

New Software Streamlines Design Of Farm Terraces

COLUMBIA, MO.

University of Missouri researchers have developed software that shortens the design time for farm terraces and lets farmers examine multiple terrace layouts without having to spend money to construct them.

“It’s like being able to test drive a car before you buy it,” said Allen Thompson, biological engineering professor in MU’s College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources.

Terracing is typically used to reduce erosion and sediment runoff.

The Web-based application uses digital elevation maps to provide real-world topographic coordinates in the location of terraces in the field. It calculates the correct spacing, number of terraces and other critical factors such as terrace length and outlet locations.

The application is based on software developed in the 1980s and 90s but incorporates significant improvements in functionality and usability. “We developed a graphical data-input

interface to let users run multiple simulations in a rapid, interactive format,” Thompson said.

Initially, trained technicians from the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will run the program for farmers. “Our goal, however, is to have the program available for anyone to have an account and run the program themselves,” he said.

Because terracing can be quite costly, most counties have a cost-share program for qualifying farmers through the Missouri Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The application process typically entails site visits by DNR or NRCS technicians, but the new terracing software can save time and money by making those trips unnecessary.

“Instead of going out to the fields and shooting topographic maps, they can do it from their office from maps that currently exist,” he said.

Thompson expects the program to be available to farmers through NRCS later this year. Δ



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