



Climate change experts have, for some time now, been warning of an increase in the occurrence of extreme events. These can be either extremely dry conditions or above-average rainfall, as we have recently seen. Following the recent heavy rains that KZN has experienced, most farms have had some form of run-off occurring. The above-average rainfall received has served as a reminder of why we need to pay attention to run-off control structures on our farms. Unfortunately, where run-off control structures, and the maintenance thereof, is neglected or insufficient, damage and/or soil loss usually occurs.

Whilst it is encouraging to go into winter with full dams and plenty of soil moisture around, any further rainfall events quickly result in run-off. This additional run-off can result in damage to infrastructure if the structures are not in good shape.

An example of this would be the spillway of a dam. Following heavy rains, it is recommended to inspect dam spillways for damage, and where possible, make repairs, hopefully before the next heavy downpour. Damaged spillways may compromise the integrity of the dam wall if left unrepaired. Usually late autumn or winter is the preferred time for doing such repairs, when we would not expect to experience any significant rainfall events.





The same would apply to waterways that may have been damaged in the rains. Remember that when fields are replanted, it is a good time to evaluate the effectiveness of waterways. In most cases, if waterways are showing signs of damage, it is possible that the specifications (width, depth and shape) of the waterway are not within spec.

Always refer to your farm's Land Use Plan to see what the recommended width and depth of the waterway is. In the absence of a plan, contact your local SASRI Extension Specialist, who will be able to calculate the correct size of the waterway for you. This often comes as a shock to growers, when they hear how wide the waterway should be, but waterways that are too narrow for the amount of water that they need to handle, almost always fail and result in expensive repairs later.

Contour banks – these structures may also require some attention following heavy rains. Check that the contour is not blocked with trash/crop residue and/or silt.

Blocked contours result in pooling of water in the contour which can spill over into the field below and result in erosion.

Very often, where contours join crest roads, some silting can occur. If this is not removed, runoff water will eventually flow down the crest road and cause further damage.



The correct contour spacing is also critical to the efficacy of the structures. These should be placed at the recommended spacing according to the Land Use Plan. Remember that the recommended spacing has been designed for sugarcane. If another crop such as maize is planted, it is necessary to adjust the contour spacing. Typically, maize requires half the contour spacing of sugarcane – so double the number of contour banks.

Farm bridges and low level crossings should also be inspected for build-up of debris such as branches, reeds etc. as this can also restrict flow and result in scouring of soil at the ends of the bridge during the next downpour.



Seedcane Movement

In addition to the recent communication regarding the planning for seedcane and the related regulations, please take note of the following:

Section 11.5 – LPD&VCC Rules and Regulations

"The Committee shall not permit a Grower to move Seedcane between Control Areas without the prior written approval of the Committees of both the Control Area which the Seedcane leaves and the Control Area which the Seedcane enters, on each occasion."

If you wish to purchase from, or sell seedcane to, a grower in another P&D Control area, this must be done with the written approval of each region's P&D Officer. The necessary surveys on the seedcane will then have been done and the pest and disease status of the seedcane will be known. It is a well-known fact that infected seedcane is a very effective vector of pests and diseases, which is the reason for the rule above. Compliance with this rule will avoid bringing a problem onto your farm, or into our region.

If there are any queries related to the topics discussed in this newsletter, please don't hesitate to contact Janet Edmonds on 071 334 8122, or myself for any assistance .

Extension Matters

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