Farm planning - Fences and soil conservation.

B. a'B. Marsh
FARM PLANNING

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Fences and Soil Conservation

Salt land can grow something or nothing. Well-timed grazing is impossible without well-planned fences and water supplies

ON any wheatbelt farm it is easy to see the need for planning fences for future convenience. Without planning, fences can cause erosion, interfere with erosion control and prevent good stock management. A neat layout of straight fences on clean white paper can be transferred to hilly land to become a nightmare of narrow corners, eroding gateways, boggy and rutted wheeltracks, unsafe cultivation on paddocks which are either overgrazed or undergrazed. After 50 years of frustration waiting for the fence to fall down before it can be replaced, it is surely amazing that even now fences are being replaced along the old fence lines.

Fences can cause erosion because they are permanent features of a landscape and cause cultivation, tracks and firebreaks to be in certain places and to travel in certain directions. If the fence is in the wrong place, so are the tracks, firebreaks and cultivation.

It is possible to plan the fences so that they do not cause erosion, but to do this, the position of the fence has to bear certain relationships to the slopes and natural features.

Fences can interfere with erosion control when placed with little regard to the natural creeks and rocky ridges. Contour working is impossible where fences and rocky ridges or creeks enclose small portions of awkwardly shaped land. Contour banks to help reclaim eroded land cannot conveniently be taken through fences; some fences, therefore, make contour banks impossible. Contour working is often inconvenient when confined by straight fences not situated well with respect to the slope of the land. This
does not mean that a well-planned farm will have contour fences; it is more usual to have the fences placed along natural boundaries, down ridges and along watercourses.

As the normal farm has developed in the past, the fences have been placed along survey boundaries or their position has been determined by the pattern of the clearing, presence of poison, etc. Now that those farms are developed it is possible to see that the fences are not related to topography and convenience.

Most farms are divided into natural clear cultivation areas by a combination of creeks, watercourses, gullies, grassed...
waterways, rocky ridges, trees left for shade and surveyed roads and farm boundaries. As if this isn’t enough, most farms are further subdivided and complicated by fences which cut across these natural paddocks.

This diagram shows a typical paddock layout on a 640 acre portion of a farm. The arrangement looks simple and convenient. (Fig. 1.)

A map of the same farm showing the natural features, shows irregularly shaped...
areas bounded by creeks and rocky ridges. These can be cultivated round and round or on the contour without much inconvenience. (Fig. 2.)

Usually the natural layout and the superimposed conventional layout divide the farm into many inaccessible, awkward shaped, small bits of land. The use of contour banks, if they are necessary or become necessary, is made difficult or impossible. (Fig. 3.)

It is possible to fence along natural boundaries providing other factors are also considered. If this farm is fenced by natural boundaries the arrangement is at once less complex and water supplies which often occur on natural boundaries immediately become more efficiently used. The number of boundaries and therefore the number of erosion hazards immediately becomes less. Usually enough latitude is allowed to divide the farm into nearly equal sized paddocks. The centre area in this case, can be divided not by a natural boundary but by a contour fence along a proposed bank line. (Fig. 4.)

Other factors, of course, must be taken into account but much hard thinking is eliminated.

The suggested method of planning which will be explained in future articles, is essentially planning on paper so that all factors can be considered and so that the record is always at hand to peruse over the period of implementing the plan, a matter of 10 to 20 years. Such a plan should be able to survive change of ownership and even major changes in farming practice.

The next article in this Series will be entitled "Fences for Efficient Grazing."

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