



# **GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE FOR HANDLING SOILS**

## **Sheet 13:**

### **Soil Stripping with Bulldozers and Dump Trucks**

**Issued by the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency, Cambridge**

**April 2000**



## MAFF FOREWORD

Standards of restoration of minerals and waste sites have steadily improved in recent years, with operators increasingly aware of their environmental responsibilities. The industry is putting forward more imaginative restoration concepts to a variety of afteruses, and is more aware than ever that it will be judged on the standard of that restoration, and the sustainability of the development.

Sustainable mineral development means balancing economic, environmental and social needs, whilst using resources wisely. The UK Strategy for Sustainable Development recognises the importance of safeguarding agricultural land to meet the needs of future generations, and minimising the loss of soils to new development\*.

Improved restoration standards have sometimes enabled planning permission to be given for best and most versatile agricultural land to be worked for minerals, on the basis that it can be restored in a way that safeguards its long-term agricultural potential\*\*. Inherent in these high standards of restoration is the requirement to handle soils in such a way that damage to their structure is minimised. It is the aim of this Guide to provide comprehensive advice on soil handling “Good Practice” to operators, soil moving contractors, consultants and planning authorities.

The Guide is in the form of 15 Sheets giving advice on soil stripping, the forming and taking down of soil storage mounds, and soil replacement operations using excavators, earth scrapers or bulldozers. There are also four Guidance Sheets on remedial works involving the removal of stones and damaging materials, and decompaction during the replacement operations.

This document should be cited as MAFF (2000), Good Practice Guide for Handling Soils (version 04/00). FRCA, Cambridge.

**Any views expressed in the guidance are those of the consultant and do not necessarily represent the view of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.**

\*(DETR, A Better Quality of Life, May 1999, paragraphs 6.66 and 8.50)

\*\*MPG7 (November 1996, paragraph 3).

### Acknowledgements

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## **SHEET 13 SOIL STRIPPING WITH BULLDOZERS & DUMP TRUCKS**

The purpose of this Guidance Sheet is to provide a model method for best practice where bulldozers, excavators and dump trucks are used to strip soils. This Guidance Sheet comprises 6 pages of text, 4 figures and a user response form.

The model may need to be modified according to site conditions or requirements of the Planning Authority. Where this is the case, deviation from the model should be recorded with reasons. The guidance does not specify the type, size or model of equipment, but this should have been agreed as part of the planning conditions or as a reserved matter. The machines should be of a kind which will cause the minimum compaction whilst being operationally efficient (eg wide tracked), and must be well maintained at all times.

Persons involved in the handling of soils, overburden etc., and in the construction or removal of mounds or tips, must comply with the Health and Safety at Work Etc. Act 1974 and its relevant statutory provisions, and in particular those aspects which relate to the construction and removal of tips, mounds and similar structures. This requirement takes preference over any suggested practice in the Sheets.

The user of these guidelines is solely responsible for all liabilities that might arise. No liabilities are accepted for any losses of any kind arising from the use of this guidance.

This soil handling method uses a bulldozer to strip the soils, an excavator to load the soil into dump trucks, and the trucks transport it to storage or to the replacement area.

The bulldozer soil handling method can significantly affect the agricultural quality of the restoration through severe soil deformation (compression and smearing). This is primarily caused through unavoidable repeated trafficking over the soils during stripping, the building of soil mounds, and on replacement; the effects of which increases with increasing soil wetness. Consequently, for satisfactory restoration

there is a need for effective decompaction treatment during the replacement operation (see Sheets 15 & 19). Decompaction treatment is an obligate requirement when soils are handled by bulldozers.

There are a number of key operational points during stripping to minimise the degree and extent of severe soil deformation, and to aid the effective treatment of the compaction on replacement:

- (i) To minimise compaction:
  - the dump trucks must only operate on the 'basal'/non-soil layer, and their wheels must not in any circumstances run on to the soil layer(s).
  - the adoption of a bed/strip system minimises the need for the trucks to travel on the soil layers.
  - the machines are to only work when ground conditions enable their maximum operating efficiency.
  - the soils are to be stripped by the bulldozer in as thick layer as possible whilst maintaining their operational efficiency.
  - effective decompaction on soil replacement is a requisite of the bulldozer handling method (see Sheet 19).
- (ii) To minimise the wetness of the soil and re-wetting of the soil:
  - the soil layers should have a moisture content of 5% or greater below their lower plastic limit\*. Moisture content should be assessed by oven drying\* of samples taken from representative locations and mid/lower points of each soil horizon. [\*Or as required in the planning conditions.]

- the bed/strip system provides a basis to regulate the exposure of lower soil layers to periods of rain and a means of maintaining soil moisture contents. The soil profile within the active strip should be stripped to the basal layer before rainfall occurs and before stripping is suspended.
- measures are required to protect the face of the soil layer from ponding of water and maintain the basal layer in a condition capable of supporting dump trucks.
- the area to be stripped is to be protected from in-flow of water, ponding etc. Wet sites should be drained in advance.
- the maintenance of a transpiring crop is important, and an appropriate cropping regime should be established for the year of soil stripping. Before stripping, excess vegetation should be removed; in the case of grassland it should be cut or grazed short and arable crops should have been harvested.

## The Stripping Operation

- 13.1 The area to be stripped is to be protected from in-flow of water, ponding etc. Wet sites should be drained in advance.
- 13.2 Soil stripping operations should not start until the required soil moisture levels are reached (as determined by the agreed method), and should be suspended as soon as the water content returns to these levels. Prior to work commencing a Meteorological Office forecast should be obtained which gives reasonable confidence of soil stripping proceeding without interruptions from rainfall events. If significant rainfall is forecast or occurs during operations, the stripping must be suspended, and where the soil profile has been disturbed it

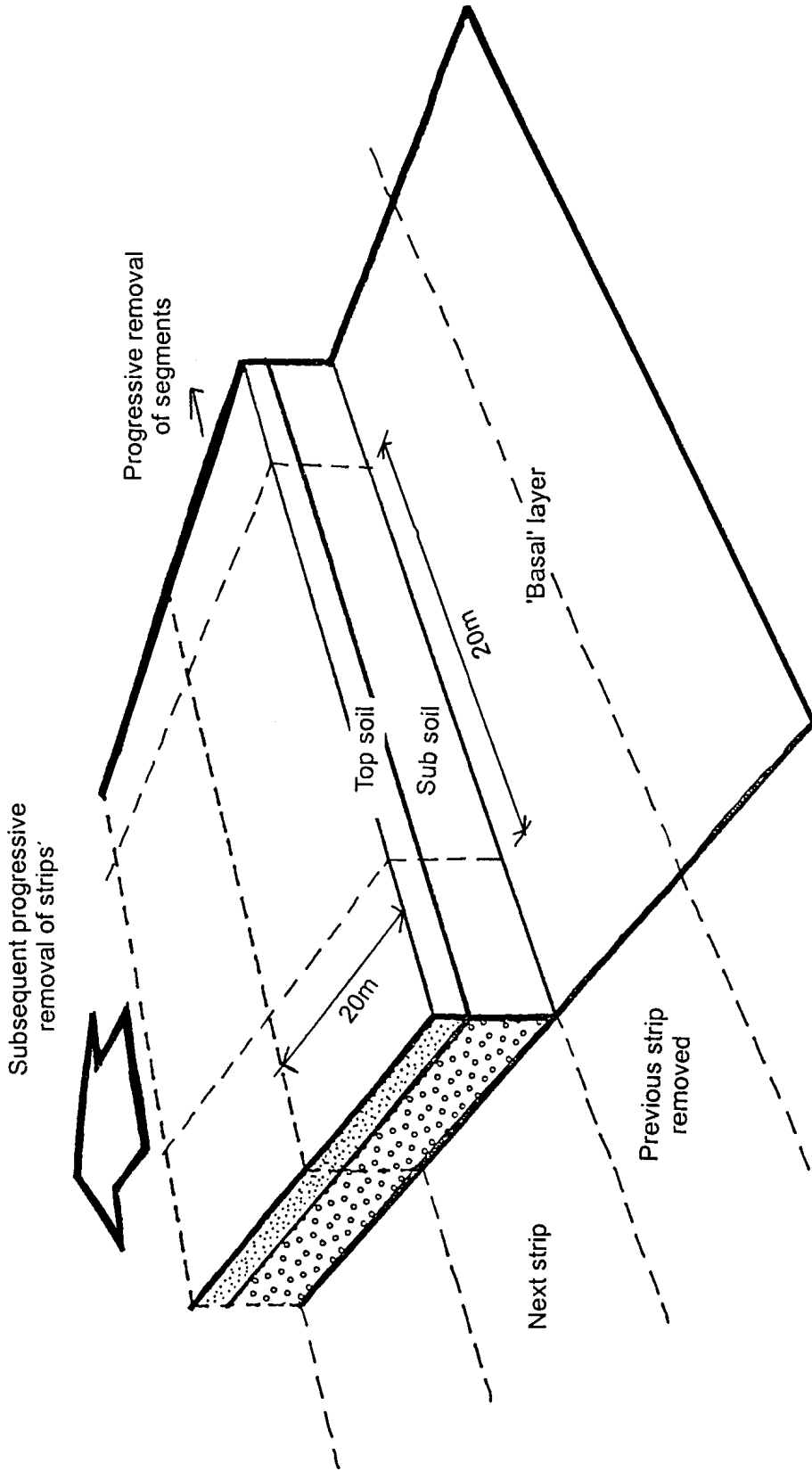
should be removed to base level. Stripping must not restart unless the weather is expected to be dry for at least a full day.

- 13.3 All machines must be in a safe and efficient working condition at all times. The machines are to only work when ground conditions enable their maximum operating efficiency. The operation is to be suspended before traction becomes a problem or the integrity of the basal layer and haul routes fails.
- 13.4 The operation should follow a detailed stripping plan showing soil units to be stripped, haul routes and the phasing of vehicle movements. The soil units should be defined on the site with information to distinguish types and layers, and ranges of thickness. Detailed daily records should be kept of operations undertaken, and site and soil conditions.
- 13.5 Within each soil unit the soil layers above the base/formation layer are to be stripped in sequential strips with the topsoil layer stripped first, followed by the subsoil layers; each layer stripped to its natural thickness without incorporating material from the lower layer. The next strip should not be started until the current strip is completely stripped to the basal layer. This is often referred to as the 'bed or strip system'. The system involves the progressive sequential stripping of the materials in strips (Figure 13.1). Where there is a gradient to the site, the main axis of the soil strips should be along the main axis of the slope.
- 13.6 The haul routes and storage areas must be defined, and should be stripped first in a similar manner.
- 13.7 The bulldozer is only to stand and work on the soil layer when stripping soils, otherwise it is to travel only on the basal/formation layer. The dump trucks are only to operate on the basal/formation layer. The excavator is only to stand and work on the mounded soil when loading the dump truck, otherwise it is to travel on the basal layer (Figure 13.1).

- 13.8 Demarcate an initial strip width of about 20m and divide the strip into 20m long segments.
- 13.9 The topsoil layer is to be pushed up in the thickest layer possible (eg 150-200mm thick), whilst maintaining operational efficiency of the bulldozer, to form a low mound (1-2m high) along the edge of the exposed soil profile (face). The soil nearest the exposed face should be pushed up first, progressively working to the back of the strip (Figure 13.2). The procedure is repeated in each successive segment until the strip is completed.
- 13.10 Topsoil should be recovered to the full width of the segment without contamination with subsoil (not more than 20% of the lower horizon should be exposed at the layer junction within the strip). This will necessitate some trafficking of the bulldozer on the adjacent strip to be able to mound the entire topsoil within the segment. The thickness and identification of the horizon junction must be verified before and during stripping. The full thickness of the topsoil horizon should normally be stripped progressively along the segments in the active strip before subsoil horizons are started (Figure 13.2). The full topsoil horizon should be stripped along the length of the active strip before the subsoil horizons are started.
- 13.11 The upper subsoil in the current strip is to be stripped and monitored in the same manner. The final 50cm of the subsoil layer should be left as a step to protect the adjacent topsoil horizon from local collapses. The process is to be repeated for the lower subsoil and any other lower layer to be recovered as a soil material (Figure 13.3).
- 13.12 With each successive lower layer taken the bulldozer must only work within the segment and not operate across the boundary of the next strip. This will initially result in a 'stand-off' (shelf) at the back of the strip to accommodate the bulldozer. Before the next layer is stripped, the soil layer in this shelf is to

be mounded at the exposed side of the next segment for loading by the excavator into the trucks (Figure 13.4).

- 13.13 On completion of the strip, the procedures are repeated sequentially for each subsequent strip until the area is completely stripped.
- 13.14 Where the soils are to be directly replaced without storage in mounds, the initial strip of the upper horizons will have to be stored temporarily to release the lowest layer and enable the sequential movement of materials. The stored initial soil material would be placed on the lower layer removed from the final strip at the end of the programme or on partially completed profiles if rain was forecast.
- 13.15 Where the stripping operation is likely to be interrupted by rain or there is likely to be over-night rain remove any exposed subsoil down to the basal layer before suspending operations. Make provisions to protect base of current or next strip from ponding/runoff by sumps and grips, and also clean and level the basal layer. At the start of each day ensure there is no ponding in the current strip or operating areas, and the basal layer is to level with no ruts.



**Figure 13.1 Soil stripping with bulldozers and dump trucks:  
 The bed and segment system**

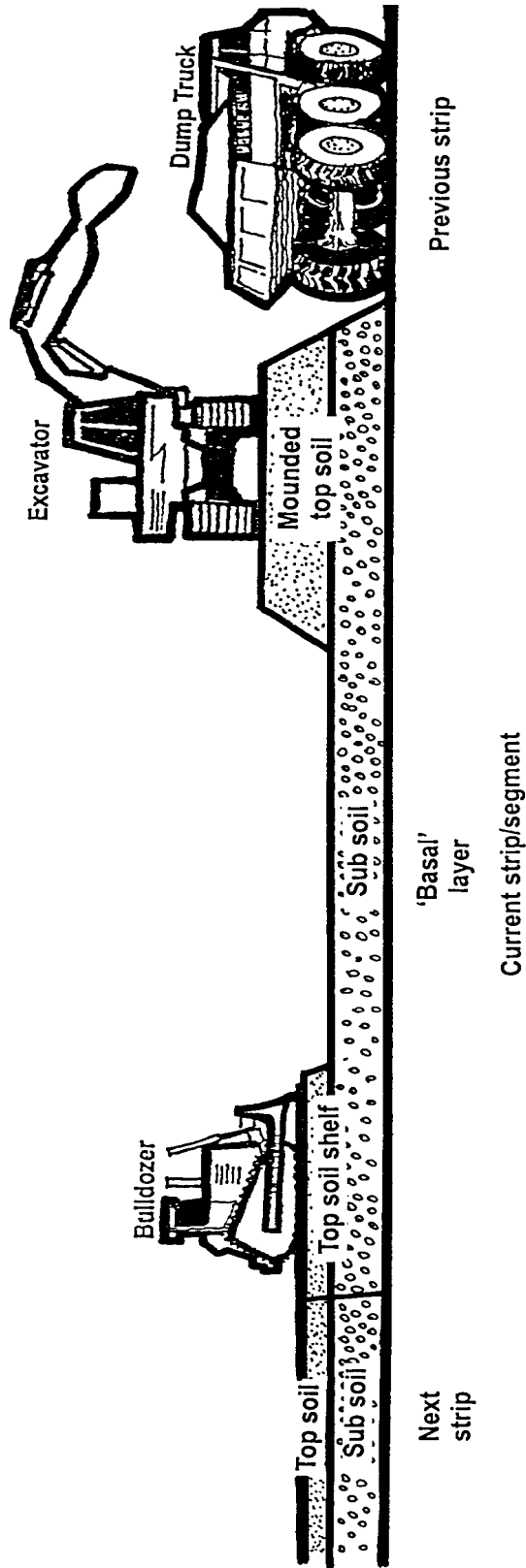
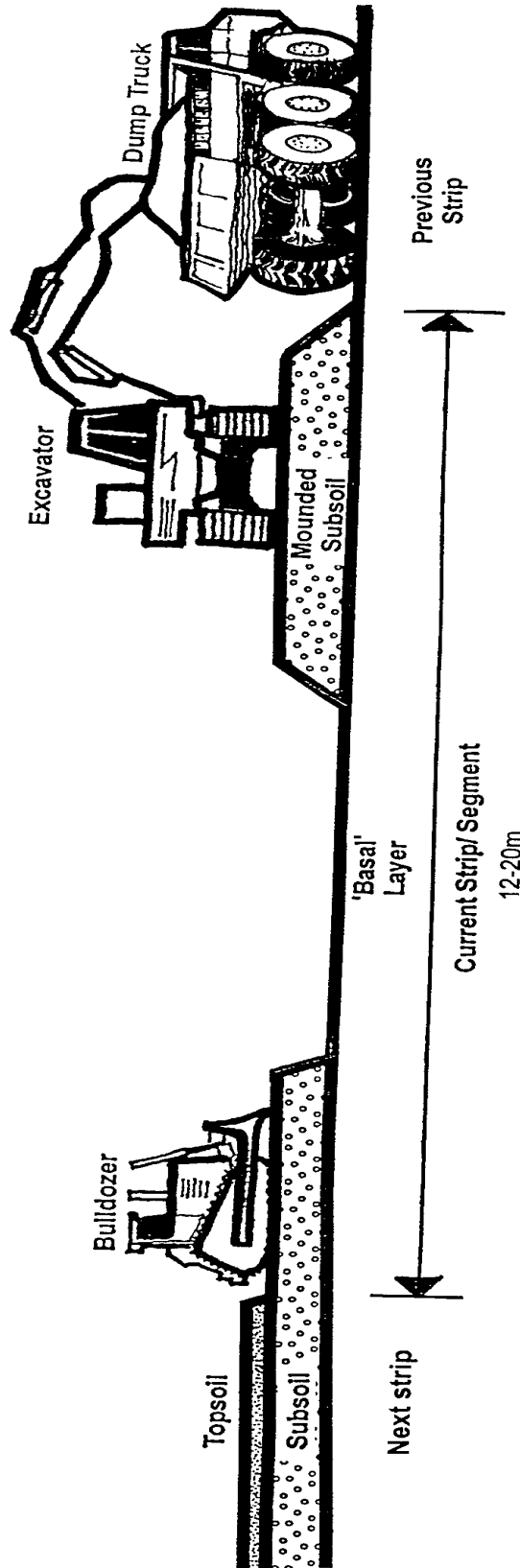
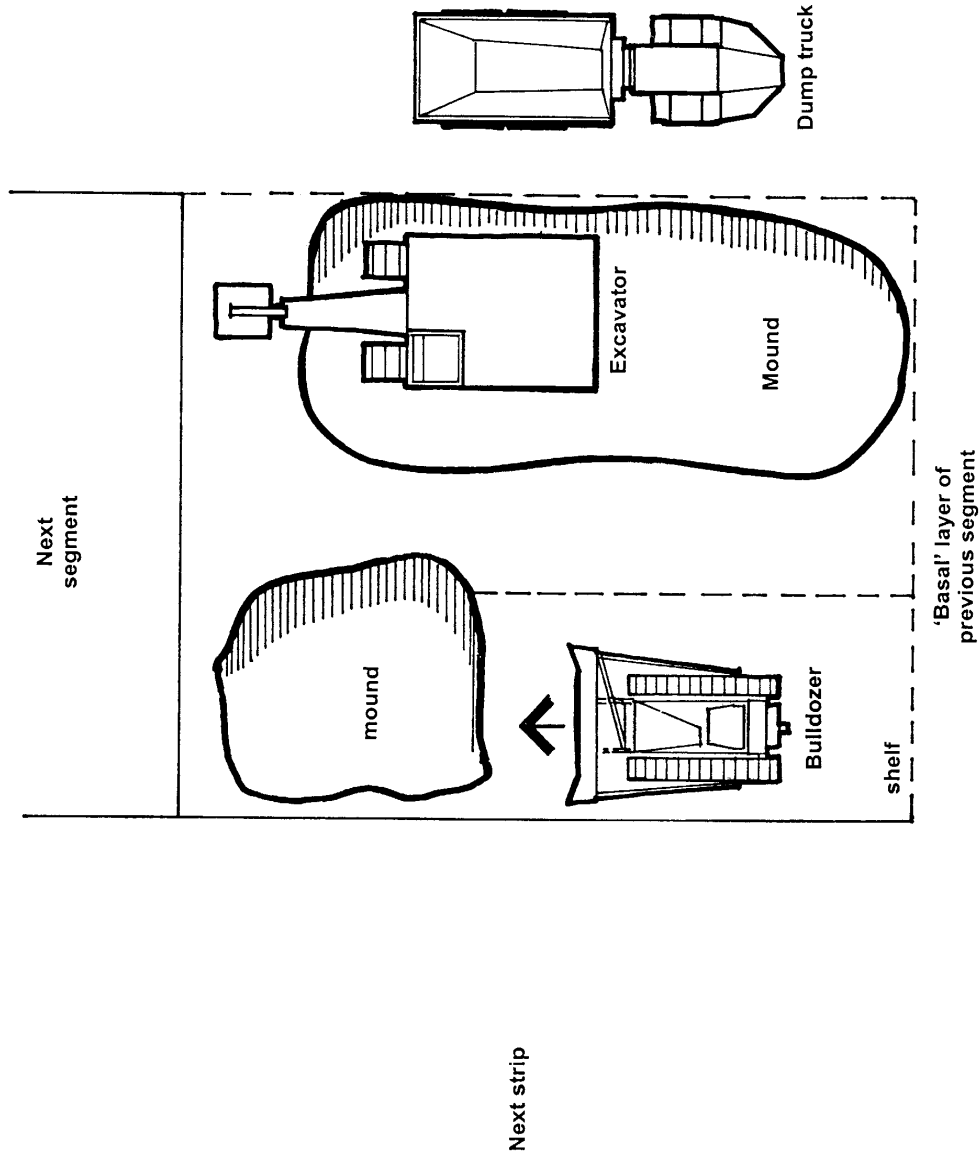


Figure 13.2 Soil stripping with bulldozers and dump trucks: Top soil



**Figure 13.3 Soil stripping with bulldozers-  
 dump trucks: Subsoil**



**Figure 13.4 Soil stripping with bulldozers and dump trucks:**  
**The removal of soil along top soil and sub soil shelves**

**SHEET 13**

**Version: 04/00**

**FEEDBACK**

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