

Cropland Preparation

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INTRODUCTION

Before clearing land for cropping, farmers should examine their land carefully because:

1. **Suitable land for cropping is very limited**

- Surveys conducted so far throughout the Top End of the Northern Territory (NT) have indicated that less than 5% of the land is suitable for cropping.

2. **Clearing unproductive land is wasteful**

- Clearing and developing land for crop production is expensive.
- A lack of planning will most likely result in selecting and clearing land that has a high erosion potential, which will increase development costs and reduce the options of land use.



Figure 1. Aerial view of contour banks on land with slopes more than 2%. The closer the banks, the more difficult are tillage operations.



Figure 2. Development of long and steep slopes will lead to this type of erosion unless zero-tillage and appropriate earth works such as graded banks and waterways are constructed.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO BEFORE CLEARING

Select the best land

- Avoid land with a slope of more than 1%.
Expensive earthworks are needed to control erosion on lands with slopes of more than 0.7%.

Select the most suitable soils

- The sandy Blain soils of the Daly Basin, for example, may need the addition of trace elements and twice the rate of other fertilisers, compared with Tippera clay loams.
- The water-holding capacity of Tippera soils is superior to that of Blain soils.

Develop the farm plan

- Start with a land resource map of the farm.
- Group areas of land into units by combining similar soils, slopes and drainage characteristics. Assess the potential and limiting factors for each unit.
- Map out areas of best potential and fewest limitations to clear and develop in stages, such as annually.
- Indicate on the map the best locations for soil conservation structures such as waterways and banks. Mark in other required features such as paddock fences, stock shade, watering points, buildings and yards.

DO YOU NEED HELP FOR PLANNING?

Officers of the Natural Resources Division of the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts can offer farmers assistance in planning through:

- Land capability assessment mapping information, which covers the potential cropping regions of the Top End.
- Field inspection and selection of areas prior to cropland development.
- Farm planning for initial development.
- Soil conservation earthwork design and management.

THE NT SOIL CONSERVATION LAW AND YOU

Ensure that development activities on your land comply with the provisions of the *NT Soil Conservation and Land Utilisation Act (1980)*.

A landholder deemed to be causing soil erosion may be served with a Soil Conservation Order in respect of the land at risk, to prevent it being cleared, cultivated or damaged in any way.

The Act also provides for the establishment of a Soil Conservation Advisory Council to consider and advise the government on the state of erosion throughout the NT and ratify the actions that the government is performing under the act. Council members represent the agricultural, pastoral and mining industries, as well as the NT Government.

The Act provides for loans to be made available to landholders to carry out soil conservation activities. Applications should be submitted through the chairman of the Soil Conservation Advisory Council.

Please visit us at our website:

www.nt.gov.au/dpifm

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