

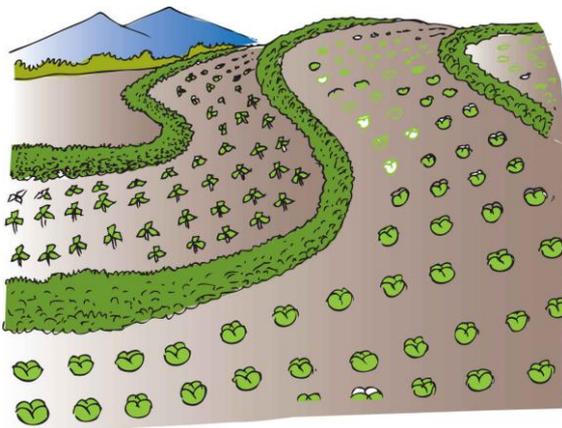
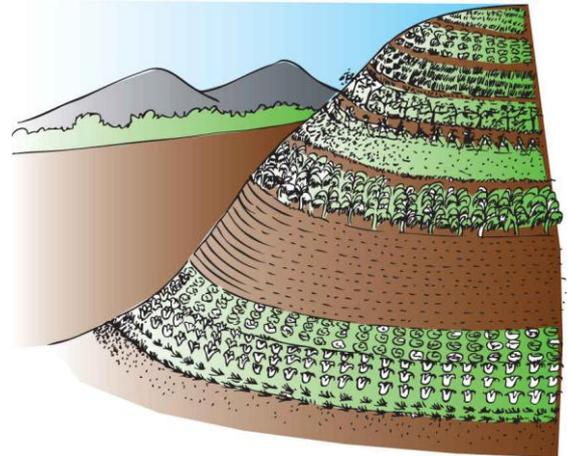
Technical Bulletin #63:

Contour Planting

A contour line refers to the same elevation across a field or along a hillside. Even land that appears to be flat will probably have slight changes in elevation.

Planting along the contour lines benefits crops by:

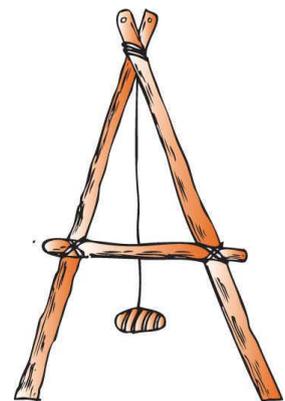
- Reducing erosion
- Slowing water runoff
- Increasing the amount of water stored in the soil
- Reducing labor



This works because water will always flow down or perpendicular to the contour line. By planting along the contour, the flow of water can be controlled more easily. Contour lines rarely appear straight; they will likely be curved. To find the contour line we need to **find where the land is even across the entire plot of land** we are using. This can be done by using a *level*, or a simple one can be made with common materials called an A-frame.

Materials needed for A-frame:

- Two poles about 2 meters long (can be from wood or bamboo)
- One shorter pole about 1 meter long
- Some string
- A stone or weight



Process:

Tie the poles tightly together to make the shape of the letter A, with the two longer poles forming the upright parts of the frame. Hang the stone from the top of the frame so it crosses the shorter pole, and make sure the stone hangs below this pole.

To find the contour line:

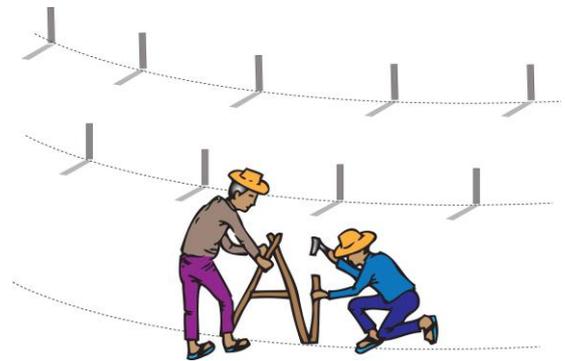
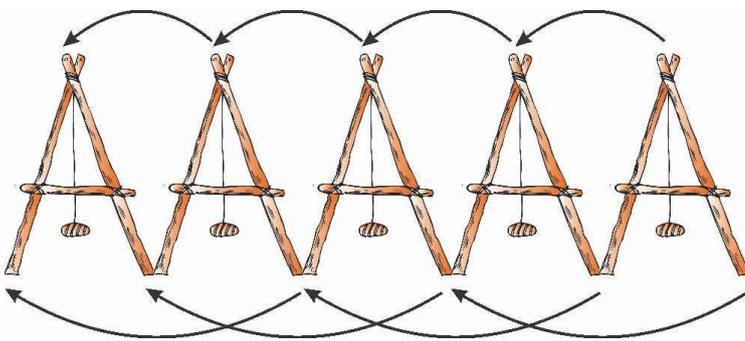
First you need to calibrate the A-frame

- Place the A-frame on a slight slope and mark on the ground where each leg stands.
- Let the stone weight come to a standstill and mark where it crosses the bottom pole.
- Switch the legs of the A-frame around, putting them into the exact same place on the other side.

- Again, let the stone weight come to a standstill and mark where it crosses the bottom pole.
- Measure the distance between the two marks. Mark the exact halfway point between the two. This new mark is the 'level' mark, and the one you will use to find the contour line.

Now it is time to mark the contour lines. You will need about 100 small sticks.

- Begin at the highest point on the field.
- Place the A-frame and move until the stone weight is in line with the level mark.
- Place a stick at both legs.
- Now swing the A-frame, keeping one leg in place, and again make the stone weight lines up with the level mark, and mark with the stick.
- Repeat this pattern across the entire length of the field.



Continue on to the next contour line. The distance between the two contour lines will be determined by what is being planted and the steepness of the slope. In general, contours should be spaced between 3.5-8 meters apart.

The lower side of the contour line should be mounded with soil, with a rounded ditch created on the other side. This helps control water flow. The mounded side will later be planted.



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