COMMUNICATING CHANGES IN SCS AND DISTRICTS

It's hard to keep up with change in American conservation. Agriculture is gaining fresh importance.

New freedom for the farmers. New worries over food prices. New worries over availability and cost of fuel and fertilizer. Record crops last year in corn, wheat, and soybeans.

But tremendous markets at home and abroad for agriculture's products--all of us want a better diet, some nations have more money to spend now.

We need to grow more food and fiber -- all we can. But we still have to protect the land from soil erosion and maintain air and water quality. Which acres should be brought back? Districts and SCS need to help. Emphasize positive effects that conservation has on yields, income, community well-being.

Water resource activities are changing.

A recent National Water Commission report has 230 recommendations, substantial changes that will need full discussion. Central theme: beneficiaries should pay the cost of the services. In watersheds, it's hard to pinpoint the beneficiaries -- widespread. And communities and groups that stand to gain the most from projects may be the least able to pay.

Notes for use by Norman A. Berg, Associate Administrator, Soil Conservation Service, at the annual meeting of the Louisiana Association of Conservation District Supervisors, Shreveport, La., January 14, 1974, and the annual convention of the Arizona Association of Conservation Districts, Phoenix, Arizona, January 17, 1974.

Revised Principles and Standards (by Water Resources Council) will affect water programs too. New interest rate of 6-7/8 percent. Environmental quality has equal status with economic growth as an objective. We feel regional development should have attention too.

Assistance programs are changing.

Landowner himself must accept a large share of the financial responsibility for his improvements. This is the setting many landowners prefer. But costs are substantial and benefits do go to community, so some financial help is needed and justifiable. State help is increasing ($47 million for fiscal 1974, ~~$1.6 million in Louisiana and~~ $2.7 million in Arizona.)

SCS funding level for 1974 is over $400 million, including new appropriations and carryovers. Withholdings, personnel ceilings, etc. make budget picture complicated. But letter writing, for example, has given us relief of 200 people on the ceiling. There will be a RECP. $90 million funding level, plus $10 million for a Water Bank. Includes some features of old REAP, plus long-term agreements on whole-farm conservation plans similar to Great Plains Conservation Program in 450 counties of former Dust Bowl.

USDA is adjusting its field office structure. Will set up U.S. Agricultural Service Centers across the Nation. Plans are for each one to have SCS, ASCS, FHA, and FCIC and possibly others under one roof within driving distance of most rural clients.

Guidelines are now out, State Conservationists are on the committees working out the center arrangements in each State. Undersecretary Campbell met with NACD last month to make sure the new arrangements wouldn't have unfavorable impact on excellent working relationship between districts and SCS.

We'll all have to conserve energy.

All of USDA was told last year to cut energy consumption 7 percent -- all forms. Early this month tacked on an additional 20 percent reduction in mileage we drive. This means all of us will have to give more attention to work planning and scheduling. It means making every activity and every trip count. We need to agree on priorities, make best use of time, look for ways to handle clerical and administrative chores. But this will help us do more no matter what the gas supply.

Land use questions are popping up everywhere.

Land use legislation is being considered or enacted in many States. The U.S. Senate has passed a bill. There is confusion, conflict over what land use policy is as well as what land-use patterns should be. Let's discuss the setting for America's land use concerns and some recent events.

LIGHTS OUT

SLIDE RUN BEGINS

ISSUES IN LAND USE POLICY

1. Of all the nations on earth, the United States is among the richest in terms of its land and water resources, its beautiful countryside, and its tremendously favorable and varied climate.
2. The future of the land resource is in the hands of millions of people who every day make decisions--good or bad--on how it is used.
3. What is the ownership of our land? Fifty-eight percent of it is in private hands--owned by individual farmers, ranchers, businessmen, and industry.
4. From this land comes most of the food, fiber, and timber we consume and export.
5. One third of the private land is in forest.
6. One third is in range and pasture.
7. And a little less than a third is in cropland.
8. Despite an almost 200-percent increase in U.S. population since 1900, these proportions in land use have changed very little.
9. The reasons for this are research, extension, conservation and other agriculture-related technology, and financial programs. The primary reason is private enterprise. America's crop production per acre continues an upward trend.

10. The second largest segment of land is under Federal management. This includes 34 percent of our total land area-759 million acres--half of it in Alaska and most of the remainder still west of the Mississippi. Some 187 million acres are managed by the USDA Forest Service. But the largest segment is public domain, under control of the Bureau of Land Management. Military land, national parks, and wildlife refuges add up too.
11. Some of those vast areas--more than 15 million acres--have been set aside as wilderness and primitive areas where timber is not harvested and most other uses are banned.
12. Much of the Federally owned land, however, is under multiple-use management. Recreation is a growing use of Federal and private land. For example, more than 80 million Americans participate in picnicking, 70 million in swimming, 40 million in boating. Almost 10 million bicycles were sold in 1972. Skiing has increased 100-fold since 1940--now there are 4½ million people going downhill. Horses are making a comeback. All this right at home--plus the more than 8 million Americans who traveled abroad last year.
13. Another 6 percent of land in the U.S. is in State and local ownership.
14. And 2 percent is Indian land.

15. For the most part, America's land is sparsely populated. In the last 10 years, 1,500 counties lost population.

16. To find the concentrations of people, we still must look to the cities...to the metropolitan areas. Here, on 3 percent or less of our land, more than 70 percent of the population lives, works, and dies.

17. This includes land for transportation--super highways, railroads, and airports. Land for transportation is highly visible although it takes up only 1.4 percent of the total land area. And it has taken up some of America's prime agricultural land, irretrievably.

18. Here's a summary of land use in America by acreage totals. We have quite a mix of public and private, rural and urban, good and bad uses.

19. The way in which we use land in America has been, for the most part, good! Businessmen, homeowners, public land management agencies, colleges and universities, and especially farmers and ranchers have had a big hand in using land properly.

20. But we, however, still use land in ways that are not to our credit. Thoughtless, unplanned, uncontrolled land use practices are costly to America, in terms of both economics and esthetics. These practices can no longer be ignored, and perhaps by the end of the 1970's no longer tolerated!

21. We still attempt to cultivate some land that is too steep and erosive--at least 50 million acres.

22. We still attempt to grow row crops on some land where frequent drought conditions present a high risk of crop failure and land damage.

23. We try to grow crops where wet conditions are equally troublesome.

24. We needlessly burn some forest, range land each year.

25. We concentrate livestock and send tons of animal waste into streams, adding to serious water pollution problems.

26. It doesn't have to be that way! The local people with whom SCS works can testify that planned conservation practices--properly installed--greatly reduce erosion and pollution, and help assure good crops on agricultural land.

27. We have created unsightly scars on millions of acres of land through surface mining, polluting streams for miles around.

28. It doesn't have to be that way! Strip-mine spoils can be reclaimed and revegetated to serve multiple uses.

29. We discard 250 million tons of solid waste each year, mostly in open dumps in rural areas where the stuff pollutes air, water, and land.

30. It doesn't have to be that way! Solid waste can be disposed of safely in properly located and managed sanitary landfills that later can serve other beneficial uses.

31. We tear up the land for building, leave it bare for long periods, and let it produce sediment to mess up the site itself and land and water downstream. Sediment is America's heaviest-by-volume water pollutant, and a growing proportion of it is produced on urbanizing land.

32. We pave over large areas with no provision for managing storm water. This thoughtless land-use practice and others add significantly to flooding problems.

33. Half of the annual flood damage still is suffered in small upstream watersheds.

34. We know it doesn't have to be that way! We can find out about land suitability and land-use hazards before any construction is started...

35. And when things are torn up, sediment can be held on site in a temporary basin just like the ponds that farmers and ranchers have been using for decades. Some of these silt traps later become attractive lakes.

36. Structures can be built to help streams safely handle the vastly increased stormwater runoff that occurs when the land is paved over.

37. We squeeze the farmer with unplanned checkerboard development and eventually make him an offer that he can't refuse.

38. Here's a comparison between an area on Rock Creek in Maryland in 1937...

39. And the same area in 1957.

40. It doesn't have to be unplanned or checkerboard. Proper land use planning can help protect and develop natural resources in both rural and suburban areas. More and more people are beginning to demand some kind of sensible land use planning--and with the one-man-one-vote system in operation, they are going to get what they want.

41. What they want is a high-quality environment where they vacation and where they live.

42. They do want high-quality food, dependable in quantity and reasonably priced at the market place...

43. And that means that land use planning must first and adequately consider the needs of a high-quality sustained agriculture.

44. They want space and facilities for a variety of recreation experiences.

45. They want space and habitat for fish and wildlife.

46. They want to protect and preserve our shorelines on the oceans and the Great Lakes, along with other unique or critical environmental areas.

47. They want to preserve areas of historical importance. (Lincoln's boyhood cabin)

48. All these needs should be considered in setting national, state, and local land use policies and in making state land use plans. The individual and his community have much to gain if land use is properly planned and land is used according to plan. They have a great deal to lose if it isn't.

49. The U.S. Congress feels that land use planning action, costly and complex as it is, has been too slow. The Senate has passed a land-use bill and the House is considering similar legislation.

50. It's obvious that the States are going to need to organize a land use planning process that will include natural resource inputs, recreation needs, population density and trends, economic factors, and related data.

51. They'll need a planning process that will provide for all the technical and financial assistance available from the Federal government--and that will blend Federal programs with State and local objectives.

52. They'll need a planning process that provides for interchange of data and ideas and training programs among agencies of all kinds. This is some of the highly useful, new imagery from the Earth Resources Technology Satellite, or ERTS.

53. They'll need to exchange information and ideas with the public, too--people will not support plans that they don't understand and that they had no hand in formulating.

54. States will need to consider whether some of the land-use decisions that have always been totally private decisions in a free-market system with limited local overview...

55. May need a stronger overview in the form of regulation, control, legislative or State approval, or perhaps litigation.

56. The States will need a process that reminds the private landowner that he has duties as well as rights in the matter of using and caring for the land and water resources he manages.

57. Above all, we must not forget that land use planning begins and ends with people. After all, land use planning is for people.

58. USDA has been is the people's department. We've been helping people manage their land better--and live better--for a long time. With conservation district help, we've told land owners and users about the natural resource information they need, where to get it, and how to use it.

59. To outline USDA's interest and objectives in the land-use field, Secretary Butz last October issued a major policy statement. I'd like to discuss its major points.

60. The first four sections stress the responsibility that rests with State and local governments and landowners, and outline the Department's ability to exchange ideas through several thousand local offices.

71. Inventories and projections by county, state, region, and the nation.

72. Which wheel is squeaking the loudest?

73. What are the issues? And where is the physical, social, and economic information to help understand them and what to do about them? USDA will find out.

74. The next part of the memorandum lists some of the objectives that agencies will have in redirecting their activities and policies.

75. For example, soil survey facts faster, and other help to guide urban growth...

76. More attention to making land-use practices assets rather than liabilities to the environment...

77. More attention to compatible uses of land.

78. Finally, the memorandum lists several broad purposes to guide all our work, to improve resources and living standards for all Americans.

79. Conservation district leaders and USDA people together will need to exercise leadership in all of these actions to help make daily life better for people. That's the assignment we all have.

80. There's a long way to go and the clock is moving. Let's get started.

END SLIDE RUN LIGHTS ON

So even as we strive to recall some long-forgotten names, we nevertheless still thrill to the spirit and the inspiration that comes with the memory of men who saw the true potential for Conservation Districts and this work.

It's timely to regain our perspective and look at what's right with America and Conservation Districts starting with these facts:

We are the recipients of a great heritage.

We are proud that the American economy is by far the freest, strongest, and most productive in the world.

Our economy gives us the highest standard of living of any nation on earth.

We are in the middle of one of the biggest, strongest booms in our history.

More Americans have jobs today than ever before, even at inflated prices.

Even the people on welfare in our country live better than the top third of any other nation in terms of the things they have--electricity, running water, central heat, indoor toilets, radio, television, automobiles, public health, food assistance--and dozens of other items.

Those are for openers. When we hear the professional pessimists bewail our Nation's problems, we have an obligation to respond and set the record straight about what is right in America.

I suppose that throughout history, each oncoming generation has believed it had reason to criticize the previous generation for making a mess of things.

I, for one, don't feel ashamed of some of my generation's accomplishments. That generation put America on wheels, made electricity available to homes throughout the land, created the wonders of television, wiped out the scourges of typhoid, diphtheria, bovine tuberculosis, polio, and succeeded in getting men to the moon and back.

My generation made it possible for all of us to be here today--alive and healthy, instead of one-fifth of us having fallen victim to the Grim Reaper, before age 20, as was true a couple of generations ago.

It was my generation that made America the best fed nation in history, at a high level of nutrition; at a cost under 16 percent of take-home pay.

That's not too bad a record. We have helped keep this America of ours pretty solid. We have kept the doors of opportunity open--we have maintained a viable economic and social system for our maximum benefit and for the benefit of society. At the same time, we recognize that the comforts, food abundance, and affluence of this nation have been achieved at heavy cost.

We've been through a lot over forty years. Agriculture has been a big yo-yo. Several times the farmer or rancher has been called on to produce just as much as he possibly can...and at other times America has wrestled with very difficult problems of what to do with mounting crop surpluses, how to adjust production. Now we've come full circle again.

From the Administrator

Produce and protect

The expected large increase in agricultural production in the United States presents major responsibilities and fresh opportunities for the Soil Conservation Service and conservation districts.

The responsibility is to encourage land users to get additional cropland under a conservation plan promptly and to select for intensive farming those acreages that can be protected adequately from soil erosion. Closely related is the job of helping landowners find ways to increase farm and ranch income and production.

Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz said recently, "While there is plenty of additional land in the United States that can be used for crop production without endangering our basic soil and water resources, there are also millions of acres of farm and ranch land with soils so prone to blowing or susceptible to water erosion that they should never be used for crops."

Also recently, the National Association of Conservation Districts called for a nationwide campaign to make sure farmers and ranchers use conservation practices to prevent accelerated wind and water erosion—to avoid another Dust Bowl.

We must work with farmers and ranchers to remind them that soil erosion control, or the lack of it, directly influences crop yields and farm income. One recent study, reported by the Agricultural Engineering Department of the University of Missouri, showed that soil erosion in some areas seriously reduced the production of corn and soybeans and resulted in a net income drop of $18.32 an acre on moderately eroded fields and $33.20 an acre on severely eroded fields. Production costs for these farmers rose 20 percent on moderately eroded fields and 56 percent on severely eroded fields, due primarily to the increased time and cost required to prepare the seedbed.

Conservation can increase net income . . . increase yields and crop quality . . . reduce production costs. This is nothing new to long-time farmers, but it may be to some of the other people we serve. The time for examples and testimonials is now. The time for letting people know what assistance we can offer them is now.

The strong demand for food products offers the American farmer and rancher an excellent opportunity to bring about real efficiency in his operations and to install good conservation systems.

For example, a bottomland farmer may now find it profitable to install tile drainage or to make other improvements in his water management system. He will gain in crop yields, be able to work his fields better, and reduce wet spots.

An upland farmer may be able to put in a new terrace system and thus add new acres of tillable land. An irrigation farmer may be able to afford ditch lining and save on his water use. Another farmer or rancher may have added incentive to bring his pasture and rangeland into first-class condition.

At a time when American farmers are producing more than ever, they should be enabled to install the necessary protective measures. The Soil Conservation Service must continue to help farmers and ranchers with efforts to retain the quality and productive capacity of their land for both the next year *and* the next generation.

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From the Administrator

Land-use planning

The first broad national land-use program, which encourages states to exercise control over land uses of more than local significance, may become a federal law in 1974. These land uses are: (1) areas of critical environmental concern, (2) areas impacted by key facilities, (3) large-scale developments, and (4) areas proposed for developments of regional benefit. This law can add major new dimensions to the concept of environmental protection and social well-being.

It has become clear that many of the problems of maintaining environmental quality are difficult to resolve effectively in the absence of enlightened land-use policies. We need only to look around us to see that too many land-use decisions have been unwise; that too many have been based on short-term expediency rather than on long-term planning.

The Department of Agriculture recognizes that major responsibility for land-use planning rests with local and state governments. Through its agencies, including the Soil Conservation Service, the Department administers many programs that influence the land-use decisions of private land users—urban as well as rural.

The Department's research, educational, technical, and financial assistance services are available in every state and county of the nation. Its agencies assist many levels of government in land-use planning and implementation efforts, and its delivery system for land-use information is widespread.

Recently, Secretary of Agriculture Earl L. Butz issued a statement on land-use policy, a major part of which is printed in this issue of SOIL CONSERVATION. The statement outlines the assistance that the Department will provide to help assure the kind of land-use planning programs that can protect and improve the nation's natural resources.

A national land-use planning assistance act can be a critical component in any strategy for guiding or directing the way land is developed. It can provide an opportunity for federal, state, and local governments to redefine their roles in land-use planning and regulation, and to work together to formulate long-range solutions to environmental problems.

Kenneth E. Grant

destructiveness of this evil under varying conditions of soil and climate, and for working out control measures applicable to the various soils and cropping practices of the Nation."

The work, it was announced four decades ago, would be carried on in close cooperation with the USDA, operating on large watershed areas in various parts of the country where soil erosion was a problem of the first magnitude.

The purpose of the work was not only to cut down land depreciation through excessive washing, but to complement efforts to bring about better flood control. The new Division was to operate on $5 million allotted by the Public Works Administration.

The Districts were to start soon in 1937.

40 yrs ago when the SCS started a few years Minn. 169.1

In September 1933 it was a time of drouth and depression. As a farm lad of nearly 16, I was still a decade away from starting my SCS career, but was already gaining valuable training and experience about land, water, grass, trees, crops, livestock, wildlife, and people. I was destined to be a conservationist. My home county in ~~Minnesota~~ was Pine, my post office and school at Grasston. My first jobs were at Meadowlands and Floodwood. I owe much to my decade of work in Idaho as a district conservationist and area conservationist at Pocatello--and to my 5½ yrs ~~work~~ in South Dakota.

Memories, Marty & Bonny

- Ed Sue - Camp Dill & Gettysburg
- Jane Glenn - Univ. of Pa. Law School