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Citation

Stevens, C. J.; Quinton, J. N.; Bailey, A. P.; Deasy, C.; Silgram, M. and Jackson, D. R. (2009). The effects of minimal tillage, contour cultivation and in-field vegetative barriers on soil erosion and phosphorus loss. *Soil and Tillage Research*, 106(1) pp. 145–151.

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1 **The effects of minimal tillage, contour cultivation and in-field vegetative barriers**
2 **on soil erosion and phosphorus loss**

3

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15

16 **Abstract**

17 Runoff, sediment, total phosphorus and total dissolved phosphorus losses in overland
18 flow were measured for two years on unbounded plots cropped with wheat and oats.

19 Half of the field was cultivated with minimum tillage (shallow tillage with a tine

20 cultivator) and half was conventionally ploughed. Within each cultivation treatment

21 there were different treatment areas (TA). In the first year of the experiment, one TA

22 was cultivated up and down the slope, one TA was cultivated on the contour, with a

23 beetle bank acting as a vegetative barrier partway up the slope, and one had a mixed

24 direction cultivation treatment, with cultivation and drilling conducted up and down

1 the slope and all subsequent operations conducted on the contour. In the second year,
2 this mixed treatment was replaced with contour cultivation.

3 Results showed no significant reduction in runoff, sediment losses or total phosphorus
4 losses from minimum tillage when compared to the conventional plough treatment,
5 but there were increased losses of total dissolved phosphorus with minimum tillage.

6 The mixed direction cultivation treatment increased surface runoff and losses of
7 sediment and phosphorus. Increasing surface roughness with contour cultivation
8 reduced surface runoff compared to up and down slope cultivation in both the plough
9 and minimum tillage treatment areas, but this trend was not significant. Sediment and
10 phosphorus losses in the contour cultivation treatment followed a very similar pattern
11 to runoff. Combining contour cultivation with a vegetative barrier in the form of a
12 beetle bank to reduce slope length resulted in a non-significant reduction in surface
13 runoff, sediment and total phosphorus when compared to up and down-slope
14 cultivation, but there was a clear trend towards reduced losses. However, the addition
15 of a beetle bank did not provide a significant reduction in runoff, sediment losses or
16 total phosphorus losses when compared to contour cultivation, suggesting only a
17 marginal additional benefit. The economic implications for farmers of the different
18 treatment options are investigated in order to assess their suitability for
19 implementation at a field scale.

20

21 **Keywords: Beetle bank, contour cultivation, minimum tillage, soil erosion,**
22 **phosphorus.**

1 **Introduction**

2 Water erosion of agricultural soils has for many years been recognised as a global
3 environmental problem (Zuazo and Pleguezuelo, 2008). In areas of the UK where
4 soils are light in texture and readily erodible this problem can be serious, with rates of
5 erosion typically between 0.5 and 200 Mg ha⁻¹ yr⁻¹ (Chambers et al, 2000). Land in
6 fallow and winter cereal crops are less susceptible to soil erosion than some other
7 crops (e.g. maize and potatoes) (Evans, 2002) but, as they have bare ground or low
8 crop cover during the autumn and winter they can still suffer large erosion losses
9 (Chambers and Garwood, 2000).

10 Phosphorus (P) binds to soil particles, and losses of P associated with soil particles are
11 often linked to soil erosion. Water erosion preferentially removes the finer fractions
12 of the soil with which P is commonly associated. This leads to P becoming
13 concentrated in overland flow (Quinton et al., 2001; Quinton, 2002).

14 Diffuse P pollution, predominantly from agricultural sources (including fertiliser and
15 animal waste), presents a serious problem in the UK, contributing to the
16 eutrophication of waterways and standing water bodies (Haygarth et al., 2005).

17 Surface waters in the UK are strongly limited by P and even small additions can cause
18 eutrophication. High inputs in the form of organic and inorganic fertilisers from
19 agriculture have resulted in considerably higher levels of soil P than are utilised by the
20 crop plants, thus creating an increased potential for the transfer of P to the wider
21 environment (Haygarth et al., 1998; Haygarth et al., 2005).

22 Potentially high levels of excess P in soils along with increases in soil erosion have
23 led to large amounts of P being transported to waterways. In recognition of this
24 problem, European legislation in the form of the Water Framework Directive
25 (2000/60/EC) requires action to reduce diffuse P pollution as part of an objective of

1 restoring waters to good ecological status. This will require that mitigation options
2 are introduced within fields, at field boundaries and adjacent to water bodies.

3 As a result of the research effort since the 1930s, there is a wide range of effective
4 mitigation options for reducing soil erosion (see Chambers et al., 2000 for examples).
5 Much less is known about how effective these mitigation options are for reducing the
6 P losses that are associated with sediment. This paper considers three treatments with
7 potential for reducing sediment and P losses associated with combinable crops:
8 minimum tillage, contour cultivation and in-field vegetative barriers.

9 Minimum tillage, which involves shallow tillage using a tine cultivator (Rasmussen,
10 1999), has the potential to conserve organic matter, promote aggregate stability,
11 increase infiltration and reduce losses of sediment and sediment-bound pollutants
12 (Quinton and Catt, 2004; Silgram and Shepherd, 1999). In a review of studies
13 evaluating minimum tillage, Strauss et al. (2003) found a median effectiveness of
14 74% for reducing soil erosion. Although the benefits for soil erosion are well
15 established, the potential for reducing nutrient pollution is less clear.

16 Contour cultivation reduces runoff by increasing surface roughness perpendicular to
17 the slope. The increased surface roughness reduces the velocity of any flowing water,
18 providing more time for infiltration and reducing erosion rates. Although popular as a
19 means of reducing soil losses in many parts of the world, contour cultivation has not
20 been widely taken up in the UK due to concerns that machinery will overturn in wet
21 conditions (Chambers et al., 2000). Quinton and Catt (2004) demonstrated the
22 potential benefits for reducing soil losses and runoff on sandy soils in the UK but, as
23 with minimum tillage, although the benefits for reducing soil erosion are well known,
24 there is less evidence available to indicate the benefits for P losses.

1 Vegetative barriers have frequently been used as field-edge mitigation options but can
2 also be placed within fields along the contour, where they serve to reduce slope length
3 and act as barriers to overland flow, thus retaining sediment from up slope. Contour
4 grass strips have received some research attention and have been shown to reduce
5 sediment losses. In laboratory experiments, Ligdi and Morgan (1995) found contour
6 grass strips were effective in removing sediment on 5% and 10% slopes. In a flume
7 experiment with different grasses and flow rates, Dabney et al. (1995) found contour
8 grass strips to range from 15 to 79% in their effectiveness. In this study we used
9 beetle banks as vegetative barriers. These raised banks are seeded with a wildflower
10 and grass mix to attract invertebrates and are installed primarily for biodiversity
11 benefits. Funding is available for farmers in the UK for the installation of beetle
12 banks under the Environmental Stewardship Entry Level Scheme (ELS), but uptake of
13 this option in the pilot scheme (1998–2000) was not high (ADAS, 2001).
14 This paper evaluates the potential for minimum tillage, contour cultivation and beetle
15 banks to reduce sediment and P losses from combinable crops; it will also examine
16 their cost-effectiveness.

17

18 **Methods**

19 Field Experiment

20 In 2005 a field experiment was established at Loddington in Leicestershire, central
21 England (GB grid reference: SK795018). The site is run by the Game Conservancy
22 Trust's Allerton Project, which seeks to demonstrate means of farming profitably with
23 minimal environmental impact. Borderless hill-slope plots were established on a field
24 with soils consisting of Hanslope and Denchworth series clays on an erodible slope

1 with an angle varying between 2 and 6°. The field was planted with wheat (*Triticum*
2 *aestivum* v. Solstice) in 2005 and oats (*Avena sativa* v. Gerald) in 2006.
3 Eight different treatments were applied (table 1, figure 1). Half of the field was
4 cultivated with minimum tillage using a disk cultivator with a maximum depth of
5 15 cm and half was conventionally ploughed using a mouldboard plough with a
6 maximum depth of 18 cm. Each half of the field had three different cultivation
7 treatment areas (TA). One TA from each tillage treatment was cultivated up and
8 down the slope and a second TA was ploughed on the contour, with a beetle bank
9 acting as a vegetative barrier part-way up the slope. In a third TA a mixed direction
10 cultivation treatment was used in 2005/6, with ploughing and drilling conducted up
11 and down the slope and rolling and all subsequent operations conducted on the
12 contour. In 2006/7 this treatment was replaced with contour cultivation. Each
13 treatment had three replicate collection tanks collecting runoff from unbounded plots
14 (one tank had to be removed from the contour cultivation/minimum tillage/beetle
15 bank combined treatment due to a perched water table surfacing within the plot, so
16 this treatment was only replicated twice). Unbounded plots were 12 m wide and the
17 length of the hill slope was an average of 67 m. Variation in slope length and angle
18 was small so is unlikely to have a large effect on the results.
19 Rainfall and runoff were recorded between October and May in 2005/6 and 2006/7.
20 Tanks were sampled after each rainfall event that generated runoff. Runoff was
21 collected in 3 m troughs sunk into the ground so that they were flush with the soil
22 surface. Clay soil from the site was packed around the troughs to give a smooth
23 surface for water to flow over and to ensure water was not infiltrating at the edges of
24 the troughs. These were placed towards the base of the slope, and water and eroded
25 sediment ran through pipes to a splitting device located on the top of each tank. The

1 splitting devices enabled collection of representative samples between 50% and
2 12.5% of the total surface runoff, which could be adjusted depending on prevailing
3 conditions. Splitting devices were thoroughly evaluated and calibrated in the
4 laboratory before installation. The collected runoff was stored in 500 litre tanks. On
5 several occasions the runoff volumes filled the tanks, causing them to overflow; on
6 these occasions a value for minimum runoff volume was measured.

7 Prior to sample collection, water and sediment in the collection tanks was agitated
8 thoroughly and a mixed water and sediment sample was taken for analysis. Samples
9 were collected as soon as possible after the rainfall event to minimise
10 adsorption/desorption effects. Samples were kept cool prior to analysis.

11

12 Laboratory Methods

13 The mixed water and sediment samples collected were analysed for total P (TP) and
14 total P $<0.45 \mu\text{m}$ (TDP) using acid molybdate/antimony with ascorbic acid reduction
15 (USEPA, 1985) and determined spectrophotometrically (880 nm) using a Seal
16 Analytical AQ2 analyser. Particulate phosphorus (PP) was calculated as TP minus
17 TDP. Total suspended solids in the runoff samples were determined using a standard
18 filtration and drying technique using Whatman GF/C filters with a pore size $1.2 \mu\text{m}$
19 (Bartram and Balance, 1996).

20

21 Statistical Analysis

22 Data were analysed using repeated-measures analysis of variance, where runoff
23 variables were the dependant variables and treatment was the independent variable,
24 and correlation coefficients. Post-hoc analysis was conducted using Tukey honest
25 significant difference test. Data analysis was conducted using R (R Development

1 Core Team, 2007) and SPSS (SPSS Inc, 2005). All data are presented as yields per
2 hectare for overwinter losses.

3

4 Cost-effectiveness Analysis

5 To determine the cost-effectiveness of the different approaches, simple spreadsheet
6 models were constructed at the farm level. These spreadsheets calculated individual
7 crop margins and thence an overall arable rotation margin at the farm level in the
8 plough up and down slope treatment (control scenario). Impacts on this margin as a
9 result of the treatments undertaken were then incorporated into the spreadsheets. The
10 models used data from the experimental work, the case study farm as a whole and
11 published data on prices and costs associated with each of the crop enterprises. The
12 data from the experimental work were collected for each treatment in each year and
13 include (i) the field records on crop establishment, fertiliser and spray applications,
14 harvesting and yield, and (ii) the additional operations associated with the mitigation
15 options. Additionally, the crops grown, their areas and average yield across the whole
16 farm were also collected for each year.

17 In the control scenario, 'operating' margins for each crop were calculated to reflect
18 the costs of crop establishment, fertiliser and agro-chemical applications, and
19 harvesting. This used crop yield and price to determine gross output. Seed, fertiliser
20 and agro-chemical variable costs were then deducted to derive the gross margin.

21 Finally, labour and machinery costs (which could be directly allocated to each crop
22 enterprise, and were associated with establishment, fertiliser and agro-chemical
23 applications, and harvesting) were deducted to derive an 'operating' margin. This
24 operating margin goes beyond an enterprise gross margin, as it includes some fixed

1 costs; however, it is not a true net margin, as certain building, land and general
2 overhead costs were excluded.

3 To calculate gross output, average crop yields from the 2006 and 2007 harvest years
4 were multiplied by October 2006 and 2007 market prices respectively (Farmers
5 Weekly, 2006a,b; Farmers Weekly Interactive, 2007). Variable cost data were
6 initially based upon standard costs taken from Nix (2005) and then amended to reflect
7 actual practice using the field data provided. Nix provides price information on seeds,
8 fertilisers and agro-chemicals prices, and uses these to calculate typical individual
9 crop gross margins. Machinery and the associated labour costs were calculated based
10 upon the number and type of operations undertaken, and as with the variable cost
11 data, were initially based upon average farmer cost data taken from Nix (2005). The
12 calculations take into account the work rate possible on the medium/heavy soils that
13 occur at Loddington, and include fuel, labour requirement, repairs and depreciation
14 but exclude the more general overhead costs.

15 These margins were then used to produce a net return per average cropped hectare for
16 a typical arable operation, taking into account the difference in areas of crop grown.

17 To do this, each crop margin was multiplied by the percentage area that was grown on
18 the farm taken from the 2006 and 2007 harvest year farm records.

19 Finally, variable and operating costs associated with each mitigation option were then
20 incorporated to demonstrate the impact on the relevant crop operating margins and the
21 overall average net return per hectare. The calculations used the data from the farm
22 field records covering (i) crop establishment, fertiliser and spray application, and
23 harvesting and (ii) the additional costs associated with the establishment of the beetle
24 bank for each of the identified mitigation options. It was assumed that mitigation
25 takes place on all fields where cereal crops were grown. A more accurate picture

1 would be to determine what percentage of the land and hence cereal crop would
2 require implementation of the mitigation option. Average net return per hectare
3 would therefore be somewhere between the original and new margin. This would not
4 necessarily be the case in reality. The switch to minimum tillage and contour
5 cultivation is included in the model within the relevant crop operating margins,
6 specifically in terms of impacts on yield, fertiliser and agrochemical costs, and
7 changes to operational costs. Additional capital costs associated with the purchase of
8 new alternative equipment to undertake minimum cultivation were not included here.
9 Consideration was also given to the establishment of the vegetative strip. There are
10 additional costs arising from establishment and annual maintenance requirements, loss
11 of productive land and, potentially, the increased requirement for weed control in
12 areas at the edge of the banks that cannot be cultivated. The initial cost for the
13 establishment of a vegetative strip covers land preparation, sowing of grass seed and
14 cutting in the first year. A fully mechanised operation with plough, seedbed
15 cultivation, drill and rolling is assumed. In subsequent years, regular topping of the
16 vegetation may be required. As a one-off capital cost, the initial cost of establishment
17 is not included within the crop enterprise operating margins. The costs associated
18 with the reduction in arable area are more difficult to calculate. In addition to the
19 direct loss of arable land, there are potential costs associated with reduced field size,
20 slower work rate and as a result increased crop enterprise operational costs. This is
21 dependent on farm size, arable area, field sizes, slopes and opportunity to incorporate
22 such strips within field. In practice, areas taken for the vegetative strip would
23 probably be less than one hectare, allowing for some reduction in cost if the area was
24 small enough to be seeded by hand.

25

1 **Results**

2 Monitored Events

3 A total of 20 events were monitored from October to May 2005/6 and October to May
4 2006/7. Ten events were monitored in each year. Total rainfall was 382 mm in
5 2005/6 and 359 mm in 2006/7. The mean event size was 38 mm in 2005/6 and
6 36 mm in 2006/7, but variability in event size was greater in 2005/6 than 2006/7
7 (Figure 2). Compared to mean rainfall (1998–2007), rainfall in the first sampling
8 season was below average for the first five months, but then exceeded the average for
9 the remaining months. In the second sampling season, rainfall considerably exceeded
10 averages during November, January, February and March. With the exception of
11 April, when rainfall was very low, all other months were close to average rainfall.

12

13 Surface Runoff

14 Total surface runoff (Figure 3a) and the event runoff coefficients (percentage of
15 rainfall lost as runoff) were higher in 2006/7 than in 2005/6. In year 1 there was a
16 significant effect of treatment on runoff ($F=9.699$, $p<0.001$). Post-hoc analysis
17 showed significantly more ($p<0.01$) runoff from the mixed direction treatment (PL
18 mix) (1.93 mm) than the treatment ploughed up and down slope (PL) (0.24 mm).
19 There was also significantly more ($p<0.01$) runoff with the PL mix treatment than the
20 plough contour cultivation and beetle bank treatment (PL C BB) (0.17 mm), MT
21 (0.51 mm) and MT C BB treatments (0.66 mm). The minimum tillage mixed
22 direction treatment (MT mix) (1.85 mm) resulted in significantly more ($p<0.01$)
23 runoff than the MT C BB treatment and the MT treatment.
24 In year 2 there was no significant effect of treatment on runoff ($F=1.97$, $p=0.16$).

25

1 Suspended Sediment

2 Suspended sediment losses were also greater in year 2 than year 1 (Figure 3b). In
3 year 1 there was a significant effect of treatment on sediment losses ($F=11.93$,
4 $p<0.001$). The mixed direction treatments PL mix (5.2 kg ha^{-1}) and MT mix
5 (17 kg ha^{-1}) treatments were mainly responsible for this. MT mix had significantly
6 higher ($p<0.05$) losses than the PL (1.1 kg ha^{-1}), PL C BB (0.4 kg ha^{-1}), MT
7 (3.4 kg ha^{-1}) and MT C BB (3.7 kg ha^{-1}) treatments.

8 In year 2 there was also a significant effect of treatment on sediment loss ($F=3.06$,
9 $p=0.05$). Post-hoc analysis showed no significant differences between individual
10 treatments.

11

12 Total Phosphorus

13 Figure 3c shows variability within treatments was very large. In year 1 there was a
14 significant effect of treatment on TP losses ($F=9.86$, $p<0.001$). This was
15 predominantly driven by the high losses from the mixed direction tillage treatments,
16 PL mix ($0.017 \text{ kg P ha}^{-1}$) and MT mix (0.037 kg ha^{-1}). MT mix showed significantly
17 higher ($p<0.01$) losses than the PL ($0.029 \text{ kg P ha}^{-1}$), PL C BB ($0.002 \text{ kg P ha}^{-1}$), MT
18 ($0.009 \text{ kg P ha}^{-1}$) and MT C BB ($0.01 \text{ kg P ha}^{-1}$) treatments. Year 2 showed no
19 significant effect of treatment on TP ($F=2.21$, $p=0.13$).

20 As with runoff and sediment, TP losses were much higher in year 2 than year 1 for all
21 treatments conducted over two years.

22

23 Total Dissolved Phosphorus

24 The difference in losses between years 1 and 2 is less than that observed for other
25 runoff variables. Variability in the data is much lower than other runoff variables

1 (Figure 3d). Differences in TDP losses were proportionally much lower than
2 differences between TP losses.

3 Examining year 1 data shows a significant effect of treatment on TDP losses ($F=6.74$,
4 $p<0.05$). Significantly higher losses ($p<0.05$) were found from the PL mix
5 ($0.0026 \text{ kg P ha}^{-1}$) treatment compared to the PL C BB ($0.0006 \text{ kg P ha}^{-1}$) and PL
6 ($0.0008 \text{ kg P ha}^{-1}$), MT ($0.0014 \text{ kg P ha}^{-1}$) and MT C BB ($0.0012 \text{ kg P ha}^{-1}$)
7 treatments.

8 In year 2 there was no significant effect of treatment on TDP losses ($F=2.06$, $p=0.14$).
9

10 Particulate Phosphorus

11 PP losses were higher in year 2 than in year 1. Results for PP losses were similar to
12 sediment losses. In year 1 there was a significant effect of treatment on PP
13 ($F=13.118$, $p<0.001$). As with sediment losses, the MT mix ($0.0322 \text{ kg P ha}^{-1}$)
14 treatment was mainly responsible for this, with significantly higher ($p<0.05$) losses
15 than the PL ($0.0016 \text{ kg P ha}^{-1}$), PL C BB ($0.0009 \text{ kg P ha}^{-1}$), PL ($0.0015 \text{ kg P ha}^{-1}$)
16 and MT C BB ($0.0077 \text{ kg P ha}^{-1}$) treatments.

17 In year 2 there was no significant effect of treatment on PP loss ($F=2.21$, $p=0.12$).
18

19 Cost-effectiveness Analysis

20 Table 2 illustrates the 2006 and 2007 cropping areas and, based upon this, an average
21 'operating margin' per hectare for the case study farm. Table 3 shows the financial
22 impact of the introduction of the various mitigation options on the 'operating' margin
23 in each year. Field records from both years show that no changes in terms of fertiliser
24 or agro-chemical applications were required and that there were no impacts on yield.
25 In the long term, this may not be the case.

1 The switch to a minimum tillage system, as is to be expected, reduces establishment
2 costs and thereby increases the operating margin. However, it can increase certain
3 weed burdens, giving rise to increased agrochemical costs. This has not been the case
4 so far.

5 The change to operating across the contour has not been explicitly costed. In reality,
6 additional time spent in the field as a result of a reduced work rate will increase the
7 operational costs per hectare associated with crop establishment, and, potentially,
8 fertiliser application and spraying of agrochemicals. Many farmers are reluctant to
9 adopt contour cultivation because of the difficulties with cultivation and spraying
10 operations. Furthermore, it would only be possible on a limited number of slopes.
11 Provisional estimates for the establishment of the vegetative strip suggest a cost of
12 establishment of £163 ha⁻¹ and ongoing annual maintenance cost of £21 ha⁻¹. The
13 costs associated with reducing field size and increasing operational costs amount to
14 between £1 and £2 ha⁻¹ and are incorporated within the resultant operating margin.

15

16 **Discussion**

17 Monitored events

18 Total surface runoff, losses of sediment and losses of TP were generally much higher
19 in year 2 than in year 1. The large variation between years demonstrates the need for
20 longer term monitoring. There was also large variability between plots and events
21 within treatments.

22 In year 1 overwinter losses of sediment (range for treatment means 0.4-17 kg ha⁻¹)
23 were lower than the average losses for tillage land in England and Wales reported by
24 Chambers et al. (2000) (160–123,000 kg ha⁻¹). Losses of sediment in year 2 of this
25 experiment (33-184 kg ha⁻¹) were closer to the range reported by Chambers et al.

1 (2000). P losses from the experiment in year 2 (0.04–0.16 kg P ha⁻¹) were lower than
2 average losses from agriculture-dominated catchments in the UK (Ulén et al., 2007)
3 (0.5 kg P ha⁻¹) and at the lower end of the range for reported losses from tillage land
4 in England and Wales (0.16–94 kg P ha⁻¹) (Chambers et al. 2000), although in year 1
5 losses were lower (0.002–0.03 kg P ha⁻¹).

6

7 Minimum tillage

8 A review of the literature comparing minimum tillage to ploughing suggests minimum
9 tillage commonly results in a significant reduction in surface runoff and sediment
10 losses (Strauss et al., 2003), but reductions were not observed at this site. There were
11 no significant reductions in runoff or sediment losses in the minimum tillage
12 treatments compared to plough treatments, in the plots ploughed up and down, in
13 those ploughed on the contour, or in those ploughed on the contour with a beetle bank.
14 Examination of the data did not reveal any apparent, but non-significant differences.
15 TP and PP losses also showed a very similar pattern. As losses of TP across all
16 treatments were strongly driven by sediment losses across all treatments ($r^2=0.92$,
17 $p<0.01$), this is not surprising. Losses of TDP showed a slightly different result, with
18 a trend towards higher losses of TDP from the MT treatment than the plough
19 treatment in year 1. In year 2 this was not the case with no significant difference
20 between treatments. The higher losses observed in year 1 could be due to P
21 concentrating at the surface of the soil and an increase in organic matter (Bertol et al.,
22 2007; Saavedra et al., 2007). Saavedra et al. (2007) found significantly higher organic
23 matter contents in soils under minimum tillage than those under conventional tillage.
24 They also found higher TP, Olsen P and organic P concentrations, but these
25 differences were not significant. A small plot study study with intense rainfall in

1 Brazil on a Hapludox soil (68% clay, 21% silt, 11% sand) showed P concentrations in
2 the upper 0–0.025 m of a soil with no-tillage cultivation were over five times those in
3 the conventional tillage after four years of treatment (Bertol et al., 2007).

4 The reduced establishment costs associated with minimum tillage may make this
5 option more appealing to farmers. However, at higher prices for output (as was seen
6 in 2007) moving to minimum tillage has less of a percentage impact than at lower
7 prices, although the actual (absolute) change is the same. The lack of a significant
8 reduction in P and sediment losses with minimum tillage means that although costs
9 are not increased overall, this cultivation is not cost-effective.

10

11 Mixed direction tillage

12 The mixed direction tillage treatment presents an advantage over contour cultivation:
13 it avoids conducting the tillage and drilling across the slope, which many farmers feel
14 presents a risk of vehicles slipping down slope or tipping over. The mixed direction
15 tillage treatment resulted in significantly higher losses of runoff, sediment and PP
16 compared to all other treatments. Losses of TP and TDP were significantly higher
17 from the mixed direction minimum tillage treatment and there was a clear trend for
18 higher losses in the plough mixed direction tillage, although this was not significantly
19 different from other plough treatments (Figure 3d). However, it is possible that longer
20 may be required for the treatment to have an effect.

21 Although mixed direction tillage offers some advantages for farmers over contour
22 cultivation, it is clearly not beneficial to controlling soil erosion or nutrient losses.
23 Farmers working on similar soils would be better using up and down slope
24 cultivations than using the mixed direction tillage. These high sediment and P losses
25 are likely to be a result of the contour rolling following up and down slope tillage

1 which formed a series of slightly raised, loose soil micro-ridges on the soil surface.
2 Crop alignment encouraged water movement down slope as in the up and down slope
3 cultivations, but these micro-ridges were too small to impede flow, instead providing
4 a source of easily erodible soil. This measure would not be cost-effective given
5 increased losses and increased labour costs in cultivating across the slope.

6

7 Contour cultivation

8 The contour cultivation treatment was established in year 2 of the experiment.
9 Contour cultivation did not result in a significant reduction in surface runoff when
10 compared to up and down cultivation in either the plough or minimum tillage plots.
11 However figure 3a shows that there was quite a large difference between the
12 treatments, with a mean reduction of 72.2% although this ranged from 9 to 98%.
13 Sediment losses followed a very similar pattern to runoff (Figure 3b), This was the
14 same for TP, TDP (Figures 3c and d) and PP. Although the results were not
15 statistically significant, the strong trends in the data suggest that there are benefits to
16 be gained from using contour cultivation to reduce runoff sediment and P losses.
17 There are additional costs associated with contour cultivation tillage, primarily
18 additional time spent in the field which will increase operational costs compared with
19 traditional cultivation. Many farmers are reluctant to adopt contour cultivation
20 because of difficulties with cultivation and spraying operations (Quinton and Catt,
21 2004), but with the right incentive this measure could be cost-effective.

22

23 Beetle Bank

24 Data collected from the beetle bank and contour cultivation treatment did not show a
25 significant reduction in surface runoff compared to up and down slope cultivation.

1 There was no significant difference between runoff from the beetle bank plots than
2 from the contour cultivation plots. Figure 3a shows that this difference is small and
3 variability was large. Sediment losses, TP and PP losses again show a similar pattern
4 to surface runoff. In both years there was no significant difference between TDP
5 losses from the beetle bank treatment and the plough treatment and figure 3d shows
6 that the mean loss was actually slightly higher from the beetle bank plots than the up
7 and down slope cultivation in year 1.

8 For all of the runoff variables considered there were only minor reductions in losses
9 provided by the beetle bank treatment compared to the contour cultivation treatment.

10 In order for a beetle bank to be placed on the contour, contour cultivation needs to be
11 used. Beetle banks are potentially problematic for farmers, not only requiring contour
12 cultivation, but also resulting in a loss of land and potentially introducing weeds in the
13 areas at the end of banks that cannot be cultivated. They also result in additional
14 cost to the farmer both through increased operational costs and a loss of productive
15 land. Installing beetle banks as a measure to improve water quality may not seem
16 very beneficial, but they do have a proven benefit for invertebrate diversity (Thomas
17 et al., 2002). If beetle banks are going to be installed as a conservation measure to
18 enhance invertebrate diversity, placing them on the contour combined with contour
19 cultivation is likely to have increased benefits for water quality when compared to
20 contour cultivation alone. Given the additional costs associated with their installation
21 and the minimal reduction in erosion losses, beetle banks are only cost-effective for
22 farmers to install where there are gains for biodiversity.

23

24 **Conclusion**

1 Minimum tillage did not reduce or increase diffuse pollution when compared to the
2 control, although it may be beneficial in other situations and reduces operating
3 margins.

4 Mixed direction tillage resulted in increases in surface runoff, sediment and P losses
5 and is not recommend as a mitigation option. Contour cultivation gave much more
6 positive results: although differences were not significant, mean sediment and P
7 losses were much lower. However, the additional time input required for cultivations
8 and safety concerns mean that this option may not be popular with farmers.

9 The beetle bank generates additional costs for the farmer and although it provides
10 significant reductions in runoff variables compared to up and down slope cultivation,
11 there is only a marginal benefit compared to contour cultivation alone. The additional
12 biodiversity benefits of beetle banks mean that there is potential for their installation
13 to benefit water quality if they are placed on the contour.

14

15 **Acknowledgements**

16 This project is funded by the UK Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs
17 (Defra) (project PE0206). We are grateful to the Game Conservancy Trust's Allerton
18 Project, especially A. Leake and C. Stoa, for use of the site and logistical support.
19 We are also grateful to P. Keenan, B. Cookson, A. Ball, J. Wilcock and G. Morris for
20 assistance in the laboratory and field and to L. Heathwaite for helpful comments and
21 discussion.

22

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1 Table 1. Treatments applied during October 2005 and 2006: PL is plough, MT is
 2 minimum tillage, C is contour cultivation, mix is mixed direction cultivation and BB
 3 is beetle bank. Plot numbers refer to Figure 1.

4

Treatment	Plot number	2005/6 (wheat)	2006/7 (Oats)
MT	1, 2, 3	✓	✓
MT C	4, 5, 6		✓
MT mix	4, 5, 6	✓	
MT C BB	7, 8, 9	✓	✓
PL C BB	10, 11, 12	✓	✓
PL mix	13, 14, 15	✓	
PL C	13, 14, 15		✓
PL	16, 17, 18	✓	✓

1 Table 2. Cropping and 'Operating' Margin, 2006 and 2007

2

Year	Wheat % area	Oats % area	Rape % area	Beans ¹ % area	Set aside % area	Margin £/ha
2006	51	7	20	14	9	201
2007	45	12	23	11	9	502

3

¹ In 2006 winter beans were grown; in 2007 spring beans were grown.

4

1 Table 3. Mitigation Options: Impact on Farm Rotational Operating Margin, 2006 and
 2 2007
 3

Year	Mitigation option	Operating margin
2006	Plough	£201 per ha
	Contour plough	£201 per ha
	Contour plough with beetle bank	£199 per ha
	Minimum tillage	£247 per ha
	Contour minimum tillage	£247 per ha
	Contour minimum tillage with beetle bank	£245 per ha
2007	Plough	£502 per ha
	Contour plough	£502 per ha
	Contour plough with beetle bank	£497 per ha
	Minimum tillage	£547 per ha
	Contour minimum tillage	£547 per ha
	Contour minimum tillage with beetle bank	£542 per ha

4

1 Figure 1. Plan of experimental plots. Bold number shows plot treatments as outlined
2 in Table 1. Plot lengths and dimensions of the beetle bank are shown in metres.
3 Contour lines are placed every metre.

4

5 Figure 2. Daily rainfall between October and May from 2005 to 2007 (mm). Mean
6 event runoff (all treatments) is shown with a closed circle.

7

8 Figure 3. Mean overwinter a) surface runoff (mm), b) sediment losses (kg ha^{-1}), c) TP
9 losses (kg P ha^{-1}) and d) TDP losses (kg P ha^{-1}). Error bars show standard deviation.
10 Grey bars show data collected during 2005/6 and white bars data collected during
11 2006/7.