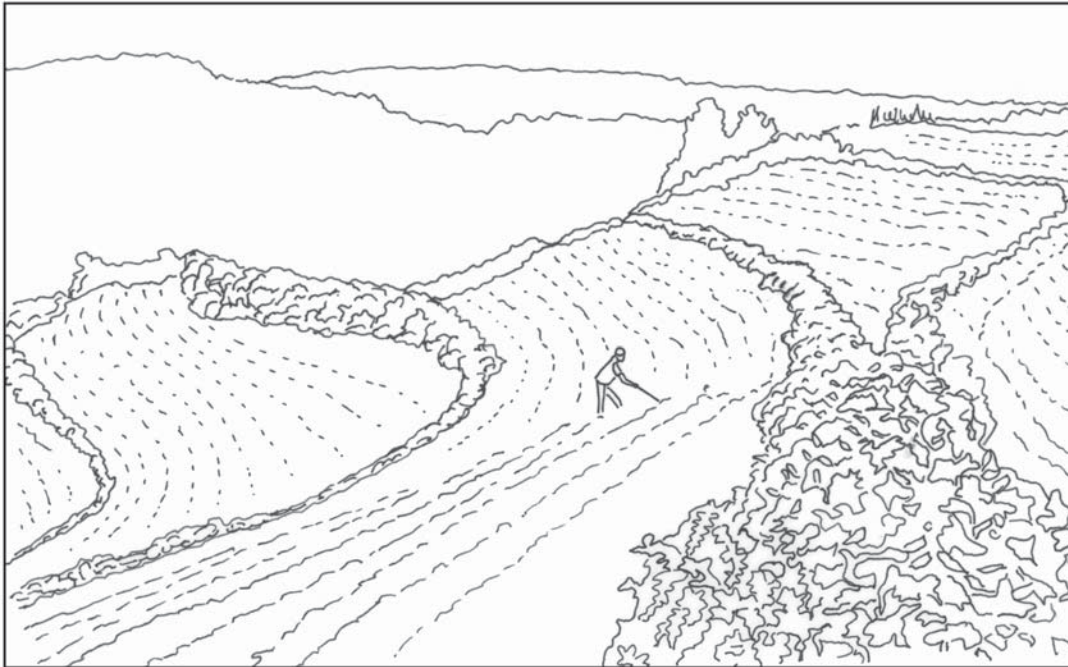

Contour Farming for Cropland in the Pacific

USDA NRCS Practice (330)



Use contour farming on cropland to conserve water and protect soil on sloping fields.

What is contour farming for cropland?

Contour farming is a traditional Pacific Island practice that is very good for growing food on hillsides. When farmers carry out their farming activities (plowing, planting, cultivating, and harvesting) across the slope instead of up and down the slope, they are using **contour farming**. This is a very old and effective conservation practice used by farmers from around the world.

Why use contour farming on cropland?

Pacific Island farmers can benefit from contour farming on their farm. Using this practice can:

- keep valuable topsoil in place on sloping fields.
- slow water down and let it soak into the soil.
- improve irrigation systems and conserve water.
- reduce labor and make harvesting easier.
- improve the appearance of the farm.

To learn more about protecting your sloping farm land from water damage, read ***Protecting Soil on Pacific Island Farms***.

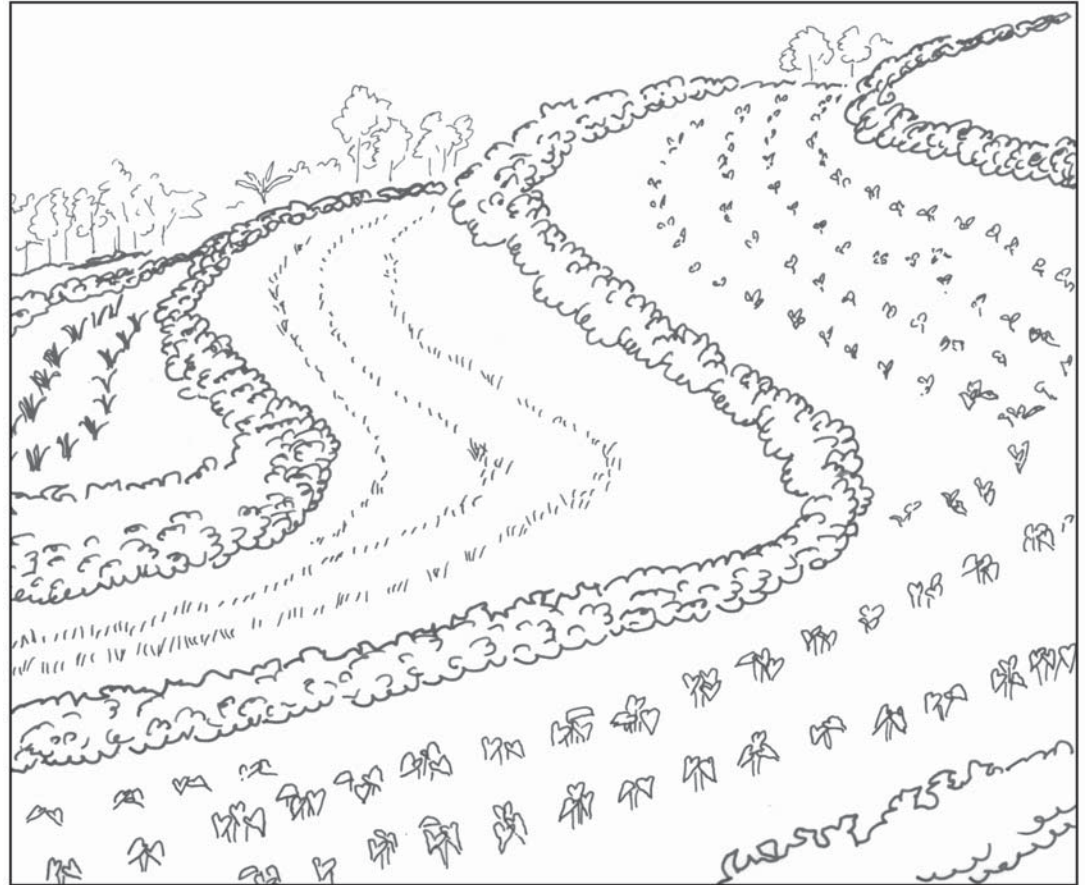
Where is contour farming used?

- On sloping fields where crops are grown
- On sloping fields with vegetable beds

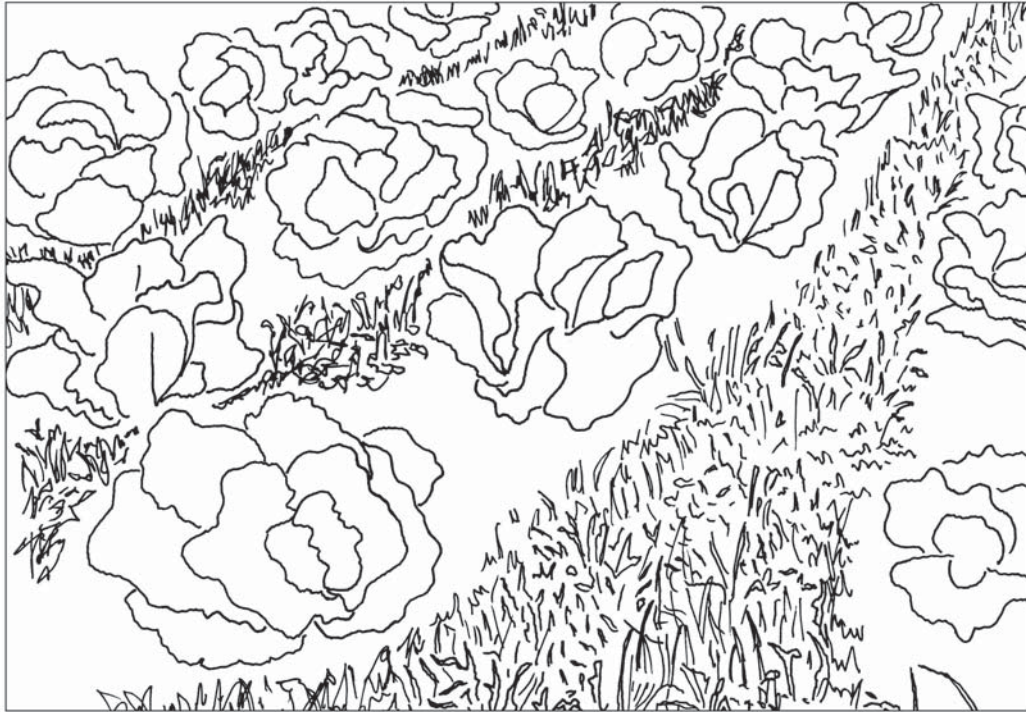
If you grow crops on slopes, you must be very aware of water movement. Be extra careful to protect your fields from water damage. Plan for heavy rain before the rains actually fall. Long, smooth, even slopes speed up runoff water. Fast moving water has a lot of power to cut deep into the land. It can wash soil off your field and damage or destroy your crops. Use conservation practices to shorten slope lengths, make them more irregular, and slow down rainwater.

Start with contour farming

As a farmer, your first step for slowing down rainwater is to determine your field's contour lines. Then plant your crops across the slope or "on the contour". This allows you to do all the land preparation, planting, and harvesting across the slope. Farming across the slope helps to shorten slope lengths, slowing down runoff water so it can soak into the soil.



Contour farming slows water down and lets it soak into the soil.



Combine contour farming with cover cropping and other conservation practices for more soil fertility and slope protection.

It is important to take time to lay out contour lines to guide you in the field. This is done with simple instruments such as a level or a homemade A-frame. Your local office of the USDA NRCS or the Cooperative Extension Service can help show you how to lay out contour lines.

Add on other practices

For more slope protection, combine contour farming on cropland with other practices. You can plant conservation covers, permanent covers, vegetative barriers, and alley cropping hedgerows in strips or rows across the slope. Use mulching and residue management to keep the soil covered. Place slash or plant residue (such as banana stalks and tree trimmings) in strips across the slope to help trap and retain water.

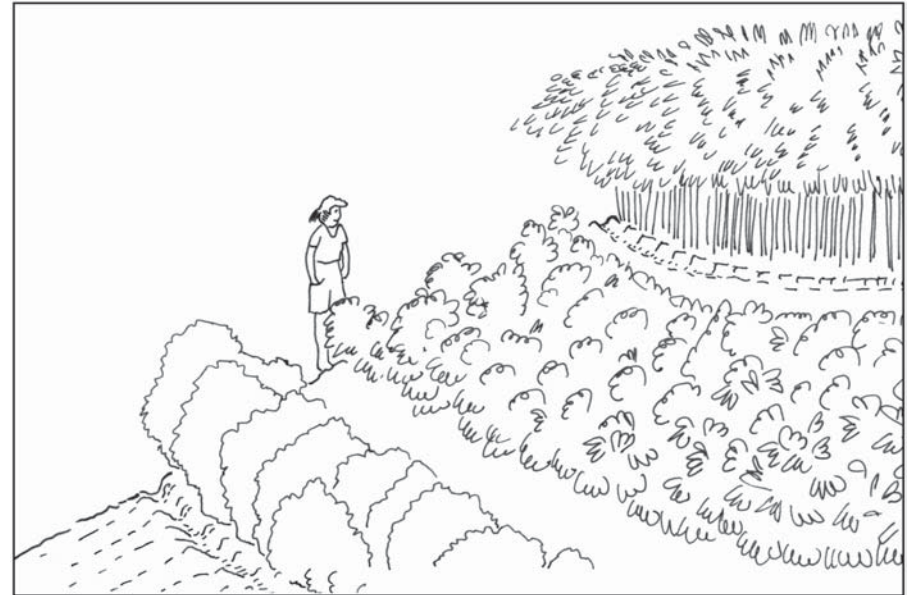
With some basic earth shaping, you can install hillside ditches across the slope. This will shorten the slope length and divert water to a stable area on the farm.

With each additional practice, your farm is better protected from water damage.

For the best results, combine **contour farming** with other conservation practices:

- **Hillside Ditch** (423): digging a small ditch across the slope to divert rainwater
- **Vegetative barriers** (601): growing small strips of stiff plants across the slope
- **Residue Management** (329): leaving slash in the field for soil protection
- **Mulching** (484): bringing in material to cover and protect the soil
- **Cover Crops** (340): growing crops to plow down and fertilize cash crops
- **Alley Cropping** (311) and **Hedgerow Planting** (422): growing hedges of bushes and trees across the slope

Additional information is available from your local USDA Service Center or at www.pb.nrcs.usda.gov and www.hi.nrcs.usda.gov.



For the best results, combine contour farming with other conservation practices such as alley cropping and contour hedgerows.