



**HAL**  
open science

## Improvement of surface flow network prediction for the modeling of erosion processes in agricultural landscapes

Alain Couturier, Joël Daroussin, Frédéric Darboux, Véronique Souchère, Yves Le Bissonnais, Olivier Cerdan, Dominique D. King

### ► To cite this version:

Alain Couturier, Joël Daroussin, Frédéric Darboux, Véronique Souchère, Yves Le Bissonnais, et al.. Improvement of surface flow network prediction for the modeling of erosion processes in agricultural landscapes. *Geomorphology*, 2013, 183, pp.120-129. 10.1016/j.geomorph.2012.07.025 . hal-00780330

**HAL Id: hal-00780330**

**<https://brgm.hal.science/hal-00780330>**

Submitted on 29 May 2020

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

1 *A. Couturier et al.*

2 *Improvement of Surface Flow Network*

3 **Improvement of Surface Flow Network Prediction**  
4 **for the Modeling of Erosion Processes**  
5 **in Agricultural Landscapes**

6 Alain Couturier<sup>a,\*</sup>, Joël Daroussin<sup>a</sup>, Frédéric Darboux<sup>a</sup>, Véronique Souchère<sup>b,c</sup>, Yves

7 Le Bissonnais<sup>d</sup>, Olivier Cerdan<sup>e</sup>, Dominique King<sup>a</sup>

8  
9 <sup>a</sup> INRA, UR0272 Science du sol, Centre de recherche d'Orléans, CS 40001, 45075 Orléans  
10 Cedex 2, France

11 <sup>b</sup> INRA, UMR1048 SADAPT, B.P. 1, 78850 Thiverval Grignon, France

12 <sup>c</sup> AgroParisTech, UMR 1048 SADAPT, F-75005 Paris, France

13 <sup>d</sup> INRA. LISAH (Laboratoire d'étude des Interactions Sol - Agrosystème - Hydrosystème),

14 Unité Mixte de Recherche INRA - IRD - SupAgro Montpellier - Campus AGRO, Bat. 24 - 2  
15 place Viala - 34060 MONTPELLIER Cedex 1 - France

16 <sup>e</sup> BRGM, ARN, 3 av. Claude Guillemin, BP 6009, 45060 Orléans, France

17 \*Corresponding author. Email: Alain.Couturier@orleans.inra.fr

18 Ph: +33 2 38 41 81 01 ; Fax: +33 2 38 41 78 69

19

## 1 Abstract

2 The modeling of soil erosion by water supposes an accurate and thorough understanding of the  
3 hydrology. Thus, it is critical to have a good delineation of the surface flow path. The flow network  
4 data are critical for important uses such as flood forecasting and watershed management. Geographic  
5 Information System (GIS) functions are able to compute a flow network directly from the digital  
6 elevation models. Because the flow directions are only based on the topography, the other factors  
7 controlling the flow directions are overlooked. In the agricultural areas, work such as tillage can have  
8 a large impact on the flow direction. We propose a 5-step procedure to account for such man-made  
9 features. The use of this procedure clearly improves the quality of the computed flow network. This  
10 procedure has been successfully implemented in a GIS and improves the prediction of surface flow  
11 and therefore improves water erosion modeling at the watershed scale.

12 *Keywords:* Overland flow; modeling; DEM; tillage direction; surface flow pattern; GIS

## 13 1 Introduction

14 The modeling of overland flow and soil erosion requires a good knowledge of surface water flow  
15 paths. Previous works have demonstrated that one of the main factors that explains the initiation and  
16 location of erosive phenomena is the area contributing runoff (Thorne and Zevenbergen, 1990; Auzet  
17 et al., 1995). Govers et al. (2000) and Le Bissonnais et al. (2005) found that the occurrence of erosion  
18 phenomena is strongly related to the runoff-generation process. It has also been shown that the flow  
19 paths and flow concentration processes inside a watershed are important (Takken et al., 2005). In fact,  
20 erosion caused by overland flow is a threshold phenomenon for which triggering occurs at specific  
21 times and locations (Boiffin et al., 1988; Papy and Boiffin, 1989; Ludwig et al., 1995; Le Bissonnais  
22 and Gascuel-Oudoux, 1998). So, even if runoff models predict correctly the water flux at the outlet of a  
23 catchment using a standard flow direction algorithm, they may be not adapted for modeling erosion  
24 and simulating the effect of anti-erosion management schemes (Souchère et al., 2005; Furlan et al.,  
25 2012).

# Postprint

Version définitive du manuscrit publié dans / Final version of the manuscript published in :  
Geomorphology, 2013, 183, 120-129 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.geomorph.2012.07.025>

1 For more than ten years, several studies have been performed to determine and model the location and  
2 the size of areas contributing to runoff within catchments, including their changes under the combined  
3 effect of farming operations and meteorological conditions (Ludwig et al., 1995; Desmet and Govers,  
4 1997; Souchère et al., 1998; Govers et al., 2000; Takken et al., 2001). These studies demonstrated that  
5 furrows created by tillage operations could affect the flow directions as much as the topographic slope.  
6 However, most current hydrologic models, such as the WEPP (Flanagan and Nearing, 1995), AGNPS  
7 (Bingner and Theurer, 2007) and EUROSEM (Morgan et al., 1998) consider the topographic slope to  
8 be the only factor controlling the water flow path. Thus, even if these models include sophisticated  
9 water routing algorithms and up-to-date finite difference schemes to compute water fluxes, they  
10 cannot properly model the actual flow paths in agricultural watersheds.

11 Orlandini et al. (2003, 2011) developed methods to improved the classical D8 flow network  
12 calculation from Digital Elevation Model (DEM) (Tarboton, 1997). The path-based D8-LAD and D8-  
13 LTD reduced the flow drift without the inconvenience of introducing dispersive flow. However, they  
14 were tested in mountainous areas where steep slopes constrain the flow direction whatever the surface  
15 roughness and anthropogenic landscape features. Bailly et al. (2008) designed an approach for  
16 automated ditch network detection from LiDAR data in vineyard landscapes. This methodology  
17 appears transposable to other linear anthropogenic features under the condition that they are located on  
18 field boundaries and that they correspond to a sufficient elevation discontinuity so that they can be  
19 identified in LiDAR profiles. In addition, since it is based on the availability of LiDAR data, there is  
20 still a need for improving flow network determination in the case of low slope agricultural landscapes,  
21 taking into account more easily accessible tillage direction and roughness information. A predictive  
22 erosion model at the watershed scale was developed with the aim of balancing the amount of data  
23 required, the cost of their acquisition, and the description of fundamental erosion processes. This  
24 model, named STREAM, is based on the understanding and parameterization of prevailing factors at  
25 local scales from experimental results and on the specific features at the watershed scale (Cerdan et al.,  
26 2002a, b; Le Bissonnais et al., 2005). In this paper, we present the 'flow network' module  
27 implemented in the STREAM model. This module allows the model to account for the effect of the  
28 tillage operations on the directions of the surface water flow. The method in use is based on the

1 modification of a regular model of the surface water flow network (i.e. a flow network model based on  
2 the topography only). From this topographic flow network, a flow network accounting for the tillage  
3 directions and preferential flow paths is built. The processing is raster-based (i.e. cell-based) and  
4 makes use of Geographic Information System (GIS) capabilities to analyze the soil surface water  
5 movement according to the terrain morphology, tillage direction, and preferential flow paths. The first  
6 part of this paper presents the 'flow network' module and the methodological developments required  
7 to introduce preferential flow paths in a regular DEM. In the second part, we apply the model to a test  
8 watershed, and we analyze and discuss the relevance of the results based on the methodological and  
9 hydrological standpoints. We then emphasize the main achievements and perspectives for future  
10 improvements of the 'flow network' module.

## 11 **2 Material and methods**

12 The 'flow network' module creates a network of flow directions for every point of the studied area,  
13 usually a watershed. The watershed is the reference unit for water and erosion management. Many  
14 algorithms have been published to compute a flow network on a grid DEM (e.g., O'Callaghan and  
15 Mark, 1984; Tarboton, 1997; Orlandini et al., 2003). The most sophisticated can define several flow  
16 directions for each cell, such as the "multiple flow direction" of Quinn et al. (1991). For our purpose  
17 of demonstrating the importance of taking into account the agricultural features for constructing an  
18 accurate flow network, we decided to use a simple "single flow direction" algorithm close to the well-  
19 known D8 algorithm (O'Callaghan and Mark, 1984). In our case, the network of flow directions is a  
20 set of cell-based data for which the module defines a unique flow direction for each cell. Because the  
21 published algorithms are topography-based only, we believe large discrepancies between the  
22 computed flow networks and the real network would be found wherever agricultural features have an  
23 effect on the flow directions.

24 In most existing networks of flow directions, the flow directions are defined based on the DEM only.  
25 Thereafter, a flow direction network computed from the DEM only is named 'topographic flow  
26 network.' The novelty of the 'flow network' module is its ability to account for the effects of human-  
27 induced features on the water flow directions in the agricultural watersheds. The improved flow

1 network better mimics the actual flow network and thus enhances the prediction of the water flow  
2 locations and fluxes. Because of this improvement, the watershed manager will make more accurate  
3 decisions for the implementation of soil and conservation practices. Accounting for agricultural  
4 features implies some specific processing, as detailed below.

## 5 **2.1 Data**

6 Three types of geographic and semantic data are required by the 'flow network' module.

### 7 **2.1.1 Roughness**

8 The first mandatory layer represents the agricultural fields as polygons. This vector-type layer must  
9 cover the entire area to be modeled. Each polygon is associated with attributes describing the soil  
10 surface characteristics, such as the soil surface roughness. Following Souchère et al. (1998), the  
11 roughness is defined as the height difference (in cm) between the high points and low points of the soil  
12 surface microtopography. The roughness is defined at the scale of a square meter *along* the tillage  
13 direction (first roughness index) and *across* the tillage direction (second roughness index). These  
14 indices were specifically designed for the overland flow studies. They can be noted by visual  
15 inspection during field mapping. Each of the two roughness indices are tagged using a six-level scale  
16 (Table 1). Thus, two roughness attributes are recorded for each polygon. The polygons must also have  
17 an attribute describing the tillage direction in degrees (from 0 to 179°).

### 18 **2.1.2 Topography**

19 The second mandatory layer is raster-type and represents the topography of the studied area. It is a  
20 DEM. The common area between the DEM and the agricultural field polygons defines the largest area  
21 that can be modeled by the 'flow network' module. To account for the edge effects caused by some  
22 numerical treatments, a 5-cell buffer is added around the area defined by the agricultural field  
23 polygons.

## 1 **2.1.3 Preferential flow paths**

2 The third layer is optional. It accounts for the preferential flow paths caused by objects such as the  
3 headlands (i.e., the unplowed land at both ends of a field after the primary plowing: headlands are  
4 usually plowed subsequently, across the primary plowing direction), open furrows (i.e., a long shallow  
5 trench in the ground left in the middle of the field or between two fields after plowing), and roads.  
6 This layer is vector-type with a line topology. Each line has attributes describing its hydrologic  
7 behavior. Depending on these attributes, changes in the flow directions of the underlying cells will be  
8 made, thereby modifying the flow network.

## 9 **2.2 Computation of the flow network**

10 The successive stages of the algorithm are illustrated in Figure 1.  
11

### 12 **2.2.1 Stage 1 – Building the topographic flow model of flow directions**

13 In a the Geographical Information System (GIS) software using square cell raster grids, one of eight  
14 possible flow directions is assigned to each grid cell. Each of these eight possible directions leads to  
15 one of the eight neighboring cells. The flow direction for the cell under inspection is computed from a  
16 raster DEM representing the topography by selecting the neighboring cell with the steepest descent.  
17 This generates a strictly convergent flow network (i.e., the flow of one cell is never routed to more  
18 than one other cell). When applied to a DEM free of sinks, starting from any cell and following the  
19 flow direction from cell to cell always leads to the edges of the studied area (the edges can be  
20 identified by cells with a special value called 'NODATA').

21 The first stage consists of computing the topographic flow network. It is called the topographic flow  
22 network because it is built by accounting for the topography only. This network is then used as a  
23 reference to build the flow network that accounts for the manmade features, as described hereafter.

### 24 **2.2.2 Stage 2 – Modifying the topographic flow network to account for tillage directions**

25 In the cultivated fields, the flow directions are not always the topographic flow direction. The flow  
26 directions can be modified following some rules described in Souchère et al. (1998). In locations with  
27 large slope gradients, the actual flow directions are determined by the topography only, whereas in

# Postprint

Version définitive du manuscrit publié dans / Final version of the manuscript published in :  
Geomorphology, 2013, 183, 120-129 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.geomorph.2012.07.025>

1 locations with gentle slopes, the actual flow directions can be determined either by the topography or  
2 by the direction of the tillage, depending on the soil surface roughness.

3 In fact, the tillage operations alter the surface roughness by making it anisotropic. As a consequence,  
4 the tillage operations can create preferential flow directions. Some of the tillage operations create such  
5 large roughness anisotropy that the flow will always follow the tillage direction. For example, the  
6 ridging of potato fields creates a large roughness across the tillage direction but a low roughness along  
7 the tillage direction. As a consequence, the flow is channeled by the ridges.

8 Souchère et al. (1998) assumed that the overland flow direction at a given location depends on two  
9 major variables: the slope intensity, and the angle between the azimuths of the steepest slope and of  
10 the tillage direction. To verify this assumption, they measured the slope with an Abney level and the  
11 angle between the two directions with a compass on 60 plots. At the same time, the actual overland  
12 flow direction was noted for each plot either by direct observation during rainstorms or by analyzing  
13 the traces left by overland flow just after the event.

14 Ten observations demonstrated that if the difference between the roughness across and the roughness  
15 along the tillage direction is greater than two levels (as defined in Table 1), the flow direction is  
16 always the tillage direction. For the other fifty observations (i.e. if the roughness anisotropy is equal or  
17 lower to two levels), the flow can be along the tillage direction or along the topographic slope. In this  
18 case, the observations were ranked in two sub-populations corresponding to: (i) plots where the  
19 observed overland flow follows predominantly the slope direction and (ii) plots where tillage imposes  
20 the overland flow direction. Using these data, an analysis of the variance and a discriminant analysis  
21 were performed using the two chosen variables – the slope intensity and the angle between the steepest  
22 slope and the tillage direction – to produce a suitable procedure for automatically determining the  
23 overland flow direction.

24 Souchère et al. (1998) used this discriminant function to categorize the grid cells into two sets: those  
25 with a flow direction along the topographic slope and those with a flow direction along the tillage  
26 direction. The discriminant function is:

$$27 \quad \text{Discrim} = -0.6646 \frac{\text{angle}W - 61.74}{19.95} - 0.6669 \frac{\text{slope} - 5.45}{3.03} \quad (1)$$

1 with *angleW* the angle (in degree) between the tillage direction and the topographic slope aspect, and  
2 *slope* the topographic slope gradient (in %).

3 The value *Discrim* is then used with a threshold equal to 0.1249 to assign the grid cells with the tillage  
4 direction ( $Discrim > 0.1249$ ) or to keep the direction of the topographic flow network computed in the  
5 first stage described above ( $Discrim \leq 0.1249$ ). The statistical analysis of Souchère et al. (1998)  
6 showed that 92% of the 50 test plots were correctly classified by the discriminant function, while the  
7 wrongly classified plots had intermediate situations in terms of (1) the slope gradient and (2) the angle  
8 between the tillage direction and the slope aspect.

9 After stage 2, there is a flow network accounting for tillage directions, but, resulting from the  
10 limitation of flow to only height possible directions per cell, a bias (or drift) is present in the flow  
11 directions. This will be corrected in stage 4 of the procedure. But before this correction takes place, the  
12 preferential flow paths are included.

### 13 **2.2.3 Stage 3 – Modifying the tillage flow network to account for preferential flow paths**

14 If the user chooses to provide the optional layer describing the preferential flow paths, this information  
15 is processed:

- 16 • In the headlands, the discriminant function (1) is used with the tillage direction inside the  
17 headland. Typically, this tillage direction crosses the general tillage direction of the field but is  
18 parallel to one of the field edges.
- 19 • For roads, the direction of the topography is kept.
- 20 • For open furrows, the flow direction is set to be downslope, along the open furrow.

21 As a result of this third stage, the new flow network accounts not only for tillage directions but also for  
22 preferential flow paths. It now needs to be corrected from the drift.

### 23 **2.2.4 Stage 4 – Cancellation of the drift in the tillage flow network**

24 When tillage directions are translated into flow directions (at stage 2), drifts in the modeled flow  
25 directions are introduced. The flow directions on square grids are set in 45° increments. The  
26 intermediate directions cannot be modeled at the scale of a single grid cell. The drift causes a  
27 misdirection of the flow (Fig. 2). The maximum drift angle is equal to 22.5°. This effect is especially

1 sensitive for long fields: the modeled flow directions will lead the flow to cross the field edge instead  
2 of being parallel to it. This can lead to a misrepresentation of the flow network. Moreover, by  
3 changing the contributing area at the watershed outlet, the drift can cause miscalculations of the  
4 cumulated flow.

5 The effect is illustrated at the scale of several cells in Figure 3(a). The actual flow direction is along  
6 AB, at the azimuth at  $30^\circ$ . By following the grey arrows, the flow network should lead from point A to  
7 point B. However, with the grey arrows having an azimuth of  $45^\circ$ , they lead to point B' instead. The  
8 angle between AB and AB' is equal to the drift angle.

9 To account for the drift, the modeled tillage flow direction needs to be corrected at a constant interval  
10 (every x columns or every y rows). The interval between the corrections is calculated based on  
11 trigonometry.

12 We define the drift  $\alpha$  as the angle between  $dirWA$  (the actual tillage direction) and  $dirWM$  (the  
13 modeled flow direction before correction) (Fig. 2):

$$14 \quad \alpha = dirWA - dirWM \quad (2)$$

15  $\alpha$  ranges from  $-22.5^\circ$  to  $22.5^\circ$ .

16 We define  $\beta$  as the modeled flow direction before correction.  $\beta$  takes one of the eight possible  
17 directions ( $0^\circ$ ,  $45^\circ$ ,  $90^\circ$ , etc.).

18 Depending on the case, the correction consists of applying one of the following two formulas:

$$19 \quad \cos \beta / \tan \alpha \quad (a)$$

$$20 \quad \sin \beta / \tan \alpha \quad (b)$$

21 Table 2 indicates the formula to be used depending on the values of  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ , and determines whether  
22 the correction must be applied on an interval of rows (R) or columns (C).

23 The removal of the drift, by counterbalancing it at regular intervals, creates a better overall flow  
24 direction (Fig. 3(b)). The tillage flow network after the drift cancellation follows the line AB. This  
25 method of drift cancellation better models the tillage direction at the field scale.

## 2.2.5 Stage 5 – Removal of flow direction artifacts

The introduction of constrained flow directions in the topographic flow direction model generates some artifacts. These artifacts are inconsistencies that make the flow network inappropriate for hydrological processing. The computation of the flow accumulation requires first the definition of the flow direction of all of the cells. The changes introduced by the tillage direction and the preferential flow paths are made at the scale of the individual cells without considering the flow directions in the neighboring cells. This creates four kinds of artifacts: converging flows, flow loops, crossing flows, and unspecified directions (Fig. 4 left). These artifacts need to be removed before the flow accumulation can be computed properly (Fig. 4 right). All of these changes in flow directions are made without taking into account the actual flow paths.

- *Converging flows.* Converging flows occur when two neighboring cells point to each other making it impossible to define a downstream flow path (Fig. 4(a) left). The solution consists of changing the flow direction of the current cell to switch it to the topographic direction (Fig. 4(a) right).
- *Flow loops.* Following a flow path that leads back to an already visited cell is considered a flow loop (Fig. 4(b) left), again making it impossible to define a downstream flow path. Again, the solution consists of changing the flow direction of the current cell to switch it to the topographic direction (Fig. 4(b) right).
- *Crossing flows.* This type of artifact occurs when the direction of the neighboring cell (white background in (Fig. 4(c) left)) is at 90° to the current cell (grey background). The solution consists of changing the direction of the neighboring cell by 45° so that it now flows into the current cell (Fig. 4(c) right). Doing so – instead of changing the current cell – ensures that no other crossing flow is being created by the change.
- *Unspecified directions.* Unspecified directions can be created during the computation of the flow directions when working within the open furrows. At stage 3, the modeling of the flow directions within the open furrows is achieved by artificially increasing the altitudes of the cells surrounding the furrows. Doing so ensures that the flow direction is identical to that of the underlying furrow. But, as a consequence, when a furrow crosses a thalweg, a local minimum appears in the DEM,

1 causing a so-called 'sink.' Such a sink has the effect of disrupting the flow path network where it  
2 should normally lead to the edge of the study area. The sink cells receive an unspecified flow  
3 direction (Fig. 4(d) left). The solution to an unspecified direction again consists of switching it  
4 back to the topographic flow direction. This causes the open furrow to overflow at the location of  
5 the thalweg it crosses. Hence, this solution restores the usual behavior of an open furrow at the  
6 field (Fig. 4(d) right).

7 The automatic procedure to remove artifacts is run twice in the 'flow network' module. During the  
8 first run, the corrections are not applied to the cells labeled as open furrows. This avoids the creation  
9 of crossing flows. In most of the cases, this solves the artifacts around the open furrows, except for the  
10 unspecified directions. During the second run, all of the remaining artifacts are solved, including those  
11 located in the open furrows.

## 12 **2.3 Test watershed**

13 The 'flow network' module was implemented in the "STREAM" watershed hydrologic modeling  
14 software (Cerdan et al., 2002b). This section details how the tillage directions and associated  
15 manmade features modify the flow network. The modeled flow network is compared to the actual flow  
16 network.

### 17 **2.3.1 Watershed description**

18 The watershed used to test the 'flow network' module is located in northern France, in the department  
19 of Seine Maritime, in the commune of Blossville (Fig. 5). The agricultural watershed has a surface  
20 area of 87 hectares, with loamy soils sensitive to crusting. The lateral flows are mostly surface flows.  
21 The village, located at the outlet of the watershed, has undergone significant damage caused by muddy  
22 floods. To decrease the risk of flooding, a watershed management plan was set up. The STREAM  
23 model was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the soil and water conservation practices.

### 24 **2.3.2 Data requirements**

25 Except for the DEM, the method has been designed for using data that do not require any specific  
26 equipment (laser scanner, etc.) during the field data collection. A first field study was performed to

1 obtain, for each agricultural field, the information necessary to model the flow directions: tillage  
2 direction, roughness along the tillage direction, roughness across the tillage direction, and location and  
3 type of preferential flow paths (Fig. 6) or (Fig. 7). In less than two hours, these parameters could be  
4 easily mapped by the visual inspection of all fields. It makes the use of the 'flow network' module  
5 cost-effective. In addition, the formation of an operator is easy. The information needed to build the  
6 DEM came from digitizing the contour lines of a topographic map and from a complementary survey  
7 of topographic points. It had a horizontal resolution of 5 m. Altitudes were stored as floating-point  
8 numbers.

9 This enables the prediction of soil surface characteristics could be deduced from information on crop  
10 type, soil surface texture, and rainfall regimes (Delmas et al., 2012). This enables to predict soil  
11 surface characteristics and their evolution during the cultivation season without further field study.

## 12 **2.4 Validation**

13 The computed flow networks are compared to the observed rill network. Erosion rills are a direct and  
14 visible indication of flow directions inside a watershed. They were mapped using a theodolite. Given  
15 the size of the catchment, they could be mapped on only part of the watershed. A thorough cell-to-cell  
16 comparison of the actual versus predicted flow network would not have been possible because the  
17 actual flow directions cannot be detected everywhere.

18 First, the validation is performed by a visual comparison of the computed flow networks with the  
19 observed flow network. Then, to quantify the improvement induced by the proposed algorithm, the  
20 following methodology is executed:

- 21 • The flow networks, refined as much as possible, are computed both from the topographic flow  
22 network (TOPO) and the tillage flow network (TILL). The lines in the observed erosion network  
23 (OBS) are cut into 5-meter-long segments corresponding to the DEM resolution. For each segment  
24 of these 3 networks (TOPO, TILL, and OBS), the flow azimuth is computed (TOPOAZIM,  
25 TILLAZIM, and OBSAZIM). For each segment in the observed network (OBS), the nearest  
26 segment in both the topographic (TOPO) and the tillage (TILL) flow network is identified. This  
27 allows attributing the nearest TOPOAZIM and TILLAZIM to the OBS segment. At this stage, for

1 each observed erosion line segment, its own azimuth, the azimuth of the topographic flow  
2 network, and the azimuth of the tillage flow network are known.

- 3 • The absolute acute angle (gap angle) between the observed and the topographic network azimuth  
4 is computed ( $TOPOGAP = \text{modulo}180(\text{abs}(\text{OBSAZIM} - \text{TOPOAZIM}))$ ). The same is performed  
5 with the tillage network azimuth ( $TILLGAP = \text{modulo}180(\text{abs}(\text{OBSAZIM} - \text{TILLAZIM}))$ ). The  
6 difference (Q) between these two angles ( $Q = TOPOGAP - TILLGAP$ ) provides, for each  
7 observed segment (OBS) considered a ground truth, an indication of the improvement in quality  
8 obtained using the tillage flow network instead of the topographic flow network. A positive Q  
9 value indicates a gain in quality, whereas a negative Q value indicates a loss in quality. The value  
10 itself indicates the intensity of this gain/loss of quality.

## 11 **3 Results and discussion**

### 12 *3.1 Model of the flow directions*

13 The first stage was to create the topographic flow network based on the DEM (Fig. 8(a)).

14 The second stage makes use of the discriminant function to define the cells where the flow is  
15 controlled by the tillage direction. This stage also includes the effect of the preferential flow paths on  
16 flow directions. According to the discriminant function, the tillage operations control a large part of  
17 the flow directions inside the watershed (Fig. 9). In the northern part of the watershed, the tillage  
18 operations define the flow direction in most of the agricultural fields. After this stage, the tillage flow  
19 network shows a drift in the flow directions (Fig. 8(b)): in the northern part of the watershed, the flow  
20 network crosses the field boundaries. If overland flow is modeled using this network, water will be  
21 routed from one field to a sideways field, even if the tillage directions, which, at this location, should  
22 control the flow direction, are parallel to the field boundaries (Fig. 7). This clearly illustrates the drift  
23 of flow directions caused by the requirement for the flow directions to be along one of the eight  
24 directions at the cell scale. The tillage operations on the northern fields have an actual direction of  
25  $145^\circ$ . At the cell level, the closest direction is  $135^\circ$ . This caused the flow direction of  $145^\circ$  (south-east)  
26 to be overstated among the flow directions in the uncorrected tillage flow network (Fig. 10).

1 To alleviate this problem, the drift-cancellation method is used to shift by 45° some of the cells with  
2 the appropriate ratio. For the specific case of actual directions at 145°, some of the directions modeled  
3 at 135° are shifted to the direction 180°. After drift cancellation, the number of flow directions  
4 pointing at 135° is decreased in the corrected tillage flow network (Fig. 10). Simultaneously, the  
5 number of directions at 180° is increased. After the removal of the flow direction artifacts, the new  
6 network better accounts for the tillage directions and is consistent with the hydrologic uses (Fig. 8(c)):  
7 the flow network remains parallel to the field boundaries instead of crossing them sideways. Taking  
8 into account tillage operations and cancelling the drift also modified the watershed boundaries  
9 (compare Fig. 8(a) and Fig. 8(c)): two fields located in A on Fig. 8(a) are now fully connected to the  
10 outlet, which was not the case with the topographic model. This underlines also the need of using a  
11 DEM covering an area larger than that of the study area.

### 12 ***3.2 Validity of the tillage flow network***

13 The above section demonstrates that the tillage flow network sensibly incorporates manmade features  
14 in an agricultural watershed. The validity of the tillage flow network can be further estimated by a  
15 comparison with the actual flow network.

16 The actual flow network is the network of the observed rills (Fig. 8(d)). The visual comparison of  
17 Fig. 8(a) with Fig. 8(d) shows that the topographic network does not account well for the actual flow  
18 network. The same exercise with Figure 8(c) or Figure 8(d) provides a better match of the corrected  
19 tillage network with the actual flow network.

20 Figure 11 represents the frequency distribution of Q values. Out of the 1240 observed segments, the  
21 proposed algorithm modified 587 segments (47%) by more than 1°. Among these, 455 segments  
22 (77%) have a positive Q. Hence, most of flow directions modified by the proposed algorithms led to  
23 an improved flow direction. This clearly demonstrates that taking into account tillage directions  
24 improves the quality of the flow network.

## 1 **4. Conclusions and perspectives**

2 In an agricultural context, and for a watershed with gentle slopes, the surface flow network is largely  
3 affected by agricultural practices. The flow network computed from the DEM solely does not match  
4 the actual flow network with enough accuracy to allow for a good modeling of the overland flow and  
5 soil erosion.

6 The topographic network model can be improved with information about the tillage operations and  
7 preferential flow paths (such as open furrows). Including this information introduces some artifacts in  
8 the flow directions. These artifacts must be corrected to create a flow network usable for hydrologic  
9 purposes. The most important artifact is a drift in the flow direction everywhere the flow direction is  
10 controlled by the tillage operations. A method to cancel this drift is proposed. It should be applicable  
11 to most of the cell-based flow networks. The automatic procedures to correct other artifacts are also  
12 presented.

13 The comparison among the topographic flow network, the corrected tillage flow network, and the  
14 observed erosion marks shows that the described method matches successfully the actual flow  
15 network. It also shows that using only the topography to account for the flow directions leads to large  
16 discrepancies in the agricultural areas.

17 The proposed method could be further improved. Currently, only the convergent flows are modeled  
18 because we are using a “single flow direction” algorithm. However, some field observations show that  
19 divergent flow can also occur, especially in sedimentation areas. Another flow network algorithm,  
20 such as the “multiple flow algorithm” of Quinn et al. (1991), could be implemented to account for this  
21 feature. The visual observations also showed that the flow directions can change depending on the  
22 water flux. For a small water flux, the flow depth is low and the flow direction is along the tillage  
23 direction. However, for a larger water flux, the flow depth increases and the furrows can overflow,  
24 increasing the flow to the topographic slope aspect. This phenomenon can occur during a single rain  
25 event and is not accounted for in the current method. No alternative method is currently available.

26 New research will be needed to address this issue. However, future studies will have to face the

1 difficulty of the distributed water-flux measurements inside an agricultural field. Taking changes in  
2 flow depth into account would lead to a network able to evolve during a rainfall event.

### 3 **Acknowledgements**

4 This work was funded by a GESSOL research grant from the French Ministry of Environment. This  
5 support is gratefully acknowledged. It was also supported by the ANR VMC program within the  
6 framework of the MESOEROS21 and LANDSOIL projects. The authors are grateful to the two  
7 anonymous reviewers who helped improve the manuscript.

### 8 **References**

- 9 Auzet, A.V., Boiffin, J., Ludwig, B., 1995. Concentrated flow erosion in cultivated catchments:  
10 influence of soil surface state. *Earth Surface Processes and Landforms* 20, 759–767.
- 11 Bailly, J.S., Lagacherie, P., Millier, C., Puech, C., Kosuth, P., 2008. Agrarian landscapes linear  
12 features detection from LiDAR: application to artificial drainage networks. *International Journal of*  
13 *Remote Sensing* 29, 3489–3508.
- 14 Bingner, R.L., Theurer, F.D., 2007. AGNPS: AGricultural Non-Point Source Pollution Model.  
15 Available online at: <http://www.ars.usda.gov/Research/docs.htm?docid=5199> (accessed on 11 July  
16 2012).
- 17 Boiffin, J., Papy, F., Eimberck, M., 1988. Influence of cropping systems on the risk of concentrated  
18 flow erosion. I. — Analysis of the conditions for initiating erosion [in French]. *Agronomie* 8, 663–  
19 673.
- 20 Cerdan, O., Le Bissonnais, Y., Souchère, V., Martin, P., Lecomte, V., 2002a. Sediment concentration  
21 in interrill flow: Interactions between soil surface conditions, vegetation and rainfall. *Earth Surface*  
22 *Processes and Landforms* 27, 193–205.
- 23 Cerdan, O., Souchère, V., Lecomte, V., Couturier, A., Le Bissonnais, Y., 2002b. Incorporating soil  
24 surface crusting processes in an expert-based runoff model: STREAM (Sealing and Transfer by  
25 Runoff and Erosion related to Agricultural Management). *Catena* 46, 189–205.

# Postprint

Version définitive du manuscrit publié dans / Final version of the manuscript published in :  
Geomorphology, 2013, 183, 120-129 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.geomorph.2012.07.025>

- 1 Delmas, M., Pak, L., Cerdan, O., Souchère, V., Le Bissonnais, Y., Couturier, A., Sorel, L., 2012.  
2 Water and sediment transfer from the field to the river in an agricultural catchment of the European  
3 Loess belt. *Journal of Hydrology* 420-421, 255–263.
- 4 Desmet, P.J.J., Govers, G., 1997. Two-dimensional modelling of the within-field variation in rill and  
5 gully geometry and location related to topography. *Catena* 29, 283–306.
- 6 Flanagan, D.C., Nearing, M.A., 1995. USDA - Water Erosion Prediction Project. Hillslope profile and  
7 watershed model documentation. Report n°10, USDA-ARS, National Soil Erosion Research  
8 Laboratory, West Lafayette, Indiana, Available online at:  
9 [http://www.ars.usda.gov/research/publications/publications.htm?seq\\_no\\_115=64035](http://www.ars.usda.gov/research/publications/publications.htm?seq_no_115=64035) (accessed on  
10 11 July 2012).
- 11 Furlan, A., Poussin J.C., Mailhol, J.C., Le Bissonnais, Y., Gumiere, S.J., 2012. Designing  
12 management options to reduce surface runoff and sediment yield with farmers: An experiment in  
13 South-Western France. *Journal of Environmental Management* 96, 74–85.
- 14 Govers, G., Takken, I., Helming, K., 2000. Soil roughness and overland flow. *Agronomie* 20, 131–  
15 146.
- 16 Le Bissonnais, Y., Gascuel-Oudou, C., 1998. Water erosion of cultivated soils in temperate area [in  
17 French]. In: Stengel, P., Gelin, S., (Eds.), *Sol: interface fragile*. INRA Edition, Paris, pp. 129–144.
- 18 Le Bissonnais, Y., Cerdan, O., Lecomte, V., Benkhadra, H., Souchère, V., Martin, P., 2005.  
19 Variability of soil surface characteristics influencing runoff and interrill erosion. *Catena* 62, 111–  
20 124.
- 21 Ludwig, B., Boiffin, J., Chadoeuf, J., Auzet, A.V., 1995. Hydrological structure and erosion damage  
22 caused by concentrated flow in cultivated catchments. *Catena* 25, 227–252.
- 23 Morgan, R.P.C., Quinton, J.N., Smith, R.E., Govers, G., Poesen, J.W.A., Auerswald, K., Chisci, G.,  
24 Torri, D., Styczen, M.E., 1998. The European Soil Erosion Model (EUROSEM): a dynamic  
25 approach for predicting sediment transport from fields and small catchments. *Earth Surface  
26 Processes and Landforms* 23, 527–544.
- 27 O’Callaghan, J.F., Mark, D.M., 1984. The extraction of drainage networks from digital elevation data.  
28 *Computer Vision, Graphics, and Image Processing* 28, 323–344.

- 1 Orlandini, S., Moretti, G., Franchini, M., 2003. Path-based methods for the determination of  
2 nondispersive drainage directions in grid-based digital elevation models. *Water Resources*  
3 *Research* 39, 1144.
- 4 Orlandini, S., Tarolli, P., Moretti, G., Dalla Fontana, G., 2011. On the prediction of channel heads in a  
5 complex alpine terrain using gridded elevation data, *Water Resources Research* 47, W02538, doi:  
6 10.1029/2010WR009648.
- 7 Papy, F., Boiffin, J., 1989. The use of farming systems for the control of runoff and erosion. In *Soil*  
8 *Erosion Protection Measures in Europe. Proceedings of the European Community. Workshop on*  
9 *Soil Erosion Protection, Freising, Germany*, pp. 29–38.
- 10 Quinn, P., Beven, K., Chevallier, P., Planchon, O., 1991. The prediction of hillslope flow paths for  
11 distributed hydrological modelling using digital terrain models *Hydrological Processes* 5, 59–79.
- 12 Souchère, V., King, D., Daroussin, J., Papy, F., Capillon, A., 1998. Effect of tillage on runoff  
13 direction: consequences on runoff contributing area within agricultural catchments. *Journal of*  
14 *Hydrology* 206, 256–267.
- 15 Souchère, V., Cerdan, O., Dubreuil, N., Le Bissonnais, Y., King, C. 2005. Modelling the impact of  
16 agri-environmental scenarios on runoff in a cultivated catchment (Normandy, France). *Catena* 61,  
17 229–240.
- 18 Tarboton, D.G., 1997. A new method for the determination of flow directions and upslope areas in  
19 grid digital elevation models. *Water Resources Research* 33, 309–319.
- 20 Takken, I., Govers, G., Jetten, V., Nachtergaele, L., Steegen, A., Poesen, J., 2001. Effects of tillage on  
21 runoff and erosion patterns. *Soil & Tillage Research* 61, 55–60.
- 22 Takken, I., Govers, G., Jetten, V., Nachtergaele, J., Steegen, A., Poesen, J., 2005. The influence of  
23 both process descriptions and runoff patterns on predictions from a spatially distributed soil erosion  
24 model. *Earth Surface Processes and Landforms* 30, 213–229.
- 25 Thorne, C.R., Zevenbergen, L.W., 1990. Prediction of ephemeral gully erosion on cropland in the  
26 south-eastern United States. In: Boardman, J., Foster, D.L., Dearing, J.A. (Eds.), *Soil Erosion on*  
27 *Agricultural Land*. Wiley, Chichester, pp. 447–460.
- 28

1

Table 1 - Roughness heights and corresponding levels

Roughness height	Level
From 0 to 1 cm	0
From 1 to 2 cm	1
From 2 to 5 cm	2
From 5 to 10 cm	3
From 10 to 15 cm	4
More than 15 cm	5

2

1

Table 2. Drift correction to be applied depending on the drift angle  $\alpha$  and the topographic flow direction modeled before correction  $\beta$ .

$\beta$	$\alpha < 0^\circ$	$\alpha > 0^\circ$
$0^\circ$	a (R)	a (R)
$45^\circ$	b (R)	a (C)
$90^\circ$	b (C)	b (C)
$135^\circ$	a (C)	b (R)
$180^\circ$	a (R)	a (R)
$225^\circ$	b (R)	a (C)
$270^\circ$	b (C)	b (C)
$315^\circ$	a (C)	b (R)

2

3

4

5

Note: 'a' and 'b' refer to the formula numbers in the text.  
'C' ('R') means that the correction has to be applied at a given interval along the 'columns' ('rows')

## 1 **List of figures**

2 Fig. 1. Stages of the flow network algorithm accounting for tillage directions.

3 Fig. 2. Drift and drift angle. At the scale of a grid cell, the flow direction does not necessarily match  
4 the actual flow direction.  $\beta$  represents the modeled flow direction. The drift angle  $\alpha$  between the  
5 modeled and the actual directions can be as great as  $22.5^\circ$ .

6 Fig. 3. Drift and its correction. The actual flow travels from point A to point B. (a) The drift causes the  
7 flow to travel from point A to point B'. (b) The drift correction consists of tilting the flow direction at  
8 regular intervals. It restores a general flow direction matching the actual flow direction.

9 Fig. 4. Examples of flow artifacts and their corrections. (a) Converging flow, (b) Flow loop, (c)  
10 Crossing flow, (d) Unspecified flow direction. The cell under consideration has a grey background.

11 Fig. 5. Location map of the study area.

12 Fig. 6. Effects of the tillage operations on sealing, roughness, and surface runoff. (a) Crusted surface  
13 on the left, tilled on the right. (b) Tilled field with deep furrows. (c) crusted furrows. (d) uncrusted  
14 seedbed. (e) structural and sedimentary crusts.

15 Fig. 7. Data used by the 'flow network' module.

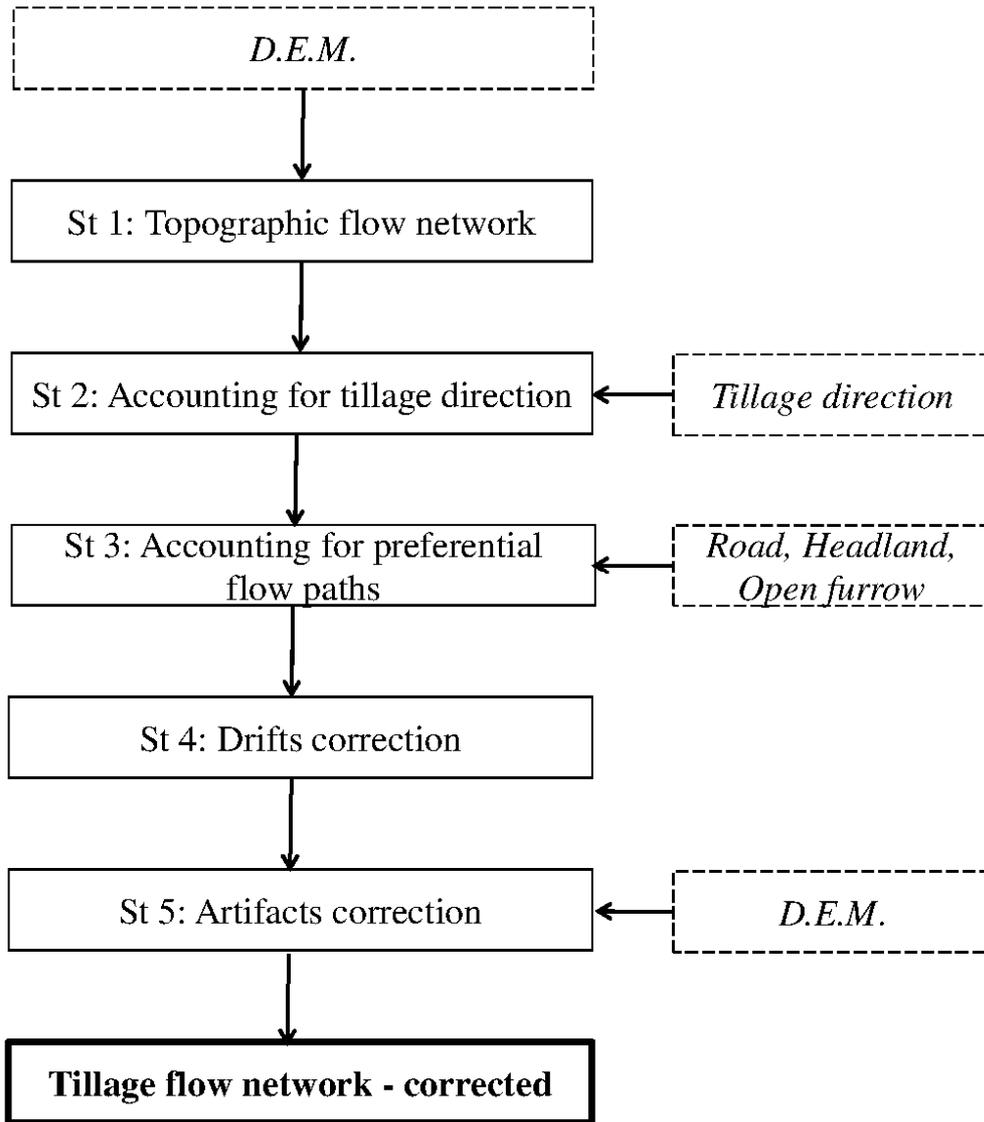
16 Fig. 8. Comparison of computed and observed flow networks. (a) Topographic flow model, based on  
17 the Digital Elevation Model only. (b) Tillage flow network before the correction of the drift. (c)  
18 Tillage flow network after the correction of the drift. (d) Erosion rill showing the actual flow direction  
19 as observed in the field.

20 Fig. 9. Effect of the tillage and topography on flow directions. The flow can either follow the  
21 topographic slope directions (light tone/brown color) or the tillage directions (dark tone/green color).

22 Fig. 10. Distribution of the flow directions for the computed flow networks.

23 Fig. 11. Frequency distribution of the Q values. A positive Q value indicates a gain in quality brought  
24 by the proposed algorithm, whereas a negative Q value indicates a loss in quality.

1

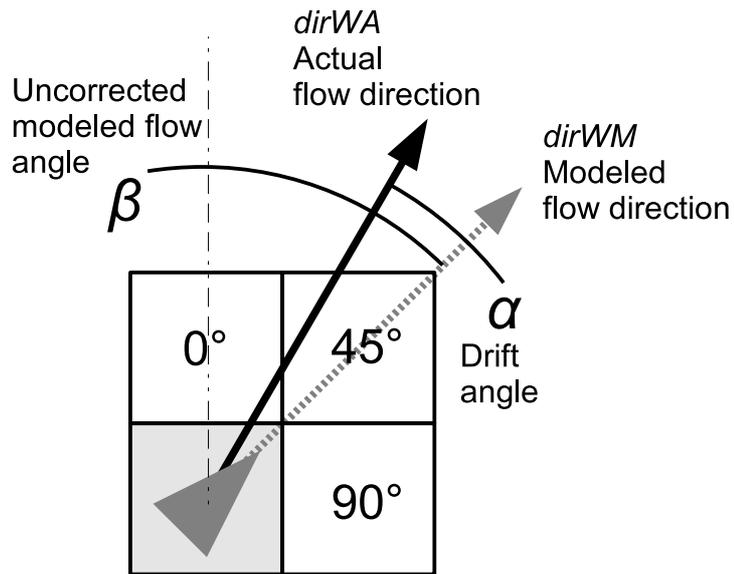


2

3 Fig. 1. Stages of the flow network algorithm accounting for tillage directions.

4

1



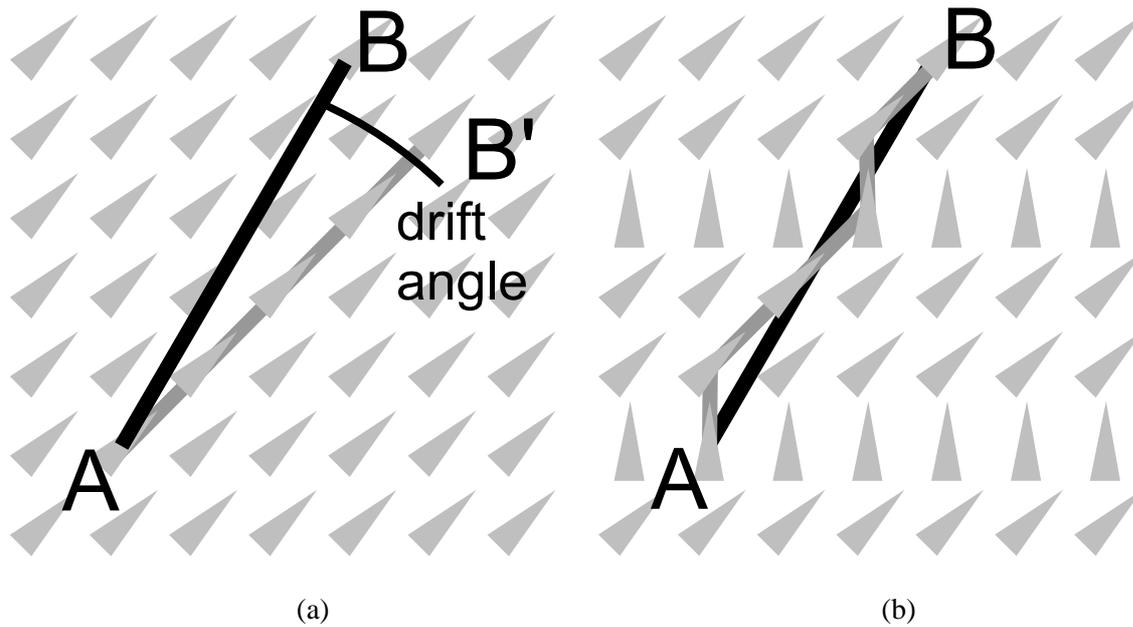
2

3 Fig. 2. Drift and drift angle. At the scale of a grid cell, the flow direction does not necessarily match  
4 the actual flow direction.  $\beta$  represents the modeled flow direction. The drift angle  $\alpha$  between the  
5 modeled and the actual directions can be as great as 22.5°.

6

7

1



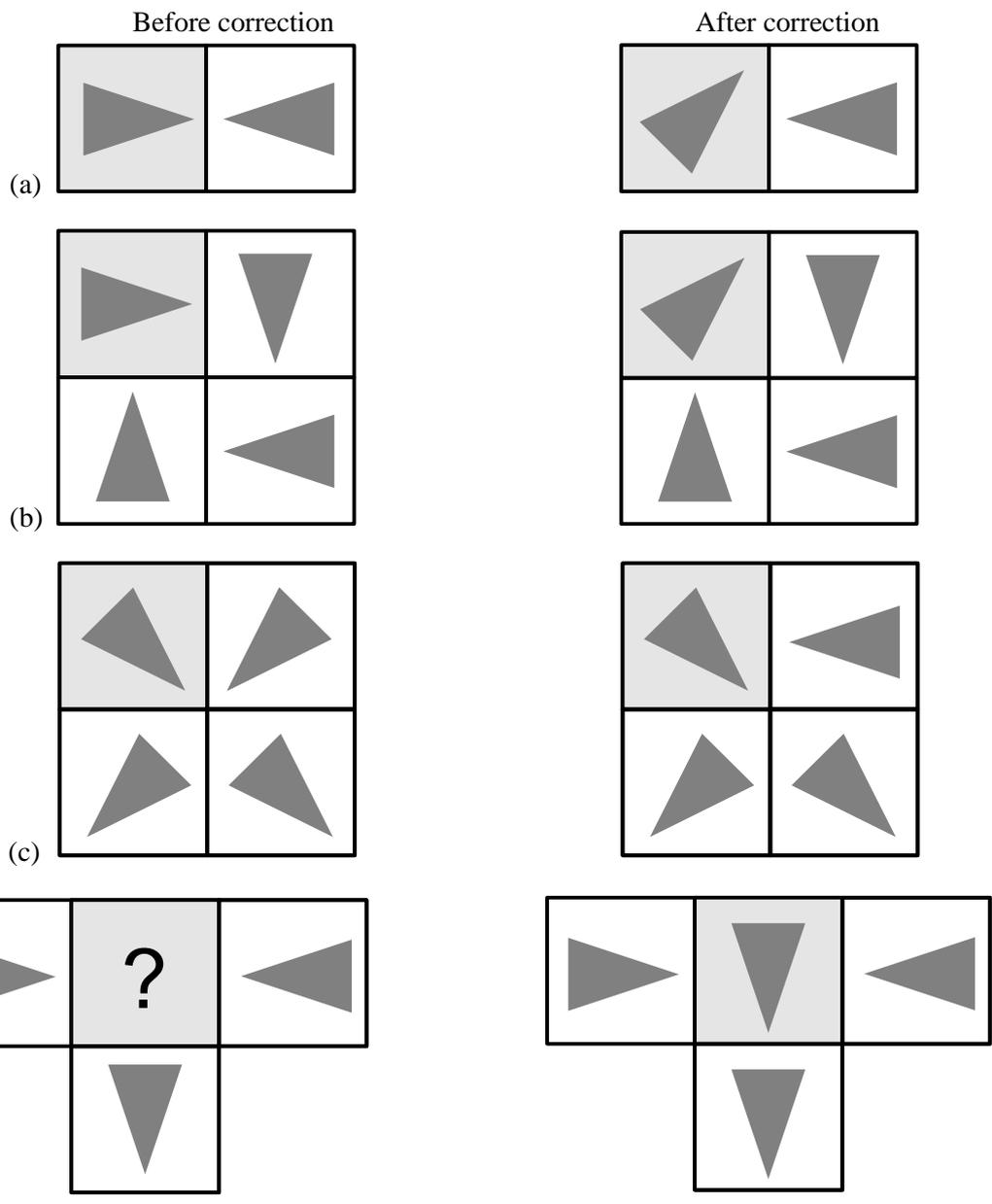
2

3

4 Fig. 3. Drift and its correction. The actual flow travels from point A to point B. (a) The drift causes the  
5 flow to travel from point A to point B'. (b) The drift correction consists of tilting the flow direction at  
6 regular intervals. It restores a general flow direction matching the actual flow direction.

7

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9

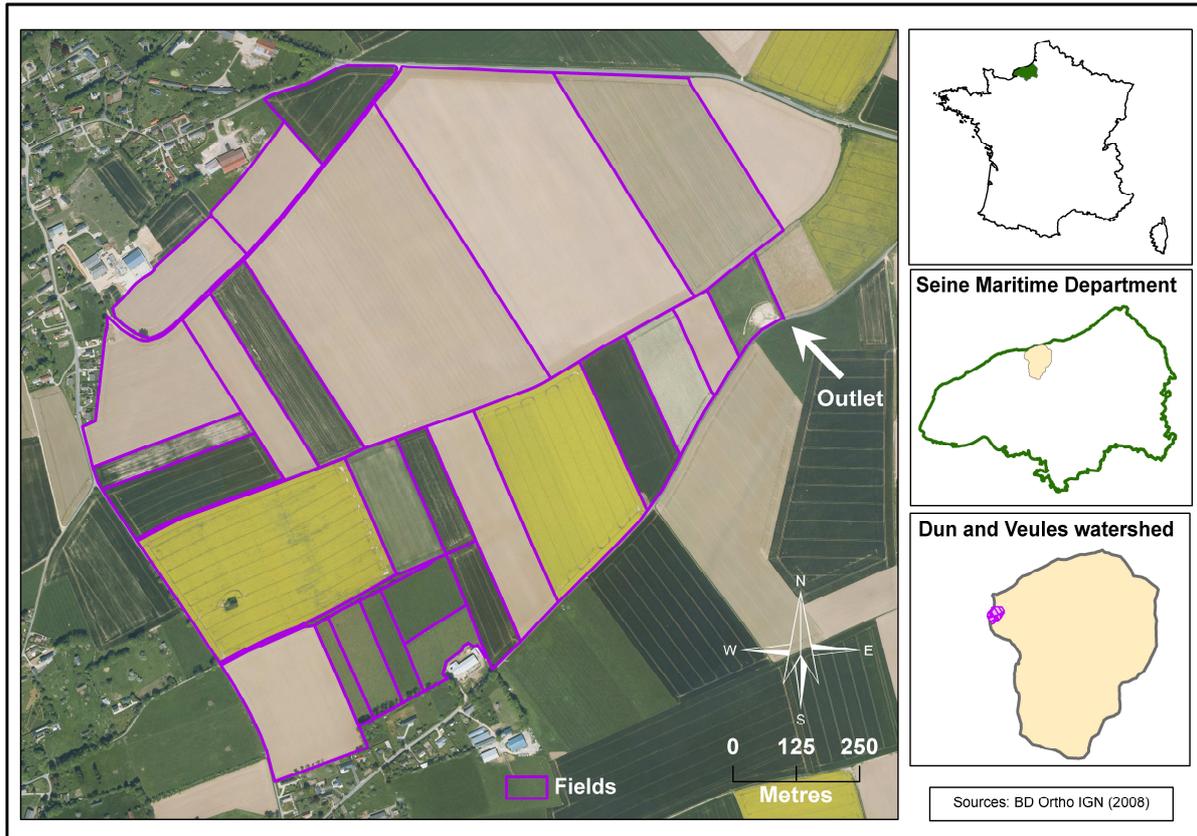


10  
11  
12 Fig. 4. Examples of flow artifacts and their corrections. (a) Converging flow, (b) Flow loop, (c)  
13 Crossing flow, (d) Unspecified flow direction. The cell under consideration has a grey background.

14

Manuscrit d'auteur / Author Manuscript  
Manuscrit d'auteur / Author Manuscript  
Manuscrit d'auteur / Author Manuscript

1



2

3 Fig. 5. Location map of the study area.

4

1

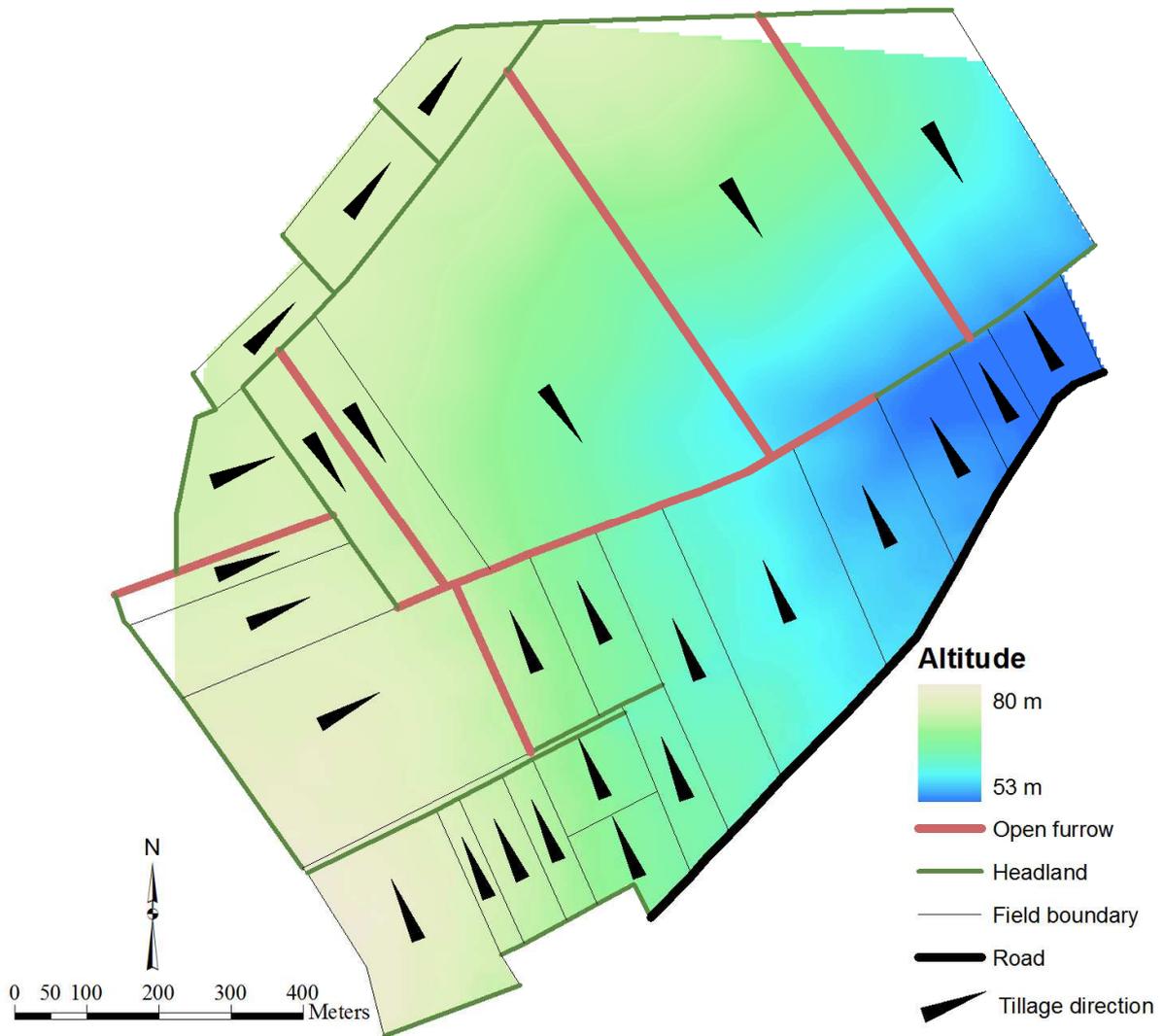


2

3 Fig. 6. Effects of the tillage operations on sealing, roughness, and surface runoff. (a) Crusted surface  
4 on the left, tilled on the right. (b) Tilled field with deep furrows. (c) crusted furrows. (d) uncrusted  
5 seedbed. (e) structural and sedimentary crusts.

6

1



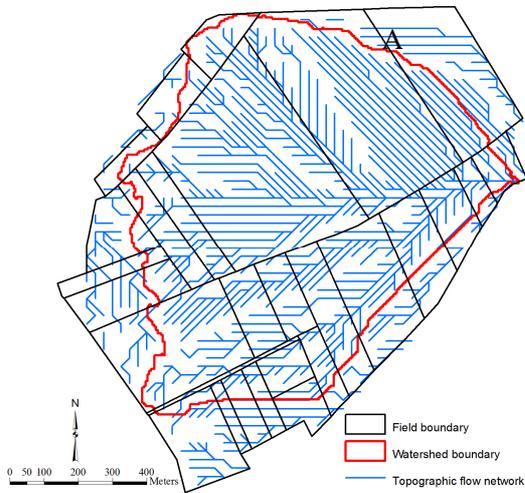
2

3 Fig. 7. Data used by the 'flow network' module.

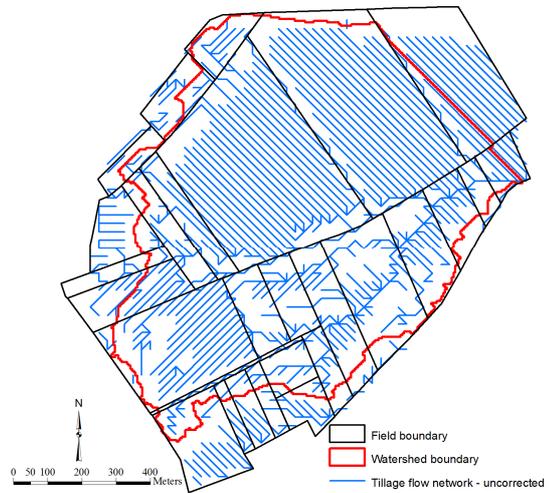
4

1

2 (a)



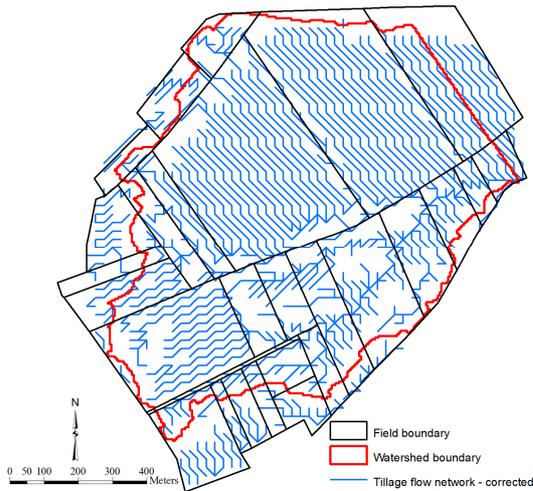
7 (b)



3

8

4 (c)



9 (d)



5

10

11 6

12 Fig. 8. Comparison of computed and observed flow networks. (a) Topographic flow model, based on  
 13 the Digital Elevation Model only. (b) Tillage flow network before the correction of the drift. (c)  
 14 Tillage flow network after the correction of the drift. (d) Erosion rill showing the actual flow direction  
 15 as observed in the field.

16

1

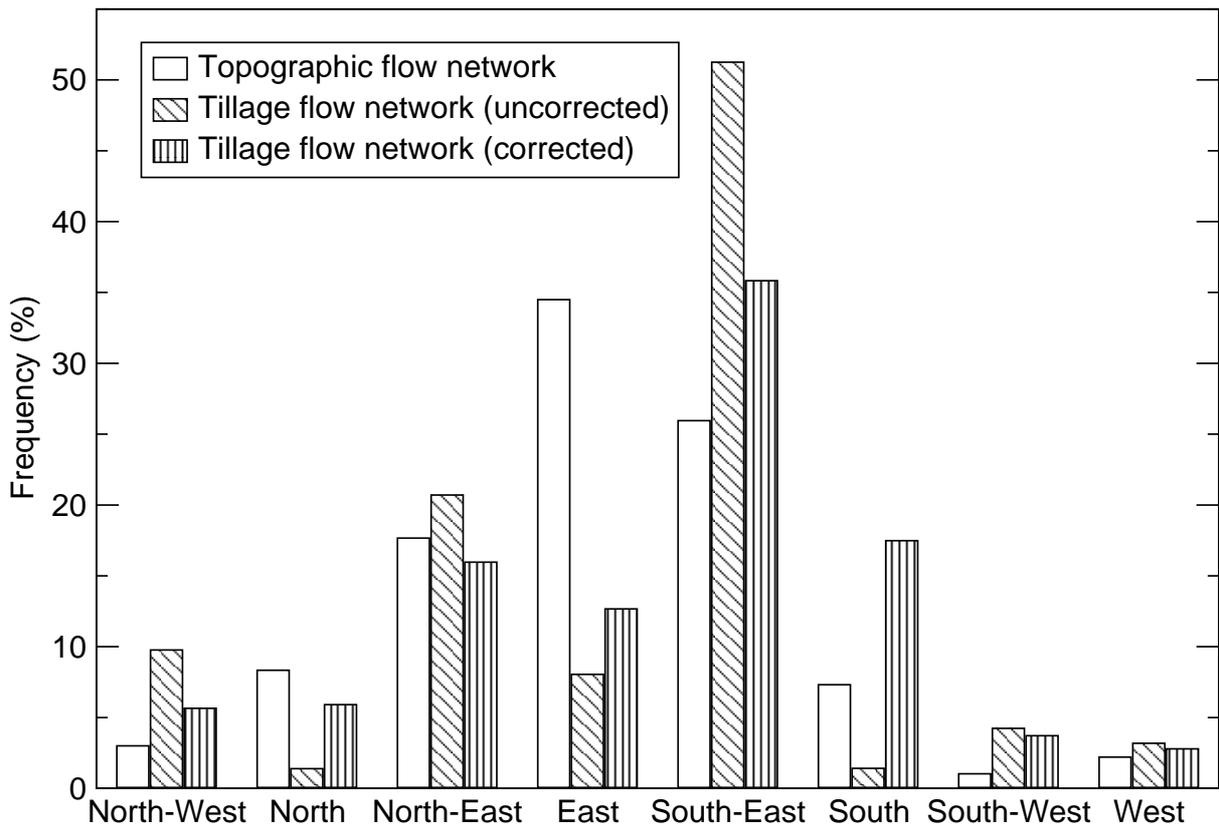


2

3

4 Fig. 9. Effect of the tillage and topography on flow directions. The flow can either follow the  
5 topographic slope directions (light tone/brown color) or the tillage directions (dark tone/green color).

6

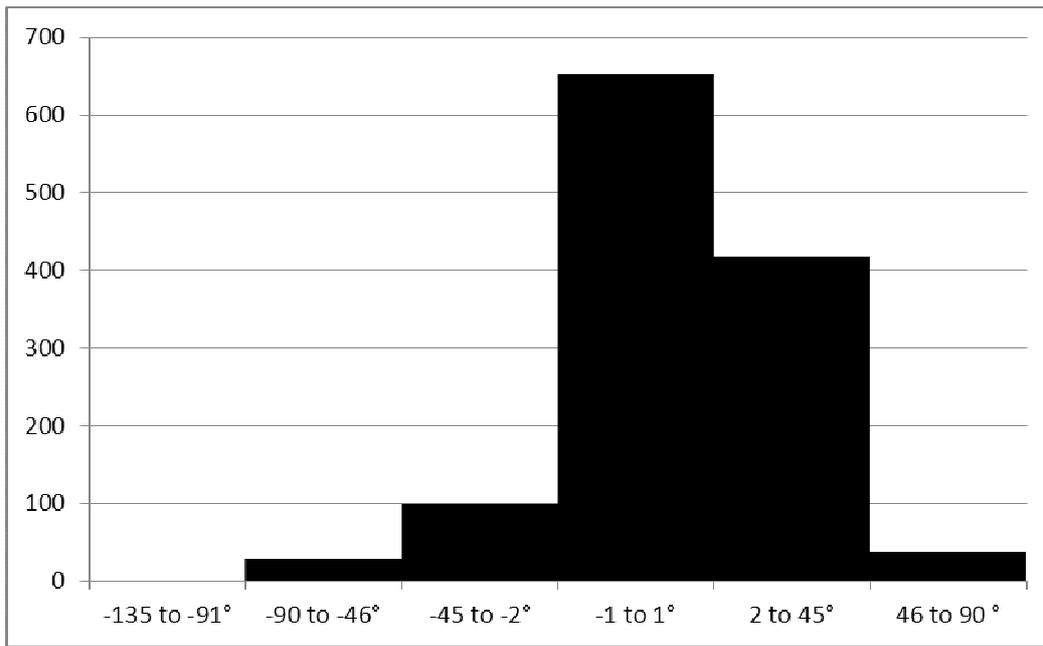


2

3 Fig. 10. Distribution of the flow directions for the computed flow networks.

4

1



2

3 Fig. 11. Frequency distribution of the Q values. A positive Q value indicates a gain in quality brought  
4 by the proposed algorithm, whereas a negative Q value indicates a loss in quality.