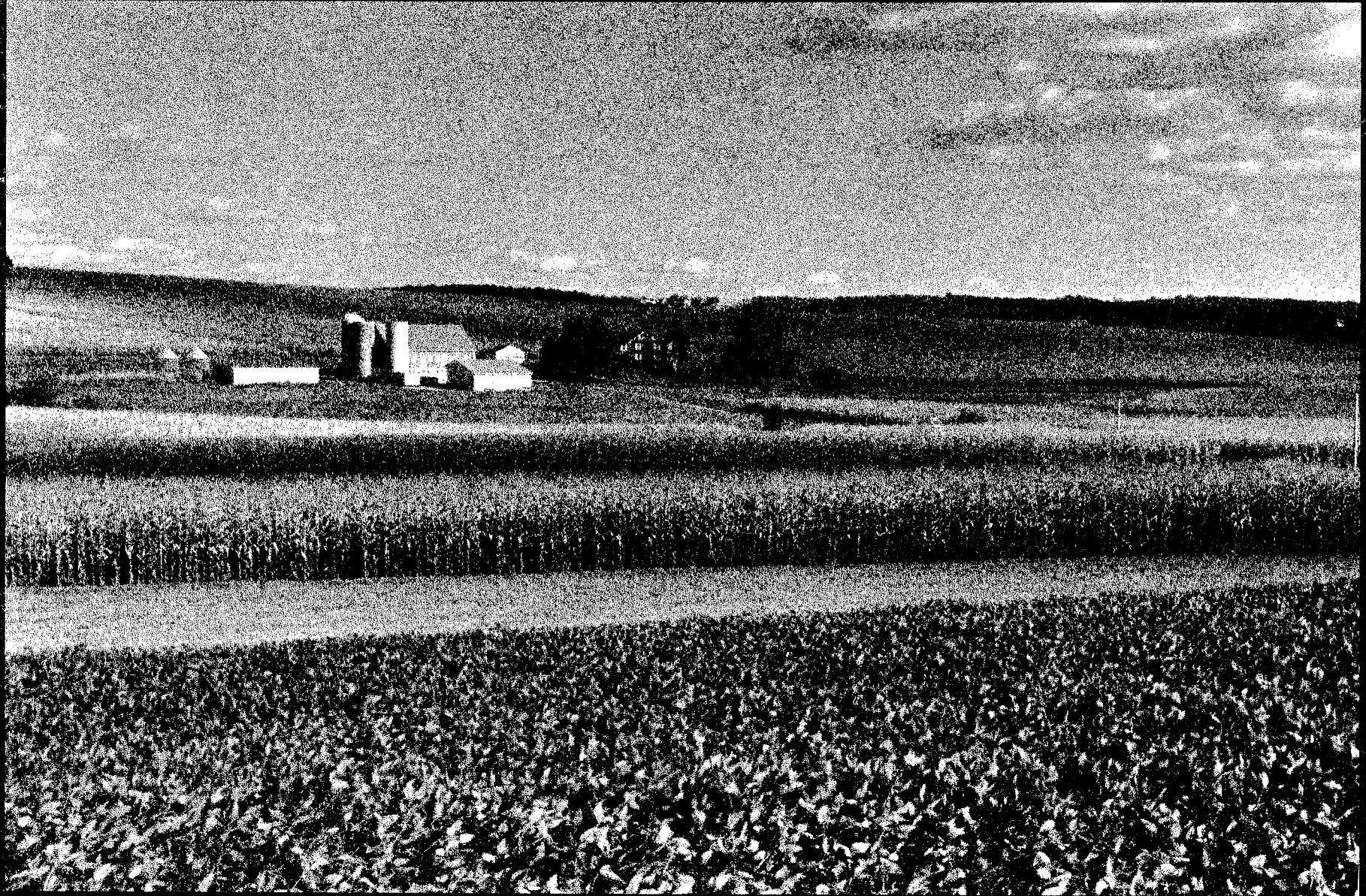


# CARING FOR THE COUNTRYSIDE

A Guide to Seeing and Maintaining Rural Landscape Quality



Joan Iverson Nassauer

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Joan Iverson Nassauer  
Associate Professor, Landscape Architecture  
University of Minnesota

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and  
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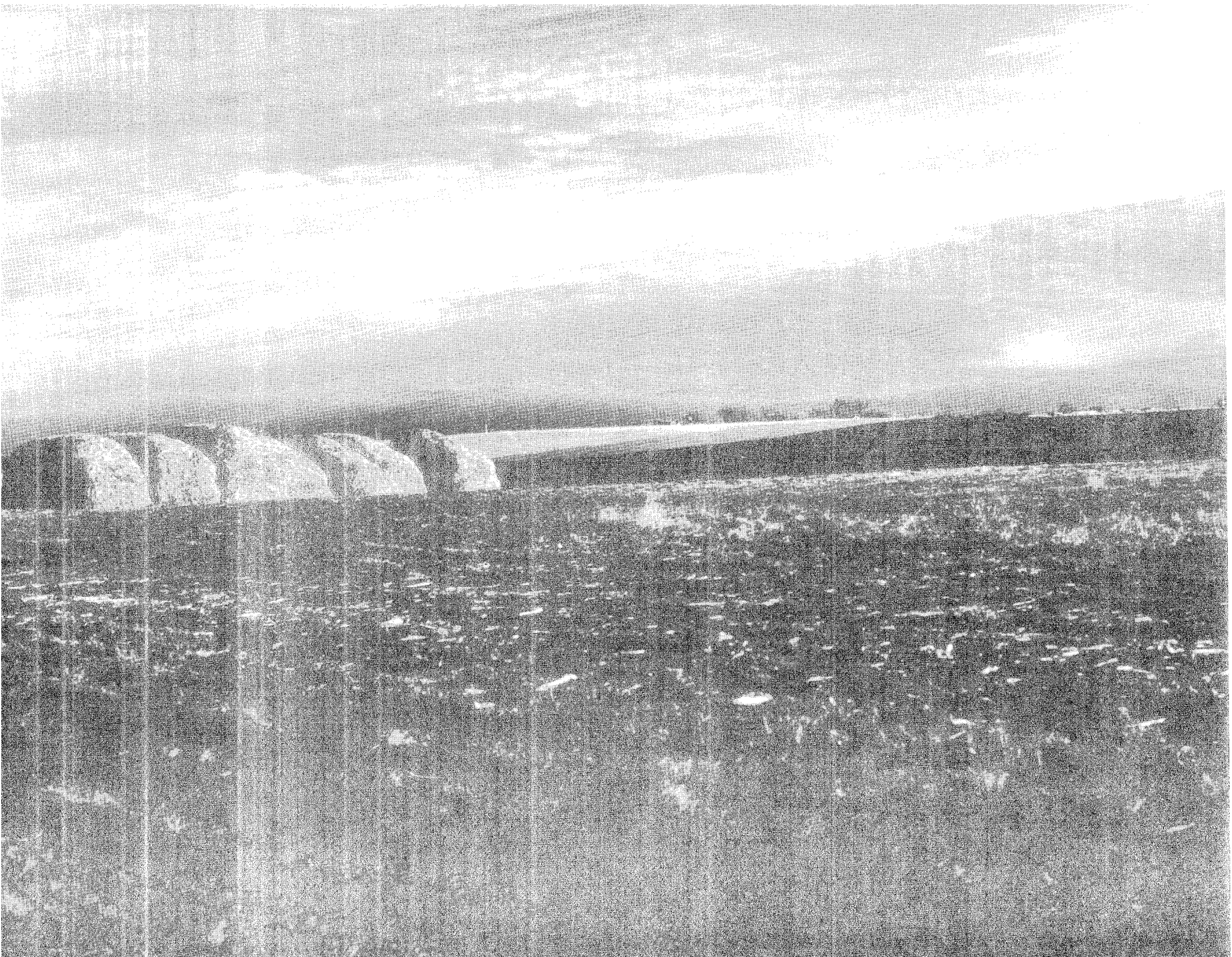
Joan Iverson Nassauer

St. Paul



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## Rural Landscape Quality

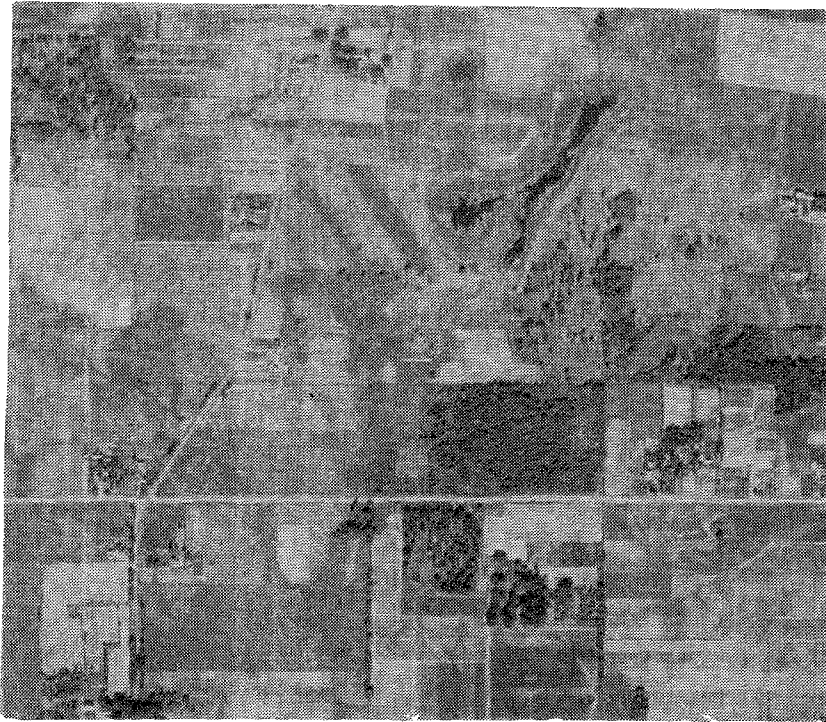
The countryside is different from the city. The landscape is different. It is open and spacious. A person can see the weather moving in and notice star patterns in the night sky. Crops and wooded areas dominate the view. Where the countryside begins and ends is not always clear, but its distinct qualities are apparent once you are there.

These qualities of the rural landscape are often ignored in discussions of local development, agricultural resources, or farmland protection. We see the beauty of the countryside, but we don't often look for it. We expect it, but we don't talk about it--unless its suddenly gone or clearly threatened. Then, when the subdivision has appeared or the shopping center is proposed, we may have difficulty convincingly describing just what is at stake. The quality of a landscape cannot be bought or sold. Lacking an obvious direct market value, it may be improperly assumed to have no value.

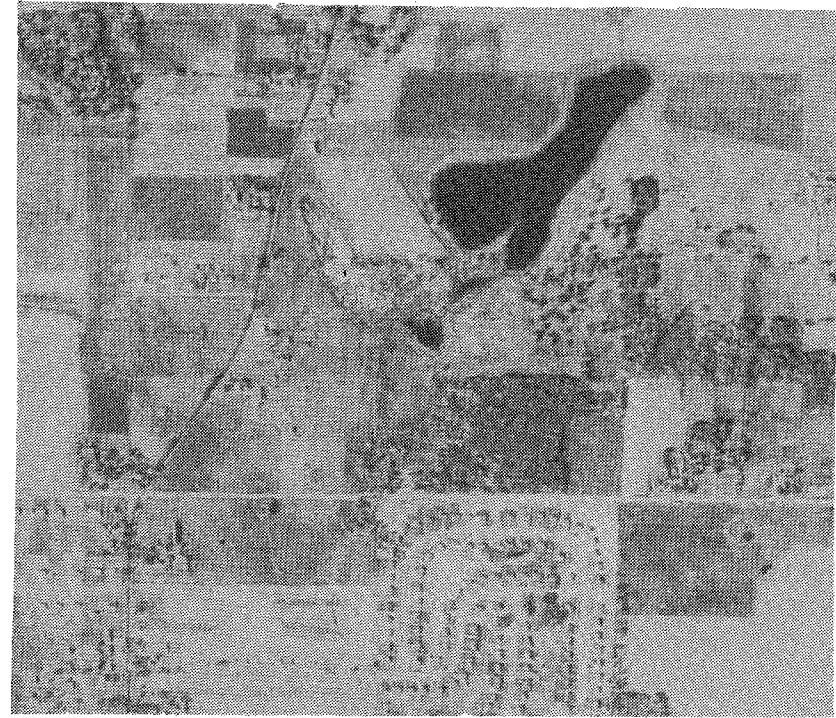
Guiding change in landscape quality requires a long term perspective. The Soil Conservation Service is no stranger to the long range view in conserving soil and water resources, and many local communities have taken a long term perspective in their farmland protection programs. But far fewer communities are acting to keep the rural landscape attractive.

Just as acting to prevent soil erosion and the loss of farmland requires public understanding, managing landscape quality begins with public awareness. We must recognize the open space value and scenic quality of the rural landscape, before we can describe or manage landscape quality.

This book is a guide to seeing and maintaining rural landscape quality. It is intended to help us look at the countryside and credibly defend it. It raises the challenge to be aware of landscape quality in our own communities and to maintain the character of the rural landscape.



*Minnesota landscape—1940*



*Minnesota landscape—1953*

## The Changing Rural Landscape

The rural landscape has always held a strong appeal for Americans. More and more people are moving to rural areas not because they make their living in agriculture, but because they value rural living. People talk about having the advantages of the city while being able to live in the country. They talk about having a place where there is plenty of room, where they can grow things or keep animals, where they feel safe, where they are in touch with nature. Though relatively few of us

live in the countryside, many of us wish we did. Even those of us who live in cities use the countryside for travel and recreation.

While most of us value the rural landscape, we see it in many different ways. For some, it is highly managed and intended for production. For others, it is a nostalgic pastoral place or a nature preserve. Others see it as



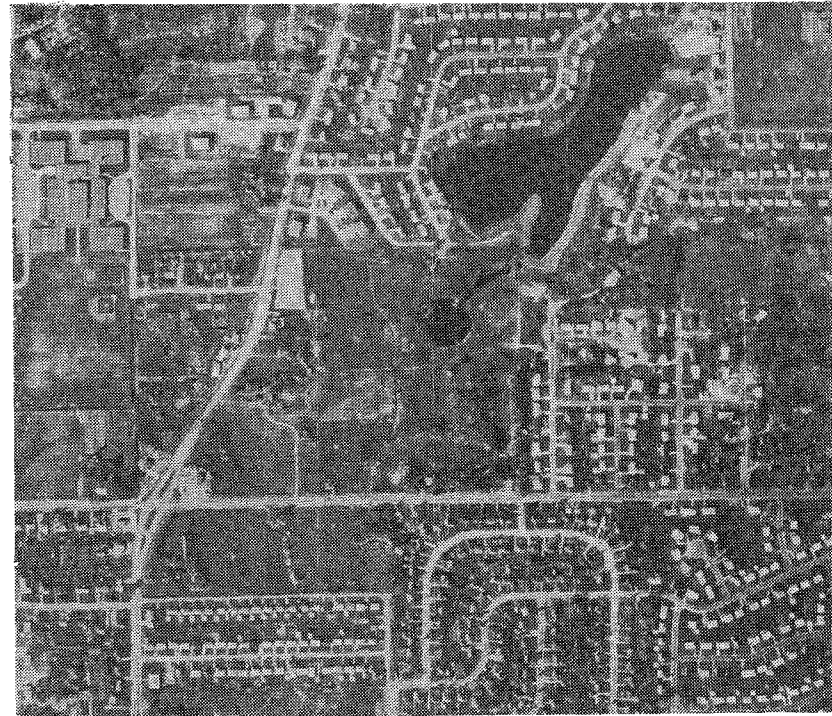


*Minnesota landscape—1957*

land ripening for development. These conflicting images have made for inconsistent and sometimes haphazard change.

### CHANGING LAND USES

People are beginning to realize that growing subdivisions instead of crops on prime land is usually a misuse of resources. But it is not the lost productivity of converted farmland that people see and feel first. The loss we feel is in landscape quality. When houses replace crops or trees on the horizon line,



*Minnesota landscape—1980*

the rural landscape has been displaced. Often the suburban landscape overtakes it in such small increments that the change is not marked. Only the most watchful observers may note how the town is growing. The key word is how.

Growth will occur and is welcomed in many rural areas. The countryside will change. Those who are interested in maintaining its rural character can affect how it changes. Will houses surround isolated fields or sit away from cultivated land on the city's edge? Will new

residences fit into the existing pattern of farmsteads, set at regular intervals along the road grid, or will they introduce a different pattern? Will they place urban emigrants in the way of unexpected dust and odors from farming operations? Will they use the existing infrastructure of roads and sewers or call for an extended system?

### CHANGING RESOURCES

Even where suburban growth is not occurring, the rural landscape is changing in other ways. In some areas, soil is being eroded away at tremendous rates. Animal waste and agricultural chemicals may pose water quality problems even where soil erosion is not severe. Both these problems and their remedies affect landscape quality.

To a person who understands the meaning of an eroding gully or a murky stream, these elements deface the landscape. At the same time, a field where minimum tillage is being practiced can enhance the landscape in the eyes of a knowledgeable viewer. Well-maintained

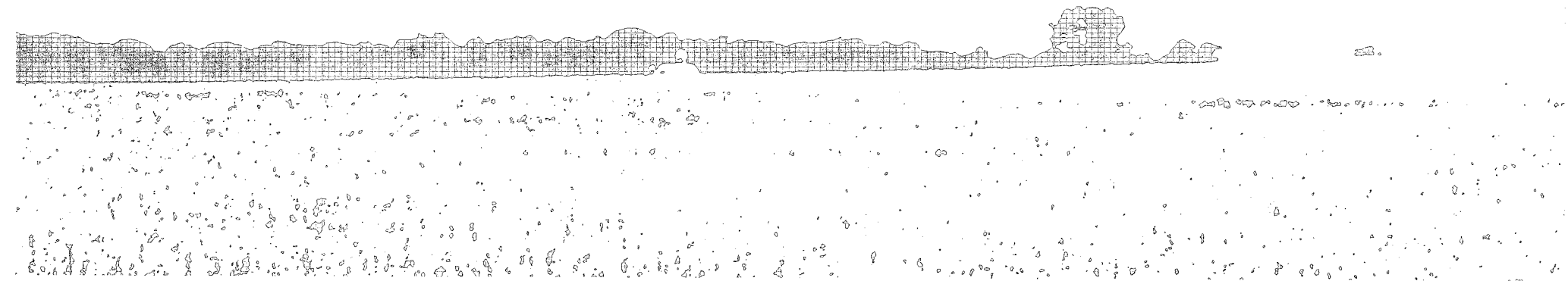
terraces or steep pastured slopes are also beautiful to the person who knows that they indicate stewardship.

Many conservation practices introduce beautiful colors and textures to the land. Stripcropping laid out across a rolling landscape creates a vibrant rhythm. Farm ponds can be shimmering focal points. In a flat open landscape, the same trees that reduce wind erosion vary the texture of cultivated fields and frame landscape views.

### CHANGING FARM PRACTICES

The rural landscape is changing in part because farming is changing. Picturebook farmsteads and field patterns have disappeared in many parts of the country. In a great many places, wooded hills and patchwork field patterns never existed.

Function, the work that needed to be done, determined the design and layout of the farms that we may now see as picturesque. Similarly, the functions of modern agriculture have called for bolder elements. Delft blue

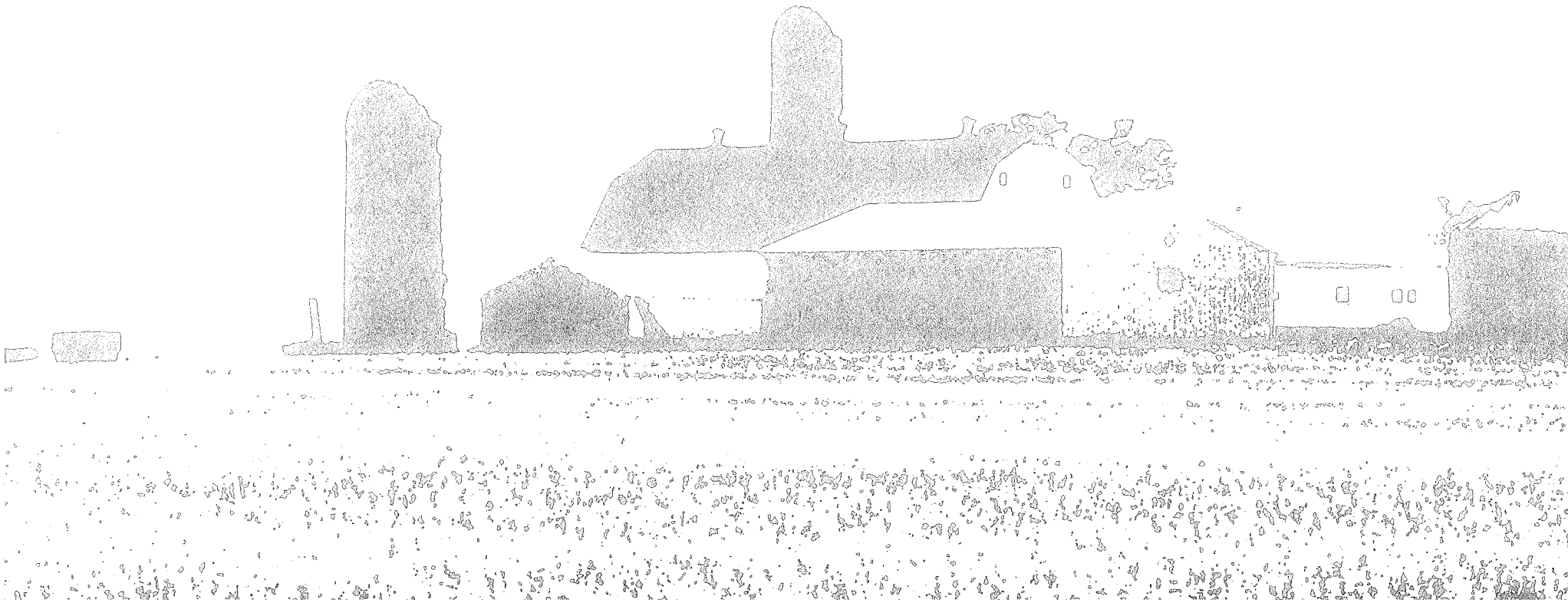


silos rise from a green horizon. They anchor long clean industrial sheds. Great expanses of flat black land hold the shimmering mirage of a distant grain elevator. Like earlier pictures of rolling hills and red barns, these images powerfully contrast with the context and scale of the urban landscape.

The particular elements of the rural landscape will change. Local building materials and building styles may be replaced by manufactured buildings. Farmers will undertake different kinds of enterprises. What once was dairy country may become vegetable farms. Techniques

for any one kind of enterprise will change. More farmers may give up the use of pasture land for confinement feeding. In some areas, farming may become more diversified, with cattle, hogs, and grain farming in one place. In other regions, farms may continue to grow larger, with an emphasis on one or two crops.

The rural landscape is highly managed and will always change as people have new ideas about the most functional ways to farm. Maintaining landscape quality doesn't mean stopping change, it means guiding change to respect and even improve the beauty of the land.



# The Beautiful Rural Landscape

Both the meaning and composition of the countryside make it beautiful. The countryside represents agriculture, open space, and nature. It contrasts with urban form and represents an alternative to urban ways of life. Rural landscapes are also visual compositions of color, texture, line, and form.

When we look for the beauty of countryside, we cannot look only at the pictures in the book. We have to read the words and think about what they mean. Pictures and words, appearance and meaning--both play into the beauty of the countryside.

MEANING: YOUR LOCALE

## Landscape Character

Landscape character grows from the unique combination of natural resources and management practices in a locale. In the countryside, the distinctive landforms, dominant vegetative types and farming practices of a region build the landscape pattern.

Your region is different from others. Recognizing and respecting its differences are keys to maintaining

*Some rural landscapes have picturesque qualities...*





landscape quality. The individual characteristics of your locale make for a particular sense of place.

Some rural landscapes have classic picturesque characteristics. They are immediately recognizable for their scenic quality. Others present visual compositions that have not been widely depicted in paintings or photographs. They may appear to be more highly functional for modern agriculture.

These two landscape types have distinct scenic qualities. While the first type is picturesque, the

second looks functional. The first is notable for its irregularity, rolling landforms, and diverse landcover patterns. The second is characterized by rectilinear geometry and the dominance of a few crops planted in large fields.

Picturesque and functional are broad characterizations that help us see that there is more than one kind of attractive rural landscape. They are pathways toward seeing the unique characteristics of any locale. Confusing their qualities or attempting to make all rural landscapes look picturesque obscures the unique scenic potential of each landscape type.

*Some look more functional.*



## Picturesque Character

Lakes and streams, rolling topography, small fields of diverse crops, pasture, and scattered woodlands characterize picturesque landscapes. Dairying, forestry, horticulture, or diversified farming operations are likely to occur in these more rugged areas. Smaller farms and operations that continue to use lofted wood barns create landscapes reminiscent of calendar scenes.

Perhaps looking at pictures has taught us that rolling, varied landscapes like this one are beautiful. The pattern of open and enclosed spaces formed by the fields and woodlands on these hills create an attractive rhythm of contrasting color and form. We might have similar landscapes depicted in the pictures which hang on our own walls.

Regardless of explanation, landscapes that exhibit a pattern of contrast and that give us panoramic views of trees, hills, or water are typically scenic. They not only display a varied pattern from a single viewpoint, but a viewer moving through this landscape experiences a varied sequence of views. Someone riding in a car might go from a wooded enclosed view to a broad open panorama and into a small field bordered by trees. Topography and landcover combine to make a rich landscape.

Ironically, the same qualities that make for picturesque countryside also make for appealing residential sites. Not only are picturesque landscapes beautiful, they also tend to be less productive than flatter, less varied landscapes. Their lower economic value for agriculture makes them more susceptible to development, particularly near urban areas.

At the same time, picturesque landscapes can camouflage some kinds of development. Their rolling terrain and wooded areas create pockets where low-rise development can blend with landforms and vegetation. Carefully controlled development can be relatively hidden.

Where development occurs in picturesque landscapes, the challenge is to prevent harmful effects on the agricultural community. Even unseen development on less productive land can have devastating effects on adjacent agricultural operations. Maintaining the unity of the countryside means maintaining agriculture.

*Varied, picturesque landscapes often make appealing residential sites.*





### Functional Character

Flat, open farming areas display a different kind of beauty. Geometric regularity characterizes these landscapes. They tend to be grain regions with large areas of relatively homogeneous landcover. Trees provide the accent rather than setting the pattern. Streams have often become rectilinear channels.

These are often highly functional, productive landscapes. They are not part of the picturesque tradition and they are not easily appreciated by the casual viewer speeding by in a car. They require a deeper understanding of agriculture and experience of the land.

In these enormous open expanses, any interruption of the horizon line focuses visual attention. Landscape meaning is extremely important. A farmstead or grain elevator can be an eloquent statement of rural character. A subdivision or shopping area can appear to be a brazen misuse of land. Where an agricultural structure rises above the fields, the character of the countryside is enhanced. But a non-agricultural land use may capture attention disproportionate to its size. Even a 10-acre parcel converted to residences may intrude upon its rural setting.

While the scale of the landscape is enormous, it tends to promote an acute awareness of detail in the knowledgeable viewer. The subtleties of prairie plant forms, the straightness of row and evenness of color of cultivated crops, the accumulating sediment in a drainageway--all shout for attention against their homogeneous ground. The landscape can speak softly and be heard miles away.

But even for an unfamiliar visitor, open is not empty. It is full of sky, clouds, sun, stars, and weather. Functional landscapes provide uninterrupted settings for watching the movement in the sky. One Iowan who had grown up on a farm remembered it this way:

"You develop the perceptual ability to sense the coming of a thunderstorm... see the changing cloud formations... perceive minute changes in air temperature. As the air coils... things hush... the storm is upon us but no surprise. We knew it was coming." (1)

Movement characterizes the functional landscape. It is the stage upon which dramatic change can be observed. The resident or frequent visitor will notice not only the sky but changes of season. Field patterns appear and disappear with the growth and maturation of a crop. Panoramas are opened up with harvest. Livestock moves in and out of pasture and field. The viewer of countryside can mark change by observing this ancient cycle.

(1) Roy Anderson, 1978. Student journal, Intermediate Landscape Design, Iowa State University.



## MEANING: THE RURAL LANDSCAPE

### Openness

Regardless of the appearance of a particular locale, whether it is flat or rolling, grain farms or pasture lands, people think of the rural landscape as having special meaning. It is different from the city.

The horizon is the strongest landscape element. Distance and openness rather than height and enclosure characterize the scene. Plant materials rather than structures dominate the ground plane. Sun and clouds cast striking patterns upon the broad landforms.

### Naturalness

Nature clearly makes the rules in the rural landscape. Agriculture means sophisticated management, but it is highly dependent on natural resources and processes. Soil-forming and erosion began long before inhabitation and will continue long after; these determine the limits of human use. Farming is paced by seasonal change. Vegetation covering the land changes radically from one season to the next, from one year to the next.

The rural landscape should not be mistaken for a nature preserve. Natural plant and animal communities have been radically altered to support agriculture. But pockets of native plants and wildlife often remain as part of larger ecological communities. The entire landscape is a pageant of weather and seasonal change. People can feel nature in the countryside to a degree that is rarely possible in urban experience.



*Marshlands contribute to an orderly landscape by holding and filtering run-off at wet times of year.*



*The stubble of last year's crop maintains order by holding soil in place.*

### Orderliness

To some viewers a productive landscape is orderly, to others it is neat. The difference is in how one sees nature's role in a well-maintained landscape.

An orderly landscape may retain undrained potholes or marshlands to hold and filter run-off at wet times of the year. A neat landscape may display fields of even black finely broken soil in the fall, while an orderly landscape may display the messy stubble of last year's crop. A neat landscape might have mown ditches, while long grasses might blow in ditches next to the fields in an orderly landscape. The orderly landscape shows care for wildlife and soil and water quality. Ironically, a neater approach may ultimately undermine natural systems.

To the knowledgeable eye, marshy potholes are a filter for surface pollutants and the prevention of downstream flooding. Unmown ditches indicate that someone is making a place for wildlife and native vegetation. Neatness can be exchanged for a broader view of orderliness in the countryside.

### Productivity

The land is managed to be productive. Fields in which rows are straight, tillage practices carefully applied, and the crop uniform, look productive and attractive to a viewer who knows agriculture. On the other hand, poorly managed farmland is not beautiful. Weedy fields, eroding and gullied land, sediment-filled drainage channels--all indicate a lack of care. Long-term productivity ultimately means care.

## SCENIC QUALITY

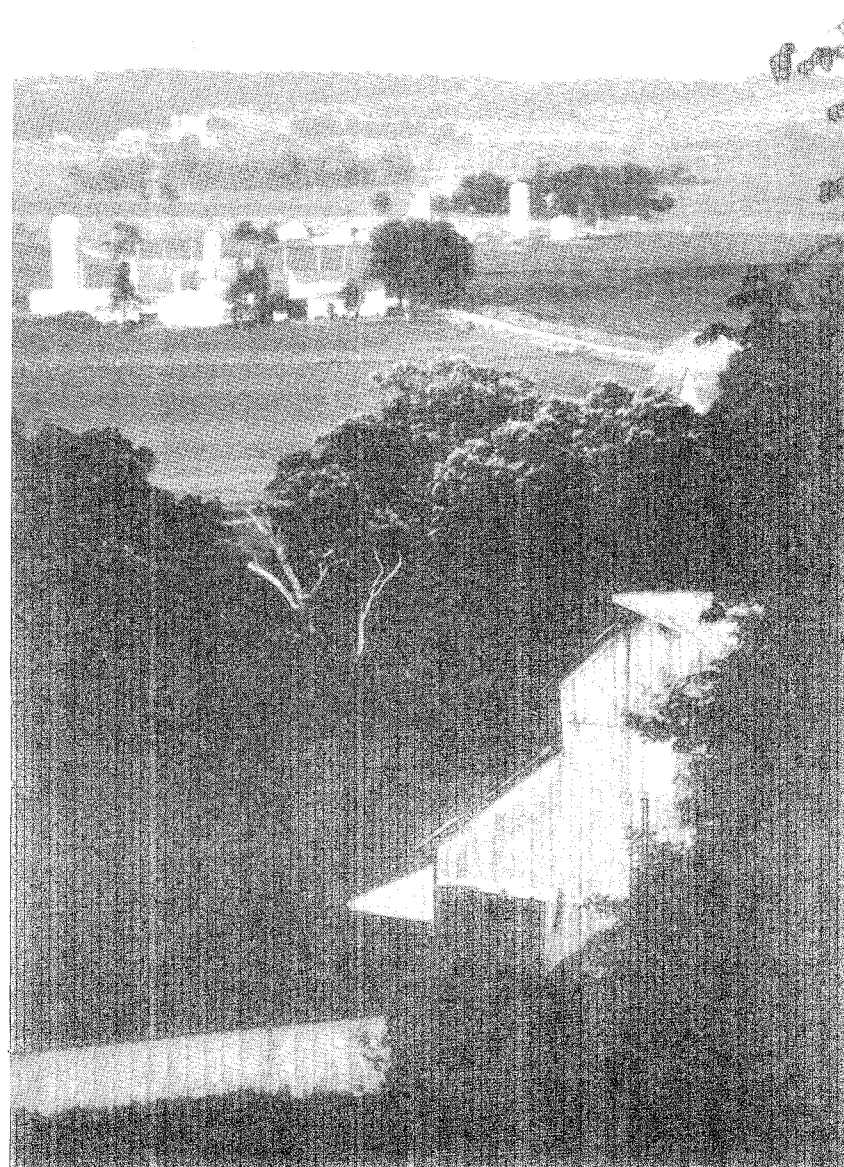
The rural landscape has powerful meaning regardless of scenic quality. But its scenic quality reinforces its appeal.

What is scenic quality? We can describe scenic quality by pointing to rural landscapes that we find scenic. The problem with this approach is that it does not help us imagine what we will find beautiful in the future. Instead, it tends to make us defend what we have now. Using this approach, we are likely to see past landscapes as beautiful and future landscapes as threatening. Making change work for us is difficult with this approach.

Understanding how landforms, vegetation, water, and structures fit together visually in the rural landscape is more helpful. Hills and ravines, cornfields and woodlands, ponds and streams, barns and grain elevators are some of the ELEMENTS of the rural landscape. While the specific elements of a pastoral dairy farm or a vast grain farm may be different, visual relationships among the elements follow the same principles. In any landscape, the viewer responds to UNITY, VARIETY, and EMPHASIS.

### Unity

Scenic landscapes display a landscape pattern unified by consistent repetition of elements. Landforms, landcover, and structures repeat and combine themselves in a way that is uniquely characteristic of the locale. They communicate a single meaning and use. The rural landscape is open, natural-appearing, productive, orderly.



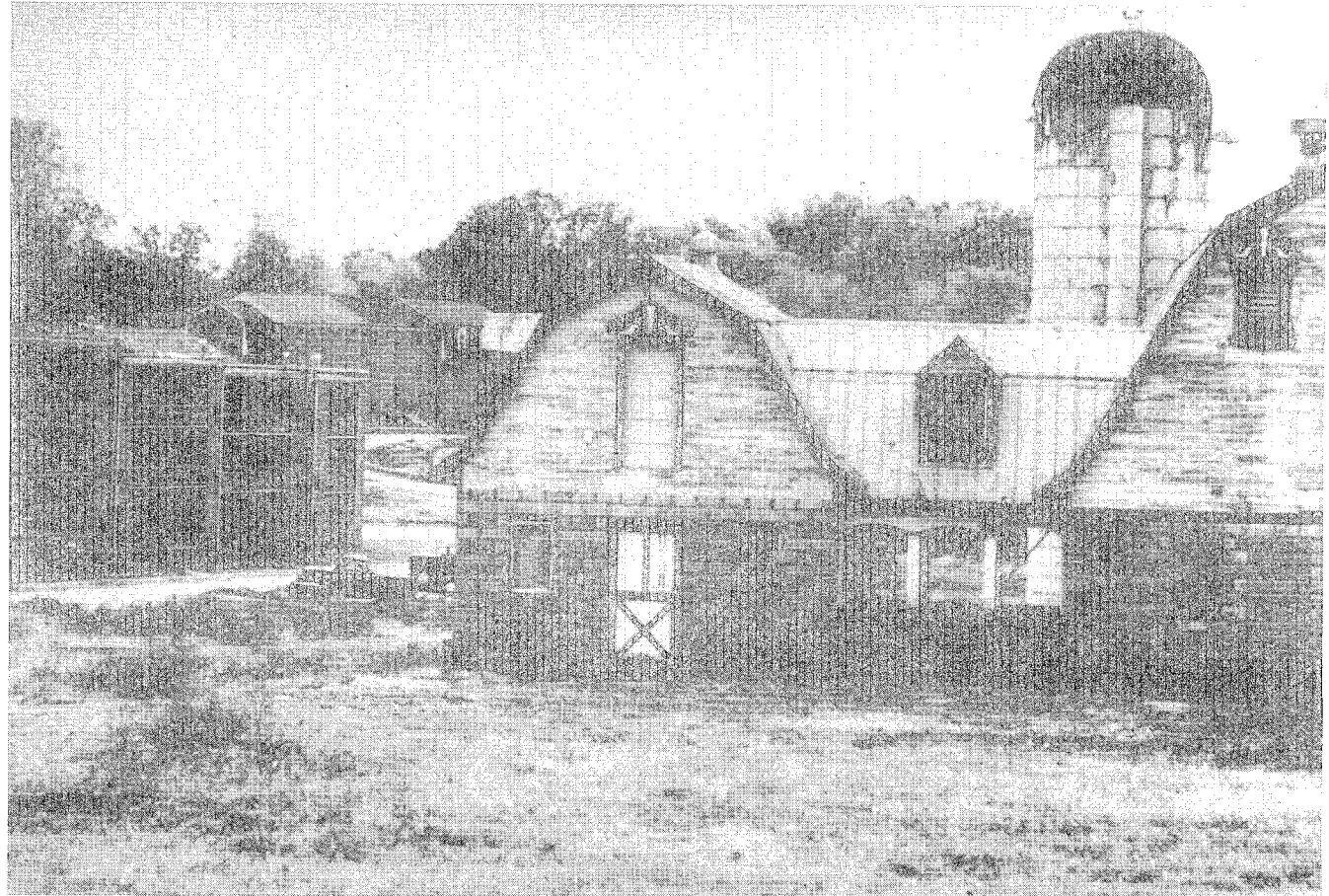


Cornbelt farmland in central Iowa looks different from Cornbelt farmland in central Illinois. The difference is in landforms, the patterns of woodlands, and the size and spacing of the farmsteads and towns. Each creates a unified landscape pattern that is uniquely its own.

More importantly, farmland in both Iowa and Illinois is very different in character from towns and cities. Unity is created by keeping that difference intact and keeping rural land uses visually separate from urban land uses.

*Repetition of similar barns, silos, and woodlands creates unity (left).*

*Dominating residential development disrupts the rural landscape (right).*



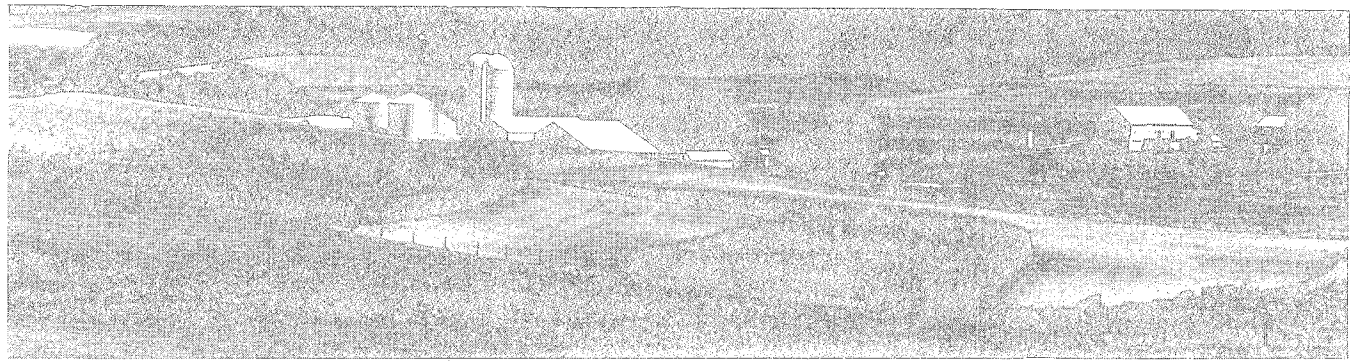
## Variety

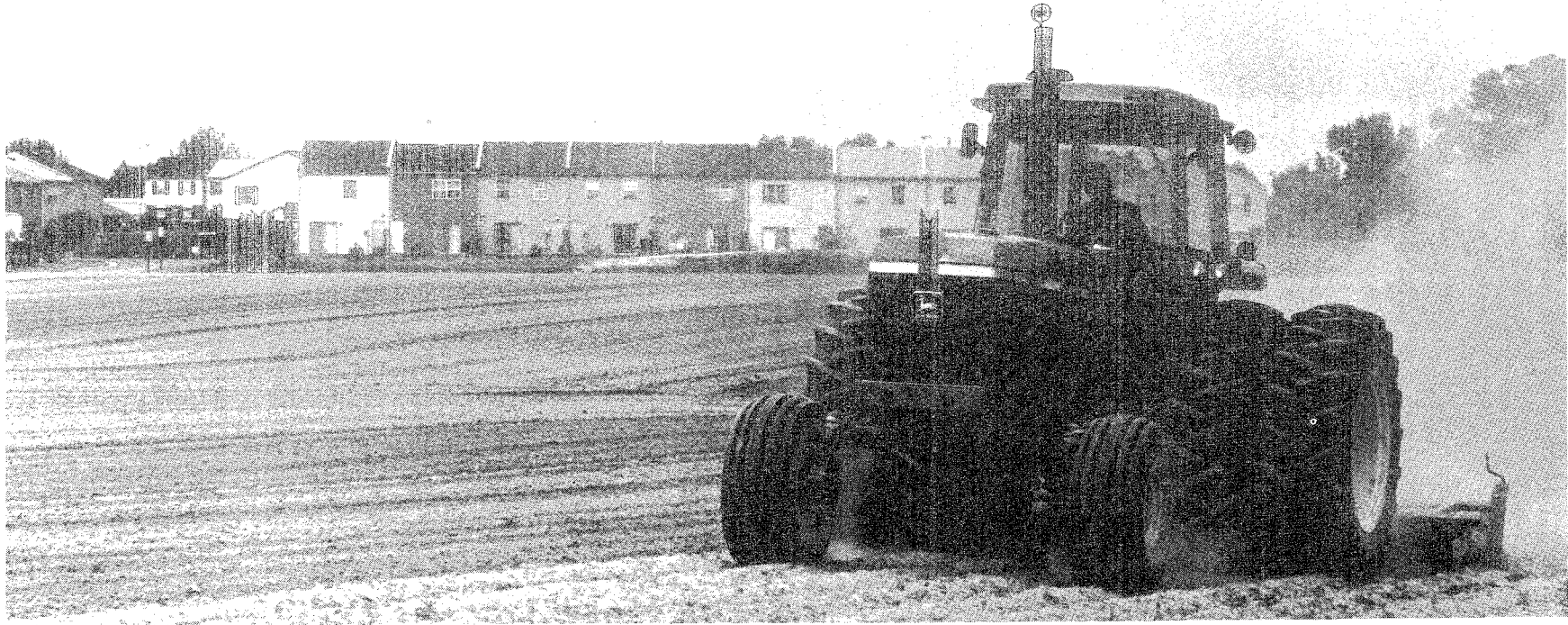
Variety is introduced by the combination of different landscape elements to make a unified pattern. This is where color, texture, line, and form come into play. The color contrast of stripcropping, the rough texture of woodlands against a smooth green pasture, or the form of a glacial drumlin protruding from the plain create variety.

These elements add visual interest throughout the landscape, yet they are subordinate to the overall pattern. Variety sets contrasting elements within the unified pattern, but it does not conflict with the meaning or repeating form of the local countryside.

Weather and seasonal change introduce another dimension of variety. Square mile wheat fields take dramatic form as wind and clouds color their surface. Faint green rows almost visibly emerge from the soil of cornfields in the spring.

In picturesque landscapes, landforms, fields and woodlands present variety that almost everyone can see and understand. Seeing the variety of functional landscapes often requires understanding and sensitivity to weather and seasonal change.





### Emphasis

Elements that stand out in contrast to the overall pattern create emphasis. Emphasis does not contradict the meaning of the countryside, it concentrates it in a highly visible landscape element which is compatible with the countryside. It focuses visual attention on structures or fields or trees which represent agriculture or nature in the countryside.

A row of townhouses or a shopping center would create discord, but a silo or grain storage facility would

create emphasis. A billboard at the crest of a slope would probably contradict the meaning of the countryside. A tree silhouetted in a field would emphasize it.

Emphasis is particularly important in functional landscapes. Areas of large fields and flat topography can be so vast that it is difficult for an unfamiliar viewer to understand their scale. The open horizon needs the accent of a silo, grain elevator, or distant wooded groves to prove the enormity of the space. Where

the accenting elements create a focus or a frame for the horizontal landscape, the viewer can appreciate its openness.

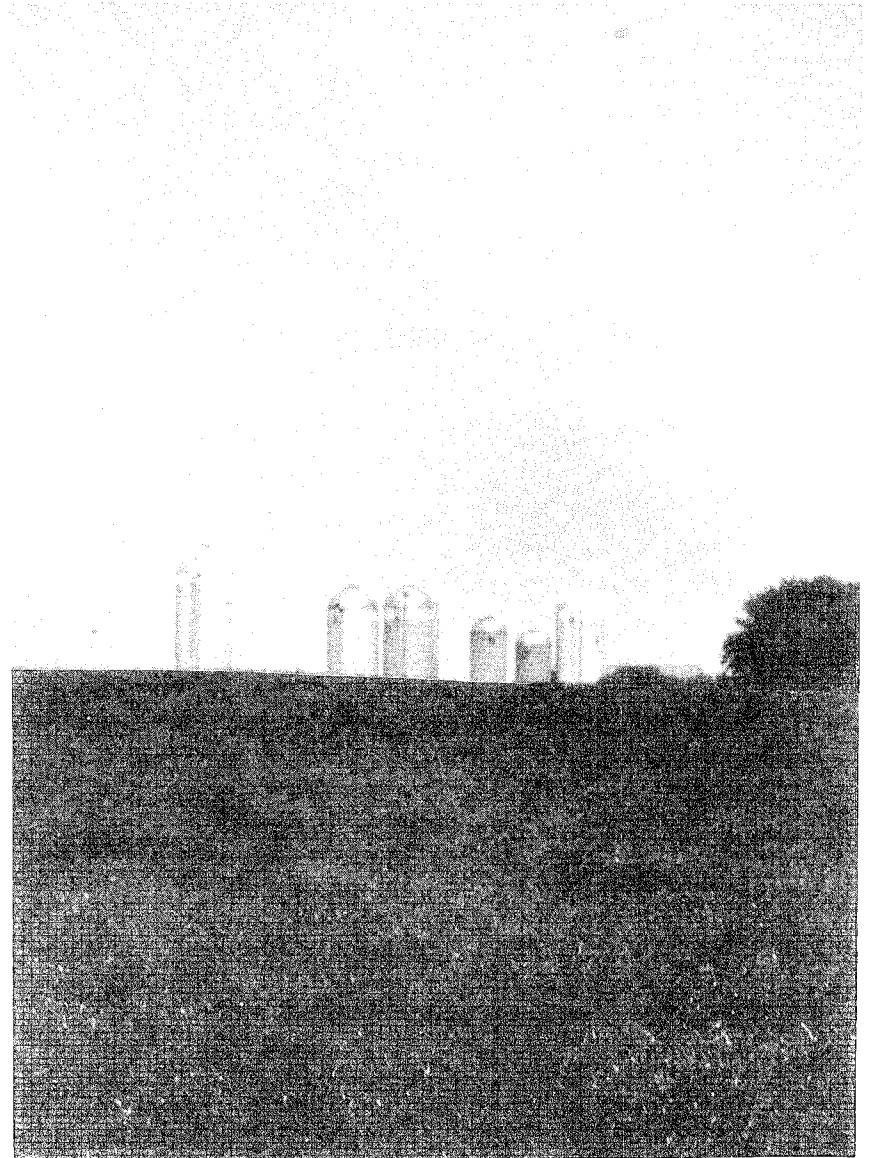
In another landscape, silos provide a focal point beyond the field and suggest the enormous scale of the space.

### Unity Dominates

Even within the vocabulary of rural elements, too much variety or emphasis is confusing rather than stimulating. Limiting the number of types of landscape elements is fundamental to creating a sense of unity. Variety is attractive where it defines the dominant local landscape pattern. Or a landscape element might emphasize the dominant pattern. The silos on this page creates a vertical focus against a dominantly horizontal landscape.

The effect is chaotic where a variety of land uses--residential, industrial, agricultural--are scattered across a rural landscape. Most important is a dominant, unified rural landscape pattern. Variety and emphasis reinforce this fundamental theme.

*The row of townhouses on the opposite page contradicts the meaning of the countryside; silos projecting from the horizon emphasize it.*



# Guiding Change

## PRINCIPLES FOR GUIDING CHANGE

Each place has its special character. The rural landscape clearly reflects natural variations in geomorphology, climate, plant and animal life. To display these, it must retain its fundamental openness, naturalness, productivity, and orderliness.

Picturesque images may come to mind first when we look at our local landscape, and they may not fit what we see. Some landscapes project a functional image. Knowing that our local landscape may be more functional than picturesque, or may have its own character different from either type, helps us build on what we have. A functional landscape "beautified" to imitate the picturesque will only obscure the real beauty of the locale. Change can maintain and even further reveal the particular character of a place.

Development that violates fundamental qualities of the rural landscape or that obscures local character will look literally "out of place". A scenic landscape displays one broad land use pattern; it has unity of meaning and of form. Variety and emphasis can reinforce the overall pattern. Landscape change should grow from an understanding of the unified pattern and elements of variety and emphasis in your locale.

Three guiding principles can help us maintain an attractive countryside:

1. Respect the particular characteristics of your locale. Reinforce the landscape qualities of your own region. Avoid imposing inappropriate landscape images on your locale (for example, the picturesque on a functional landscape).
2. Maintain the meaning of the countryside. Look for those qualities that distinguish countryside from urban areas. Preserve a sense of openness, naturalness, productivity, and orderliness.
3. Look at the basic visual relationships among landscape elements. Begin by identifying the unified pattern of elements in your locale. Any new elements should fit into that pattern or enhance it by adding variety or emphasis.

The following pages describe some guidelines for implementing these principles.



## GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTING CHANGE

### 1. RESPECT THE PARTICULAR CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUR LOCALE.

If rolling hills, pasture lands and woodlands dominate your local landscape, it may have a picturesque quality. Sequential views of open fields and wooded hillsides, panoramic views of rolling terrain, dairying or diversified crop enterprises, smaller fields, and traditional agricultural structures are typical.

Changes in the landscape should support these basic characteristics. They must be a part of the larger unified pattern. Variety--of open pastures or fields and wooded areas, of hilltop panoramas and sheltered valleys, of diverse crops and livestock--creates a rich landscape experience.

Integrating non-agricultural landscape elements is made easier by the many hidden or screened areas and varied textures created by slopes or vegetation. Development of limited scale and appropriate color and texture can blend into the landscape without interrupting its visual pattern.





*In picturesque rolling hills of woodlands, carefully designed development can blend into its setting.*



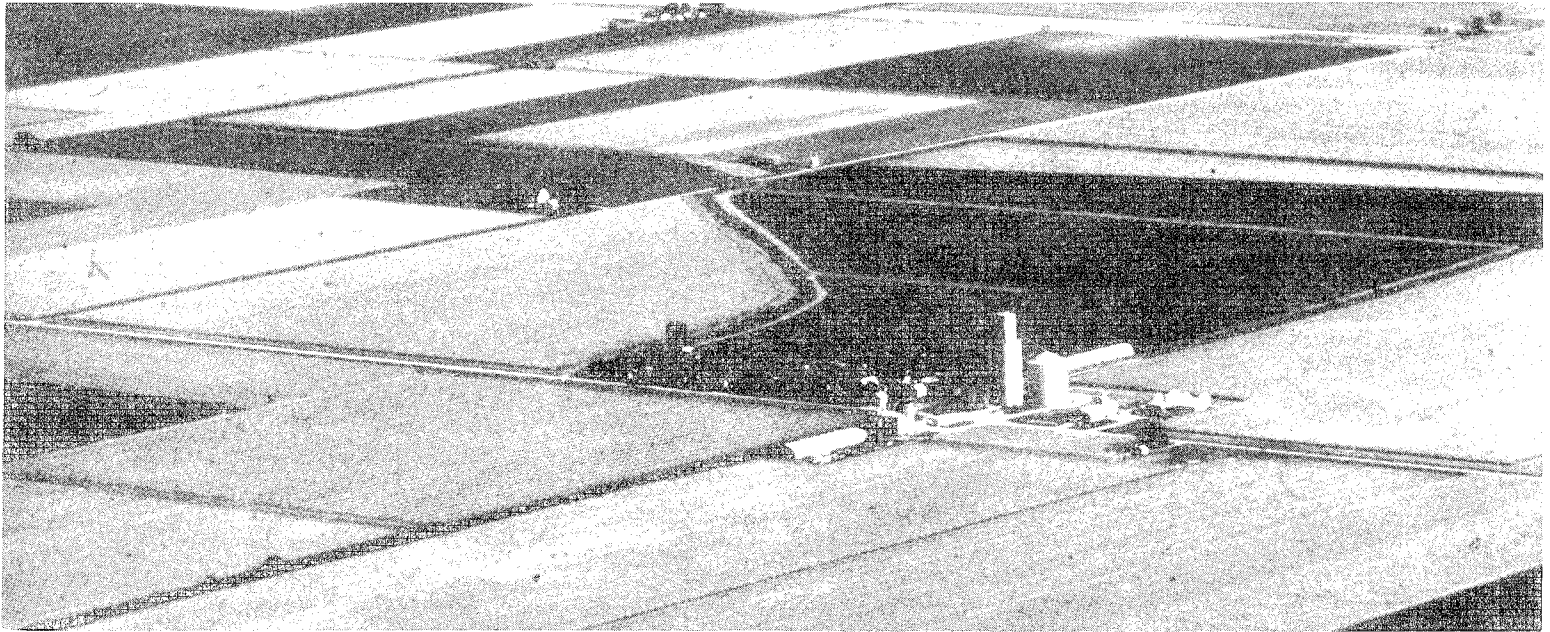
If your region is relatively flat with large fields and few wooded areas, it may have a more functional quality. Long, low horizontal landforms and apparently vast cultivated fields characterize this functional landscape. Here metal sheds are more likely to be seen than wooden barns. Livestock is rarely seen outside a feedlot. Distant towns, farmsteads, and occasional windbreaks or fencerow trees, are dwarfed by the horizon.

The horizon dominates and unifies functional landscapes. Variety in field patterns or ground textures can add interest to functional landscapes, but it seldom rivals the visual power of the horizon. Emphasis, introducing a focal point on the horizon, is more powerful. Grain elevators, silos, or mature trees surrounding a farmstead focus visual interest and show the awesome scale of the functional landscape.

The open horizon exposes all development and shifts visual attention to foreground detail. Consequently, placement and design of development in functional landscapes must be handled with special sensitivity. Even a few residences can inadvertently emphasize the intrusion of nonfarm development on the rural landscape.

Your local landscape may not be either picturesque or functional. It may display some aspects of both types. The important thing is to look for the landscape elements that characterize your own locale. Understand your region on its own terms, and plan for landscape change on those terms.

A farmstead with a long curving driveway set in the middle of flat corn and soybean fields is out of place. So are eroding cultivated slopes. Maintaining landscape quality begins with a long, hard look at the inherent qualities of the land.



*In flat areas that are highly functional for agriculture, development can appear exposed and isolated.*



## 2. MAINTAIN THE MEANING OF THE RURAL LANDSCAPE

### Openness

Though many of us would like to live in rural areas, most are limited to enjoying the countryside as a place to travel. A wall of development between the road and the open fields beyond obscures the openness of the countryside.

Clustered development, commercial or residential, will maintain a sense of openness better than will strip development. Billboards also break up views to the open countryside. Overall, development patterns that conserve agricultural land protect the openness of the rural landscape.

*Strip development obscures the open view of the countryside beyond.*



## Naturalness and Order

The openness of the rural landscape presents viewers with the elemental experience of seasons, sky, and weather. These emphasize agriculture's dependence on nature.

Ecological capacities of the land sometimes present themselves more subtly. Erosion may not be apparent until it becomes severe. Water quality may not be noticeably different until one fishes a familiar stream or digs a new well. But eroding land or polluted water contradicts the meaning and undermines the attractiveness of the countryside, even if we cannot see it but only know about it.

*A marsh maintains ecological order.*



Ecological order supports the land's long term productivity, but nature is not always neat. A marsh could be drained or it could be graded to make a neat pond, but either change would be an ecological loss. An unmown roadside represents farmers' understanding of wildlife habitat and the beauty of wildflowers and grasses. A neater mown roadside represents time and fuel spent. Similarly, an even black field displays neatness and good farming in some eyes, but an appreciation for ecological order lets a viewer see the beauty in a field of stubble.

*An unmown roadside enriches it.*



## Productivity

The look of the rural landscape is the look of agriculture. Agriculture means managing the land for its productivity. Agriculture keeps the land open. It is the medium for displaying local land patterns and natural features. Land that stays in agriculture is likely to retain other attractive qualities as well.

Protecting agricultural land uses is a matter of regional land management. Some states (Massachusetts and Oregon, for example) and regions (the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area) have farmland protection programs. More often local units of government have developed programs. Sometimes private organizations (Appendix II) have actively assisted in protecting farmland.

Strategies and techniques for farmland protection present a wide array of possibilities. County zoning, property and income tax incentives, transfer of development rights, easements, and fee simple purchase have all been used. Each of these has been implemented in numerous ways. For instance, agricultural zoning may mean limiting the sale of residential lots to one 1-acre lot on every 40 acres of farmland or it may mean minimum residential lot sizes of 40 acres.

Having a farmland protection program in place is extremely helpful in maintaining the attractiveness of your local rural landscape. Several excellent detailed descriptions of techniques for protecting farmland exist (Appendix II). Talk to local staff of the Soil Conservation Service, Extension Service, or in city or county planning to learn more about how you can participate in conserving local farmland.





### 3. LOOK AT BASIC VISUAL RELATIONSHIPS AMONG LANDSCAPE ELEMENTS.

#### Unity: Repeating landscape elements

New land management practices, new agricultural structures and even new land uses can fit into the rural landscape. The existing pattern of landform, vegetation, water, and structures provides a framework for introducing new elements. How does vegetation tend to be distributed across the landforms? What vegetative communities are characteristic of the region? Where do wildlife or recreational corridors occur? How are farmsteads and small towns typically sited and distributed? Answers to these questions can guide new landscape elements to fit into the larger pattern.



The meaning of new landscape elements dictates their fit into the existing landscape pattern. Elements that reinforce the agricultural and ecological function of the rural landscape might be prominently sited, while elements that conflict with that function should be sited with extreme care for their visual and functional effect.

Residential development in agricultural land contradicts its meaning and interrupts its function. Yet living in a house overlooking a rural scene is extremely attractive to many people. Nonfarm residences in the countryside might be likened to observers. If they interfere, they may ruin what they have come to observe. Instead, they should be sited unobtrusively, where they provide landscape views without becoming outstanding visual elements.

*Rural non-farm residences should be sited to fit into surrounding trees and landforms (left and far right), rather than protruding above the horizon (center).*



Where nonagricultural development interrupts the existing pattern, it robs the landscape of its unity. A house prominently sited at the crest of an unwooded hill may have panoramic views in all directions, but it also shouts out its presence (and catches winter winds). In open, rolling countryside, a better solution is to select a location which is both visually and microclimatically sheltered.

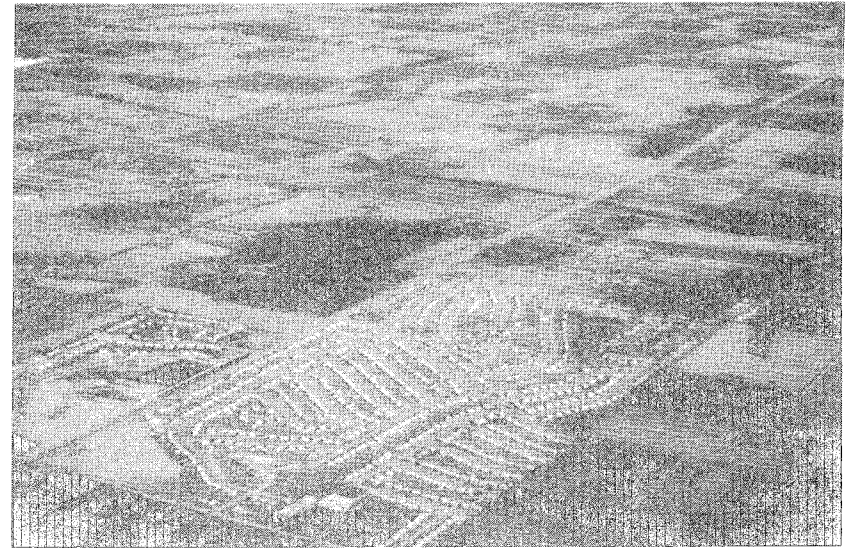


In a wooded or rolling setting, houses can be integrated with the vertical line of the trees or slope, and can be nearly hidden from view. House colors and textures that blend with their setting further strengthen visual integration. Set out in more easily accessible sites on cultivated land, houses are likely to block views to the open landscape, contradict the meaning of the countryside, and use productive land.

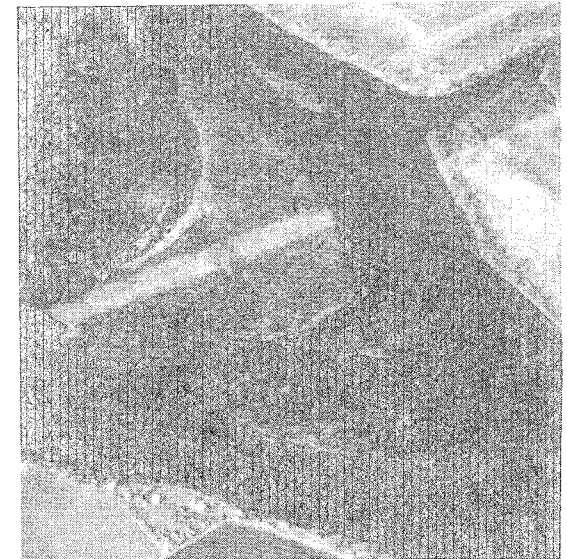




Nonfarm residences in open, flat landscapes can be set in dense clusters to mimic the local pattern of farmsteads and towns. Development which is limited to unclustered single residences can also be modelled after the distribution pattern of farmsteads, lying along existing roads at distinct intervals in most cases. A third alternative is to use the limited bands of trees, which typically fall along stream corridors, as a means of integrating the houses into the landscape. This alternative has the disadvantage of requiring more road construction and maintenance and creating more edges for potential conflict between farming operations and residential use. It also requires that development be set outside of the floodplain and be sensitive to ecological values.



However, all three alternatives are superior to the most typical pattern of rural residential development: a linear wall of houses paralleling a main road, obscuring views to the countryside and providing little privacy or enclosure for their residents.



*In flat, open landscapes, residences can be set in dense clusters (above right) or mingled with trees along stream corridors (above left and below right).*

*Set along a road (below left), a line of houses obscures views to the rural landscape.*





Variety: Field patterns

Especially in flat open landscapes, the pattern created by crops and conservation measures is an attractive source of variety. Early season crops, like winter wheat, create green swatches which contrast with surrounding fields. Similarly, crops of different heights (corn and soybeans) or different colors (sunflowers and corn) create broad patterns of contrast. Stripcropping, terracing, and grassed waterways all introduce variety and heighten landscape beauty.

*Terraces create a dramatic field pattern (left).*

*Corn against a harvested soybean field draws a graceful line across the landscape.*



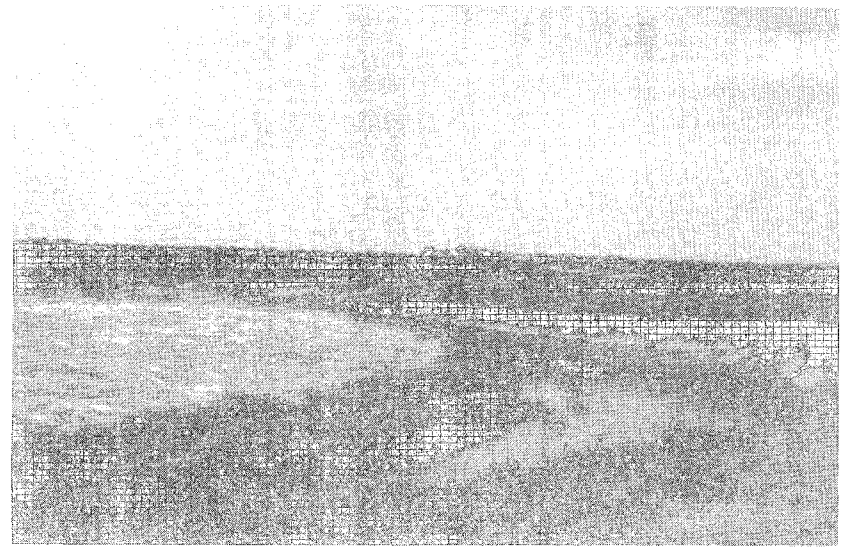
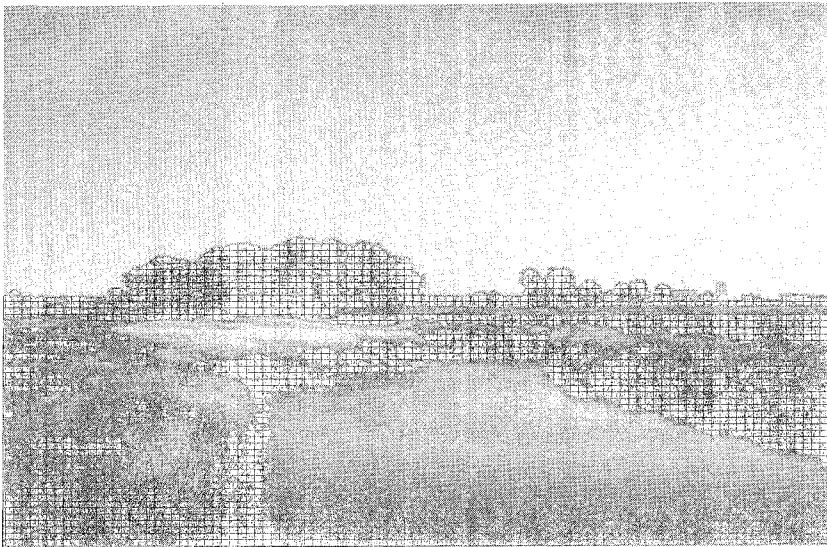


### Variety: Water elements

Streams, ponds, and lakes introduce new texture and color to the landscape. The relationship of water to other landscape elements helps make it attractive. Water elements that fit into adjacent landforms tend to enhance the landscape. In a rolling landscape, the water's edge will curve with the landform. The familiar straight drainage channel will fit into only the most flat landscapes.

Trees along the edge also make water elements more attractive. They provide a backdrop or frame for the reflective water surface. In addition, a grassy or wooded stream edge helps to prevent the banks from eroding, and suggests orderly management.

*Trees make a backdrop or frame, protect water quality, and prevent erosion.*

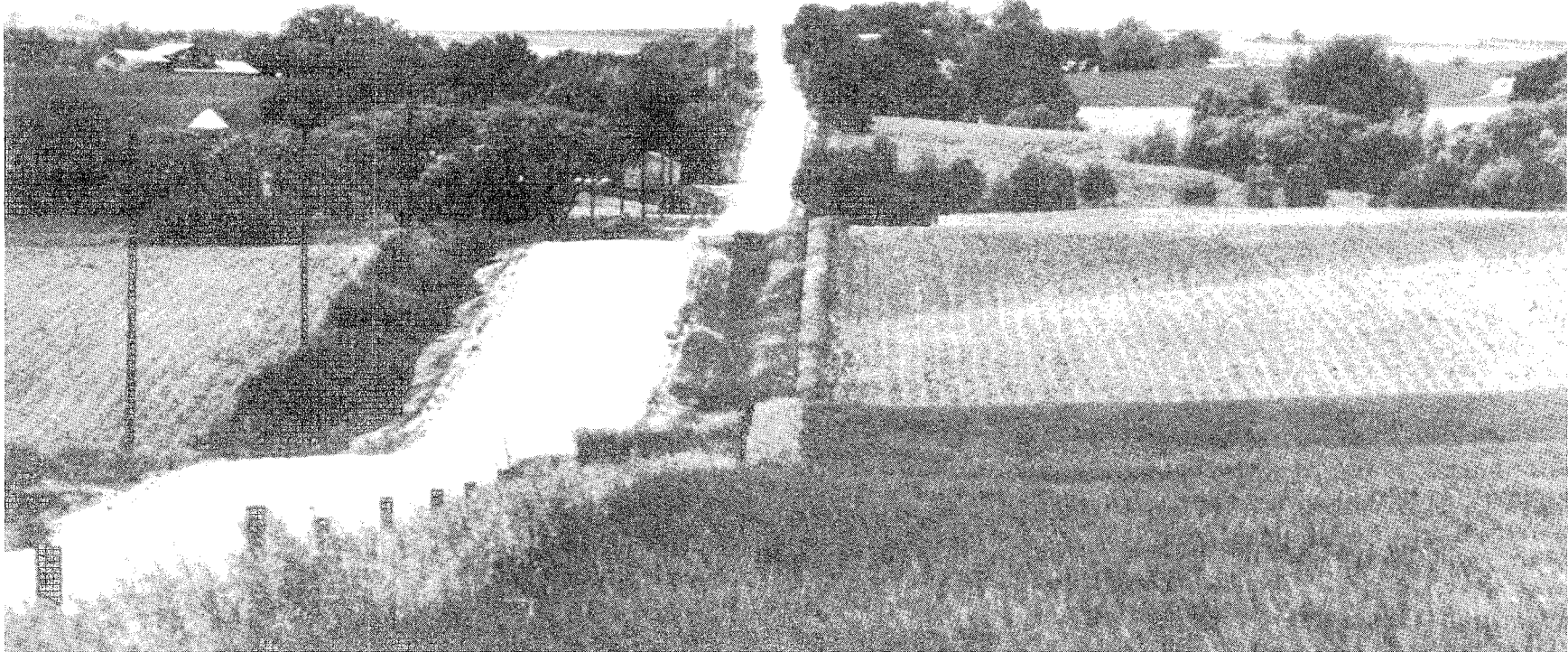




Variety: Open and enclosed spaces

The contrasting textures and heights of fields and woodlands, which characterize picturesque landscapes, create variety. A landscape with a mixture of open views, especially from high points, and spaces enclosed by trees offers an attractive sequence of spatial experiences. Change in these landscapes should maintain or enhance this variety.

*In the distance, a sequence of open and enclosed spaces. Nearby, rich plant textures in the unmown ditch.*



Variety: Detailed plant textures

Roadsides and farmsteads often make the foreground of countryside views. Near the viewer, details, like the textures of plant materials, become highly apparent. Especially in functional landscapes, colorful, tall grasses and flowers can be an attractive contrast with adjacent fields. An irregular natural-appearing roadside sets off the geometric beauty of long even rows of corn or beans. Highly varied roadside or farmstead plantings can also provide important shelter for wildlife.

Emphasis: Agricultural structures and trees as focal points

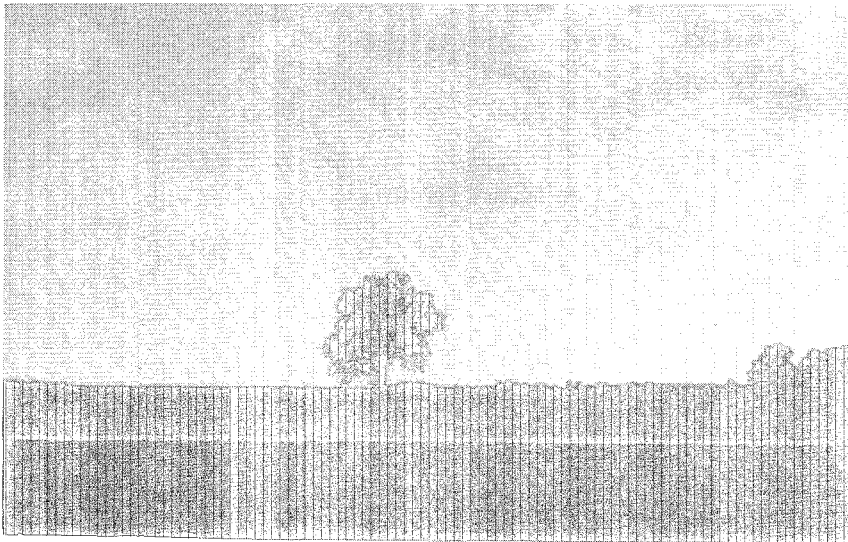
In functional landscapes, where the horizon is dominant, structures and trees become focal points. These vertical elements do not challenge the open horizon. Instead they create silhouettes which emphasize the meeting of the land and the sky.

Prominent structures should communicate the meaning of the countryside: openness, productivity, natural order. A grain elevator or farmstead on the horizon may enhance the appearance of the landscape. In an open landscape, a

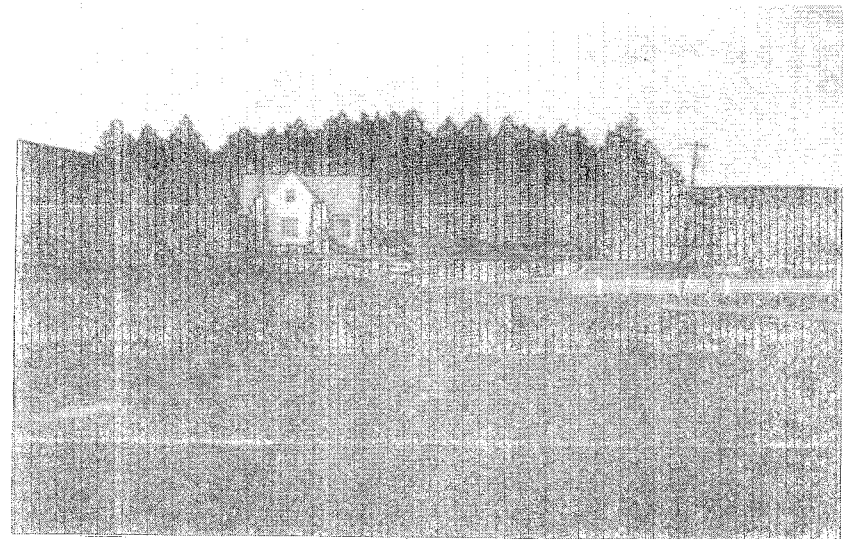
single prominent tree draws the eye. A grove of trees near a farmstead becomes one massive focal element when viewed from a distance. Similarly a red barn or bright blue silo calls attention to itself and its agricultural function.

However, nonagricultural residences or commercial uses contradict the meaning of the countryside. They belong in less highly visible locations, and their color and height should be selected to blend with the surrounding landscape.

*A tree is silhouetted on the horizon.*



*A windbreak frames the house, and, from a distance, becomes a focal point.*

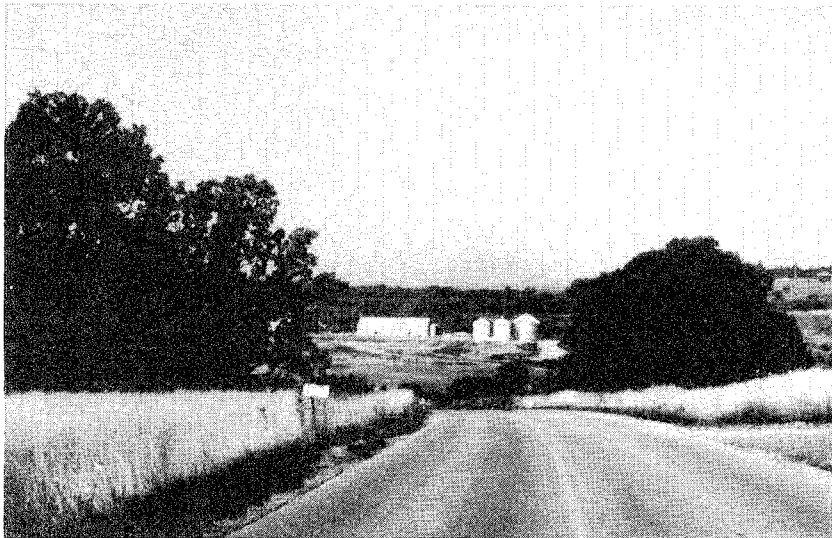


**Emphasis: Framing views with structures and trees**

**Trees and buildings can act as focal points or frames in the countryside. From nearby, a grove may frame farmstead buildings, acting as their backdrop. Trees planted in linear configurations, in windbreaks or fencerows, also frame and direct views of the landscape. In flat, open landscapes with few other trees, placement of windbreaks can be crucial in framing (or obscuring) key landscape views.**

*Roadside trees frame a farmstead view (below left).*

*Windbreaks frame and direct views to the distant landscape (right).*



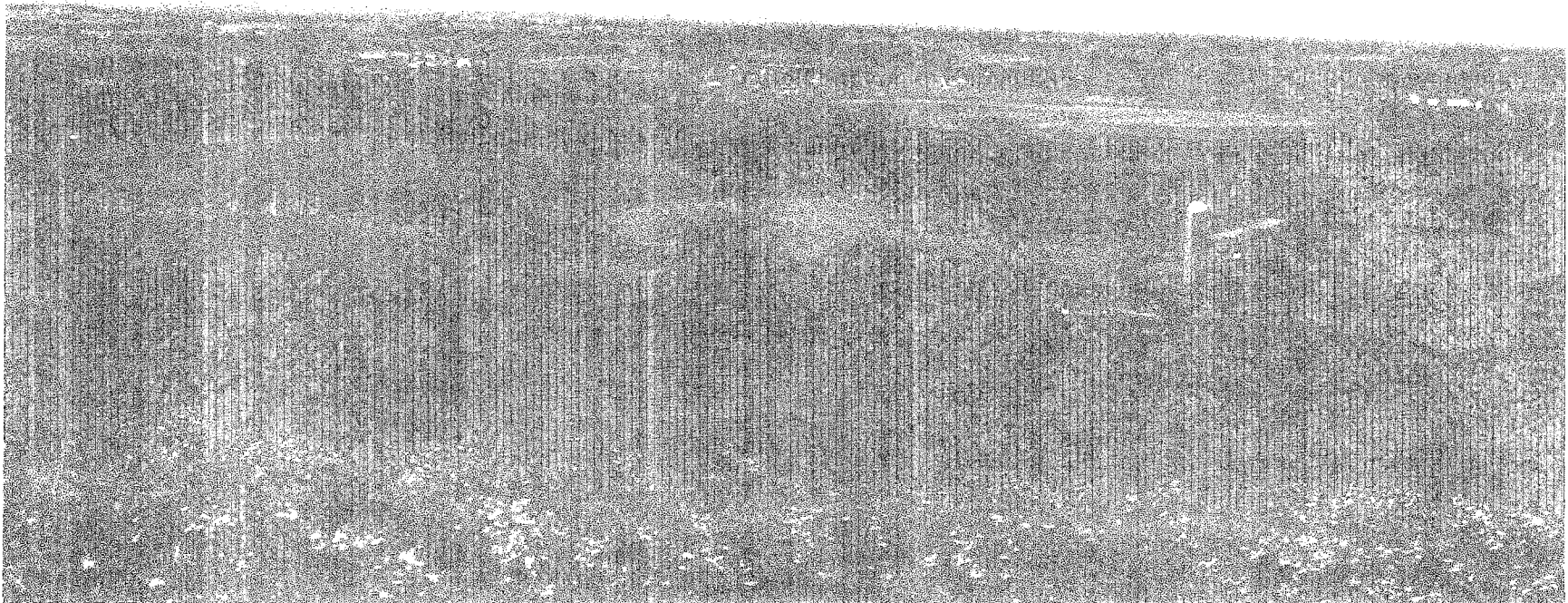
## Where Do We Start?

### KEEP THE LAND OPEN

By their meaning alone, rural landscapes are attractive to most of us. The best way to begin to keep your countryside attractive is to keep it open, productive, and responsive to natural order. Agriculture and natural areas are

fundamental to the appeal of any rural locale. Look to your local SCS and Extension Service staff, your town and county planning and zoning officials, your state legislators, and private land conservation organizations (see Appendix 2) to help you develop and use techniques to keep the rural landscape open.

*A landscape can be attractive for its varied, picturesque qualities...*





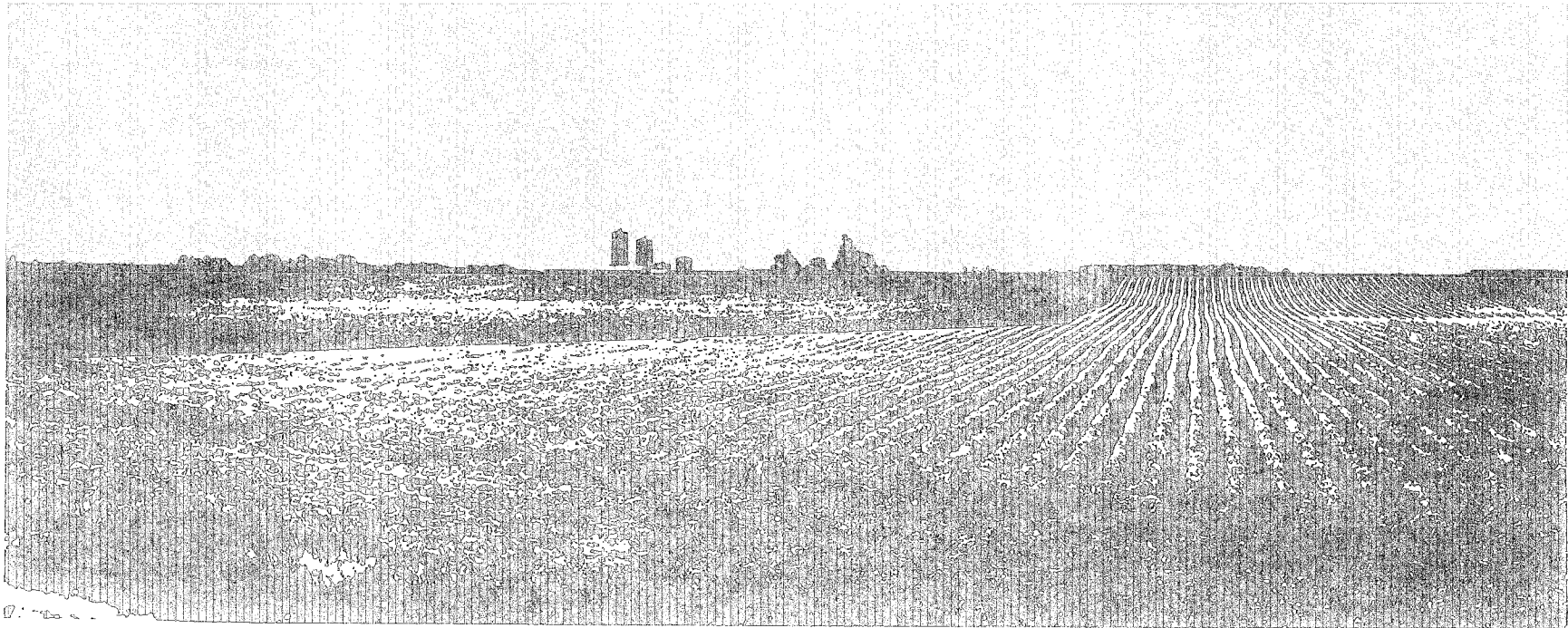
## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Within the open countryside, determine the special characteristics of your locale. Is your landscape more picturesque, more functional, or does it have a different character altogether? What are the landscape elements necessary to the identity of your own region? These might be landforms, vegetative communities, crop types, patterns of farmsteads, field layouts, architectural details, or any number of additional landscape elements. You will want to protect and perpetuate them.

*or for its functional, productive appearance.*

Look at the visual relationships among these elements. Landscape change should respect the unified pattern they present. It should repeat the elements inherent to agriculture and nature in your locale.

Consistent with the meaning of the countryside, look at the way new landscape elements can add variety or emphasis to the landscape. Variety in landforms and vegetative patterns nearly defines picturesque landscapes. Reinforce this quality. The strong horizon line in functional landscapes can be emphasized with vertical focal elements--trees or agricultural structures.





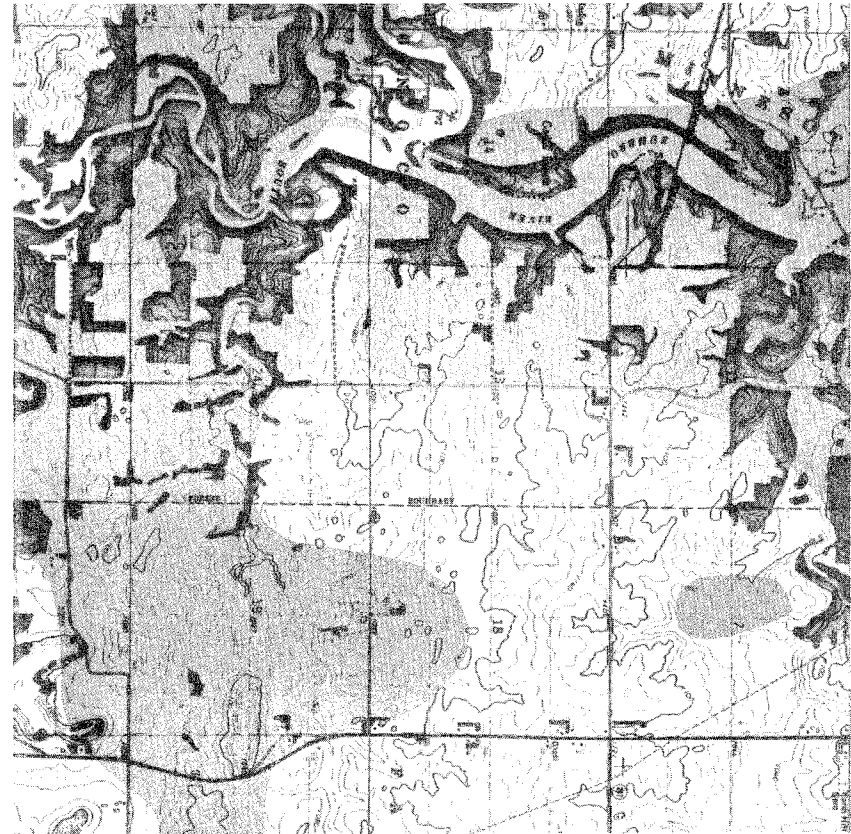
## FOCUSING YOUR EFFORT

You can plan ahead to protect rural landscape quality. By knowing and describing the value of the landscape before disruptive change occurs, you can be prepared to guide harmonious change.

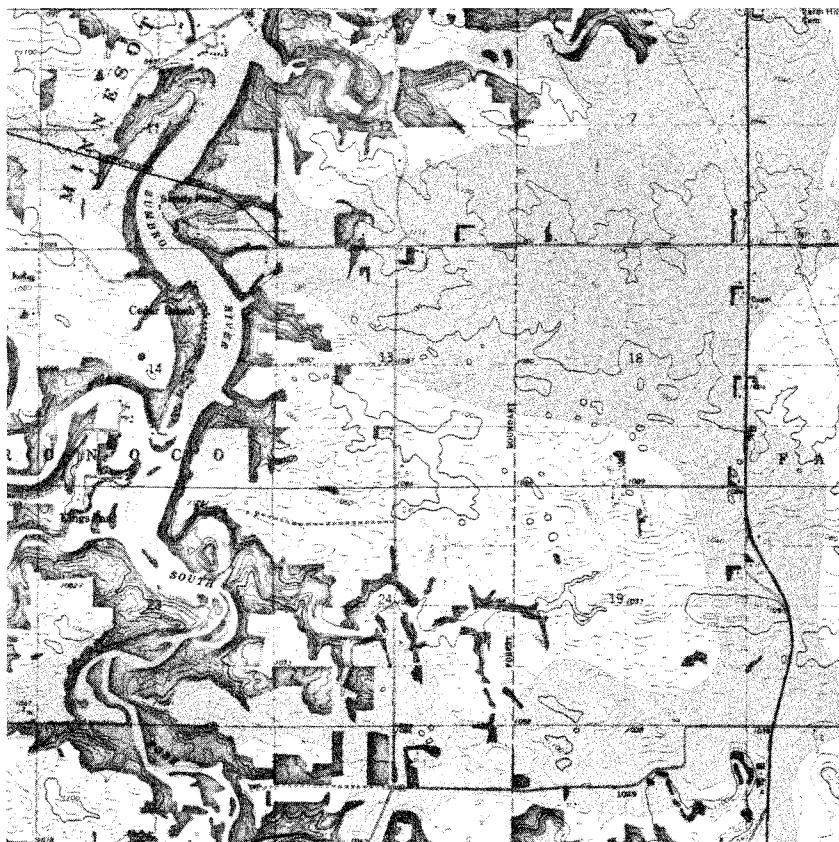
Review your region to find particularly attractive landscapes and landscapes where development is likely to be highly visible. Not all beautiful landscapes will look alike. Some will be picturesque, some will be functional, and some will be neither. Appreciate the countryside on its own terms.

Rolling, wooded landscapes are attractive to many people. At the same time, well-designed development can fit unobtrusively among hills and woodlands. Flat, open landscapes, on the other hand, may be most beautiful to the knowledgeable viewer, but development is likely to be highly visible in this landscape type. The conflict in meaning between agriculture and convenience store, or cornfields and subdivisions is immediately apparent. Neither landscape type represents a *carte blanche* for development. Each requires sensitivity to its own local characteristics.

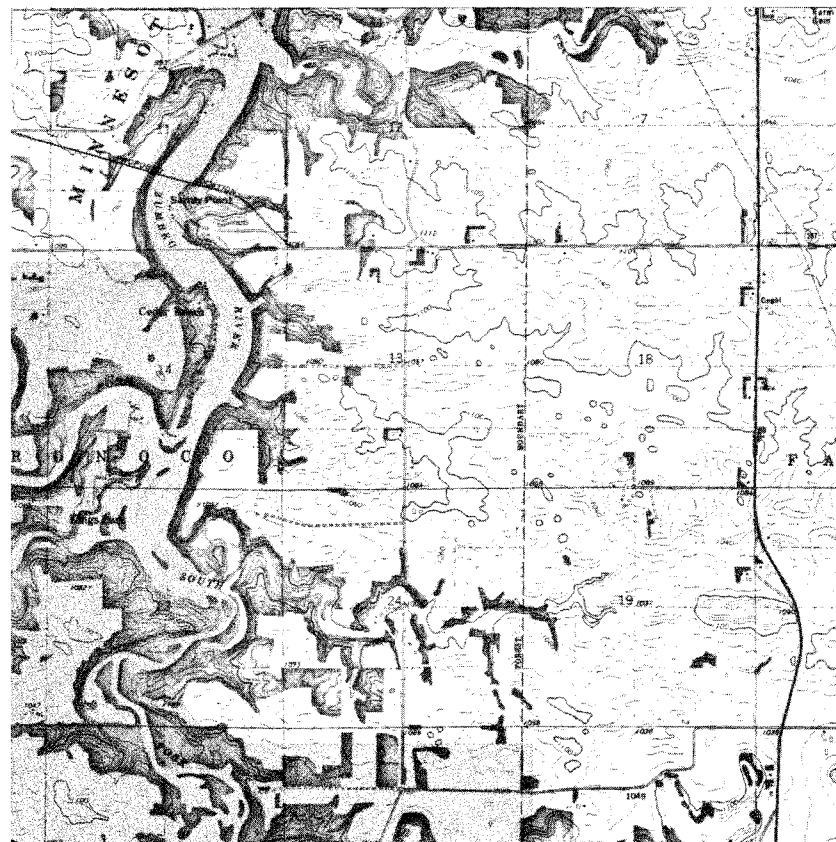
Finally identify areas where landscape change is likely to occur. These might be areas of proposed residential, commercial, or industrial development. They might be areas where conservation practices are going to be widely implemented. They might be areas where new crops or other new agricultural enterprises are being adopted. These are the areas where change can be guided to enhance or maintain the beauty of your countryside.



*The most attractive local landscapes have been shaded.*



*Development is likely to be highly visible in the shaded areas.*



*Platted subdivisions or areas zoned for development have been shaded to show that landscape change is likely.*

A professional landscape architect can help you evaluate the landscape. Consult your local SCS office, county planning office, or state university to find the right professional to get you started.

A basic tenet of landscape design is "consult the genius of the place". You will be looking for the particular character of your locale. You can act to support that sense of place and guide countryside change in your neighborhood.

It has been almost a century since people in this country could expect to move on to a new frontier in search of open country. For people who enjoy the countryside, the frontier is in our attitudes toward the landscape. We no longer can expect to move on. Development moves with us. Instead, we can move toward establishing ways of taking care of the rural landscape that we value.





Appendix 1  
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Color** - the basic manifestation of light expressed through hue and value. Hue is that quality of color through which an object is called red, green, yellow, etc. Value is that quality of color through which an object is called dark or light--its tonal quality in terms of resemblance to black, white, or an intermediate gray.

**Composition** - the putting together or organization of landscape elements.

**Elements** - distinct components of the landscape. Relatively static elements include structures, landforms, vegetation, streams, lakes, or ponds. Visibly moving or changing elements include people, animals, and vehicles, and sky elements: clouds, sun, stars, and moon.

**Emphasis** - the focus of visual attention on a landscape element or space which contrasts with the dominant visual character of its surroundings. This might be a strong vertical element (a grain elevator) in a flat, open, horizontal landscape. It might be an open, panoramic view in a wooded, enclosed landscape. It might be farm buildings in a bright red hue in a landscape of subtle green tones.

**Functional character** - a combination of natural resources and land management which suggests high suitability for row crop agriculture. Flat land, few trees, and large fields typify landscapes with a functional character.

**Line** - Edges between landscape elements with contrasting colors or textures. A dominant line in any landscape is the horizonline: the edge between landform, vegetation or structures and the sky. Other important lines are created between different types of vegetation (woodland and crop, different crops as in stripcropping) and by abrupt changes of slope (as in some kinds of terracing).

**Meaning** - the broad range of functions and symbolism expressed by the landscape. The rural landscape is characterized by ecological and agricultural functions. Qualities which symbolize and communicate these functions are openness, naturalness, orderliness, and productivity.

**Panoramic view** - a landscape view which is not obscured by elements near the viewer. A view which is long and broad compared with other views which typify a locale.

**Picturesque character** - a combination of natural resources and land management which do not suggest suitability for large-scale continuous row-crop agriculture. Rolling terrain, woodlands, pasturelands, and diversified agriculture characterize landscapes with a picturesque character.

**Scenic quality** - the beauty of visual relationships among landscape elements. Scenic quality results from the unified composition of landscape elements. High scenic quality requires that elements be in keeping with the meaning of the rural landscape.



Texture - the surface quality of a landscape element, its roughness or smoothness. Texture changes with the element's distance from the viewer. Textures that are complex and varied when seen at close range (detailed textures) blend into a more uniform mass when seen from a distance. However, landscape elements that are seen as individual objects at close range (for instance, corn plants or trees) blend into a larger textured surface (rows of corn or a variegated woodland) when seen from a distance.

Unity - wholeness and consistency of visual pattern. Unity is created by repetition of similar landscape elements or similar forms, lines, colors, or textures across the broad landscape pattern. Contrasting forms, lines, colors, or textures are combined at a small scale (within a farmstead or field, for example). However, the pattern of combined elements is repeated across the larger landscape. Local management practices, structures, and resources will be similar.

Variety - Contrast in form, line, color or texture that remains subordinate to the dominant landscape pattern. Variety enhances scenic quality by including contrasting forms, lines, colors, or textures but reinforcing the meaning of the landscape. A colorful crop or agricultural structure might create variety but a colorful car dealership would not.

Appendix II  
FARMLAND PROTECTION RESOURCES

Private Organizations

American Farmland Trust, 1717 Massachusetts Avenue, N. W.,  
Washington, D. C. 20036

American Land Resource Association, 5410 Grosvenor Lane,  
Bethesda, Maryland, 20814.

American Planning Association, 1776 Massachusetts Avenue,  
N. W., Washington, D. C. 20036

American Society of Landscape Architects, 1733 Connecticut  
Avenue, N. W., Washington, D. C., 20009

Trust for Public Lands, 82 Second Street, San Francisco,  
California, 94105

References

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Protection of Farmland: A Reference Guidebook for State  
and Local Governments. National Agricultural Lands Study.  
U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C.

Steiner, Frederick R. and Theilacker, John R. 1984.  
Protecting Farmlands. AVI Publishing Company, Westport,  
Connecticut.



