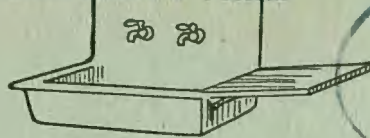


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The Present Status of the Soil Erosion Control Program

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The Soil Conservation Act

On April 27, 1935, Congress passed the "Soil Conservation Act." This act may well be considered the culmination of an active nationwide educational campaign regarding soil erosion started less than ten years ago by a small group of scientists in several of the bureaus of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. This group of pioneers were the first to recognize the seriousness and widespread presence of the soil erosion problem. Hence they started out many years ago to assemble both statistical and pictorial evidence that would enable them to wage their campaign effectively. Their primary purpose was to make the general public throughout the United States "soil erosion control minded." How well they succeeded is fully attested by the vigorous activity in soil conservation now evident throughout the United States resulting in the passage of the "Soil Conservation Act."

Pursuant to this act which gives the necessary authority and provides for the permanent organization and support of such an administrative unit, there has been set up in the U. S. Department of Agriculture a plan for the coordination and cooperation of all agencies—federal, state, corporate and individual.

Salient Features of the Proposed Plan of Action

The plan, just now before the state agricultural experiment stations and other agencies for consideration and approval, recognizes in no uncertain way the all embracing character of the problem of soil erosion control in the field of agriculture.

It recognizes the fact that neither soil saving dams in gully control nor terraces, nor cover cropping in sheet erosion control can be looked upon as the only sure means of ultimate control. Although these methods are still and will continue to be important and, in numerous cases, necessary, it is also known that there are many cases where they are not even possible of application owing to local topographic or soil conditions.

For example, an area largely comprised of a series of disconnected knolls—a condition recently spoken of as "carbuncle topography"—cannot be terraced because there can be no outlets provided for the terraces, and outlets are a prime need in terracing. A serious gully is often started and many an existing gully is rapidly growing laterally as a result of uncontrolled ravages of field rodents over which dams have no control and to which the best built dam may fall a victim.

Over-pasturing has long been recognized as a leading factor in aggravated soil erosion that only a reasonable restriction of grazing and a scientific renovation or rebuilding of pastures can successfully meet.

Many areas now in farms, owing to roughness or steepness of topography, are known to be unsuited to farm operations consistent with soil conservation. They should be eliminated from agriculture.

Cover cropping is known to be in some instances the only effective and economically feasible type of control. Hence, one of the problems due for serious consideration at the present time is, just what type of cover crop is best suited for the purpose for a given local condition of climate, soil, and topography. For example, recent tests in this state have shown that one of the best soil blankets is sod grown from a mixture of timothy and alfalfa—the effective planting proportions being 2 pounds of timothy seed to 10 or 12 pounds of alfalfa seed.

Strip cropping not recognized as effective in some regions is known to be especially effective in others. Contour tillage is growing in favor and makes a useful and necessary combination with strip cropping and terracing.

Many other examples might be cited but these will suffice to indicate why the present proposed federal plan includes all of the following methods and agencies in the national program for soil conservation:

- Vegetative and engineering methods
- Land classification for suitable use or for disuse
- Proper crop rotation
- Controlled grazing
- Other sound farm management practices

- Economic feasibility of individual control programs
- Rodent control
- Wild life conservation
- Weed, insect, and disease control in field plantings.

The system of large scale demonstration projects started in southeastern Minnesota in 1934 will be continued and extended but sizes of new projects of this character will be much more limited than the earlier ones carrying out the idea that many small but complete demonstrations thoroughly spread over a considerable region will effectively reach more people than a few larger, widely scattered ones covering the same region.

Local Soil Conservation Associations

In recognition of the fact that the problem of soil conservation is ultimately one for the individual farmer in cooperation with the local community, another distinct and unique element of the proposed plan, strongly urged and intended, eventually, to be required where federal cooperation enters the picture, is the development of township or other local soil conservation associations. The plan contemplates a uniformity in form of organization of these associations, supported, it is hoped, in time, in each of the several states, by uniform enabling legislation. The associations will be closely tied in with the local farm bureau organization and with the agricultural extension service of the various state agricultural colleges who will render aid and counsel in the organization and future operations of the associations through the agency of a coordinating specialist in soil conservation appointed to the extension staff and giving full time to the work.

The coordinating specialist in this work for Minnesota will be M. A. Thorfinnson, who for the past five years has been the efficient county agricultural agent in Goodhue county.

This federal plan of soil erosion control presents interesting possibilities for effective and necessary accomplishment both in research and in practical application of results of research to this urgent problem if there can be prompt initiation and steady prosecution of the vast campaign of activity visioned by it.