Mississippi, 2000-2003.

Swath	Crop				Herbaceous				Wood			
	n	ME	SE	PYR	n	ME	SE	PYR	n	ME	SE	PYR
1	52	7683	362	23.0	94	6842	198	30.0	90	6014	222	38.0
2	51	8704	357	13.0	94	8319	228	15.0	90	8086	246	17.0
3	51	9353	338	05.0	94	9291	223	05.0	90	9057	245	07.0
4	50											

... was also found at swath 2 next to herbaceous and wood APC type and for whole field (combination of crop, herbaceous and wood field edges or irrespective of APC). In a related study that examined lower yielding field edge segments through precision agriculture, over years 1997-1999

in corn, soybeans, and wheat, conservation strips resulted in a net economic gain of \$373.25/ha (17). Economic returns decreased from swath 1 out to swath 4 and whole field. Economic returns increased from APC type crop, herbaceous, and wood, respectively. Irrespective of adjacent community type, CP-33 was economically advantageous at swath 1 (Fig. 4).

Table 3. Partial budget results and net profit change (NPC) for adjacent plant community types, from 104 corn fields in Clay, Lowndes, and Noxubee counties, Mississippi, from 2000 to 2003.

	Swath	Total advantage (\$/ha)	Total disadvantage (\$/ha)	NPC (\$/ha)
Crop	1	\$832.36	\$747.20	\$85.14
	2	\$832.36	\$843.74	-\$11.34
	3	\$832.36	\$905.02	-\$72.66
	4	\$832.36	\$927.17	-\$94.77
Herbaceous	1	\$832.36	\$667.76	\$164.60
	2	\$832.36	\$807.32	\$25.04
	3	\$832.36	\$899.16	-\$66.80
	4	\$832.36	\$934.31	-\$101.95
Wood	1	\$832.36	\$589.52	\$242.84
	2	\$832.36	\$785.30	\$47.07
	3	\$832.36	\$877.05	-\$44.69
	4	\$832.36	\$920.89	-\$88.53

Table 4. Total advantage (+) or disadvantage (-) (\$/ha) of CP-33 and corn by swath, adjacent plant community type and whole field\*.

Swath	Adjacent Plant Community			Whole field
	Crop	Herbaceous	Wood	
1	\$85.14	\$164.60	\$242.84	\$176.98
2	-\$11.34	\$25.04	\$47.07	\$25.52
3	-\$72.66	-\$66.80	-\$44.69	-\$59.62
4	-\$94.77	-\$101.95	-\$88.53	-\$95.24

\* Whole field is all swathes irrespective of plant community type

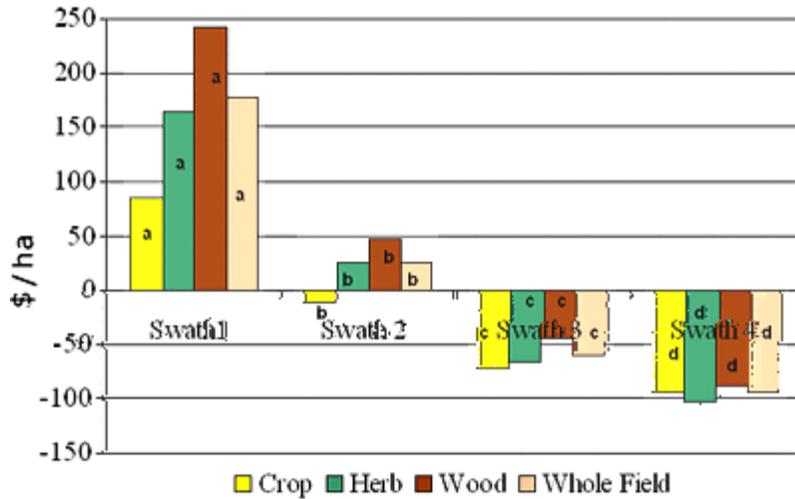


Fig. 3. Advantage (+) or Disadvantage (-) (\$/ha) of CP-33 and corn by swath and adjacent plant community and whole field (irrespective of APC) from 104 fields in Clay, Lowndes, and Noxubee counties Mississippi, 2000-2003.

### Soybeans

For 46 soybeans fields mean yield of first combine swath for three adjacent community types (crop, herbaceous, and wood) was 10.0% less than mean yield (2,497 kg/ha) of field interior (Table 5). Mean yield estimates differed significantly by swath, but not by adjacent community. Swath  $\times$  adjacent community interaction was not found to be significant. The test of slice effect of adjacent community type (crop, herbaceous, wood) within swath on mean yield estimates and within adjacent community type on mean yield estimates was not significant for crop, herbaceous, and wood.

Table 5. Mean soybean yield (ME) (kg/ha) and standard error (SE) by swath (1 to 4, n = segments\*) and adjacent plant community type (crop, herbaceous, wood), and percent yield reduction (PYR) compared to rest of field for 46 soybean fields in Clay, Lowndes, and Noxubee counties, Mississippi, 2000-2003.

Swath	Crop				Herbaceous				Wood			
	n	ME	SE	PYR	n	ME	SE	PYR	n	ME	SE	PYR
1	12	2496	212	08.0	42	2203	112	07.0	39	2041	115	14.0
2	12	2501	184	08.0	42	2156	107	09.0	37	2188	112	06.0
3	12	2604	172	04.0	42	2229	107	06.0	38	2273	119	04.0
4	12	2612	194	03.0	42	2310	108	03.0	38	2346	124	01.0

\* The 46 soybean fields had n segments of adjacent plant community type per swath.

Least square means estimates (ME) and standard error (SE) on yield reduction relative to field interior by swath and adjacent community type resulted in adjacent community crop, swath 1 with the greatest yield reduction, followed by swath 2, swath 3, and swath 4. Within adjacent community herbaceous, swath 2 had greatest yield reduction, followed by swath 1, swath 3, and swath 4. Within adjacent community wood, swath 1 had greatest yield reduction, followed by swath 2, swath 3, and swath 4 (Fig. 3).

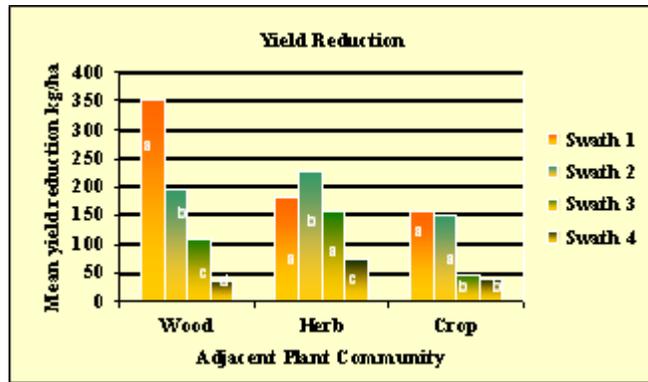


Fig. 4. Mean soybean yield reduction (kg/ha) for adjacent plant community types crop, herbaceous, and wood.

The partial budget analyses for soybeans showed that for any APC type and swath combination and for the whole field consideration (irrespective of APC type), enrolling in CP-33 would be not be economically advantageous (Tables 6 and 7). Similar to corn, a trend of decreasing economic returns occurred from swath 1 out to swath 4 and the whole field. As well, a trend of increasing economic returns occurred from APC type crop, then herbaceous, and then wood and the whole field overall (Fig. 5).

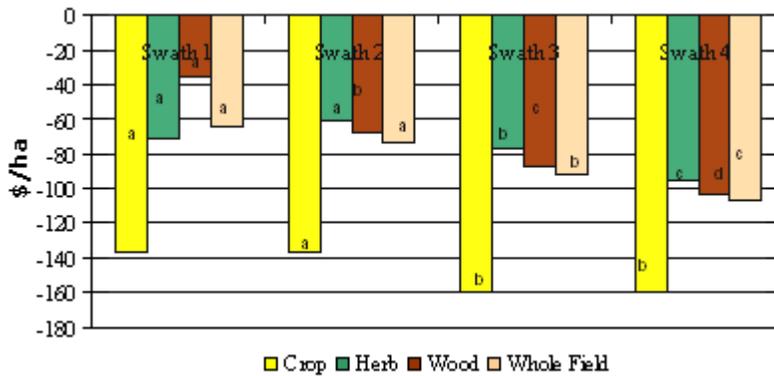


Fig. 5. Disadvantage (-) (\$/ha) of CP-33 and soybeans by swath and adjacent plant community and whole field (irrespective of APC) from 46 fields in Clay, Lowndes, and Noxubee counties Mississippi, 2000-2003.

Table 6. Partial budget results and net profit change (NPC) for adjacent plant community type, from 46 soybean fields in Clay, Lowndes, and Noxubee counties, Mississippi, from 2000-2003.

	Swath	Total advantage (\$/ha)	Total disadvantage (\$/ha)	NPC (\$/ha)
Crop	1	\$428.86	\$565.18	-\$136.32
	2	\$428.86	\$566.29	-\$137.43
	3	\$428.86	\$589.15	-\$160.29
	4	\$428.86	\$590.82	-\$162.06
Herbaceous	1	\$428.86	\$500.17	-\$71.31
	2	\$428.86	\$489.74	-\$60.88
	3	\$428.86	\$505.94	-\$77.08
	4	\$428.86	\$523.91	-\$95.05
Wood	1	\$428.86	\$464.22	-\$35.36
	2	\$428.86	\$496.84	-\$67.98
	3	\$428.86	\$515.70	-\$86.84
	4	\$428.86	\$531.90	-\$103.04

Table 7. Total disadvantage (-) (\$/ha) of CP-33 and soybeans by swath, adjacent plant community type and whole field<sup>x</sup>.

Swath	Adjacent Plant Community			Whole field
	Crop	Herbaceous	Wood	
1	-\$136.32	-\$71.31	-\$35.36	-\$64.65
2	-\$137.43	-\$60.88	-\$67.98	-\$73.97
3	-\$160.29	-\$77.08	-\$86.84	-\$91.94
4	-\$160.06	-\$95.05	-\$103.04	-\$107.03

<sup>x</sup> Whole field is all swathes irrespective of plant community type.

### Conclusions

Mean corn yields at combine swath 1 next to wood APC were significantly less than the mean yields of the field interior. Although a significant corn yield reduction relative to the field interior was always present within any field segment regardless of APC type at swath 1 (field edge), it was greatest adjacent to wood, followed by herbaceous then crop. Swathes 2 through 4 also had associated yield reductions but were less so and not significantly different from the interior yield.

Mean soybeans yields at swath 1 were significantly less than mean interior yield but not for swathes 2 to 4 nor of the same magnitude as for corn yield (9.6% mean yield reduction for soybeans and 30.3% for corn). Soybeans typically are grown on clays, which in some years can be advantageous from an available soil moisture standpoint. Like corn, soybean yields were significantly less next to wood adjacent community. Both corn and soybean crops could have had reduced yields at the field edge due to depredation by herbivores [e.g., eastern cottontail rabbit (*Sylvilagus floridanus*), eastern whitetail deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), raccoon (*Procyon lotor*)] as well as possibly birds and insects. A wood community adjacent to the crop would potentially harbor more species of herbivores and individuals of those species than either crop or herbaceous adjacent community. Yield reduction differences between corn and soybean may be related to differences in photosynthetic abilities among C3 and C4 plants as wooded APC would limit sunlight availability.

For corn, implementation of CP-33 was economically advantageous at swath 1 for crop (+ \$85.14/ha), herbaceous (+ \$164.60/ha), wood (+ \$242.84/ha), and whole field (+ \$176.98/ha) and at swath 2 for herbaceous (+ \$25.04/ha), wood (+ \$47.07/ha), and whole field (+ \$25.52/ha). For any other swath and APC combination, CP-33 was not economically advantageous. For soybeans, implementation of CP-33 was not economically advantageous for any swath or APC combination. Less yield reduction at field edges as well as low relative crop production costs contributed to the economic disadvantages of CP-33 for soybeans.

Results and conclusions are based on "averages," individual fields might have different results. Additionally, fields were mono-culturally farmed, thus fields enrolled in a crop rotation might have different outcomes. Also, the added value of upland birds and other wildlife species might provide incentives economic or non-economic not considered in this analysis.

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