

District Manpower Needs

You notice, as I do, that frequently the higher you go in the organization, the more nearly your commands are phrased as questions. As an example, for this meeting, I received a phone call, "Norm, the program Chairman was wondering whether you would speak to this Area meeting." I wonder if he was wondering. However, I appreciate getting your command invitation in the form of a question. And I'm challenged by the topic. So I'm here in turn to raise some questions. As I look back I've spent too much of my career life explaining to somebody why we couldn't do more because we didn't have enough money, or I've spent a large portion of my time concerned about how we could get more money. I'm saying to you that it is going to be tough for a while, but in a Nation with over 800 billion dollars in Gross National Product now and probably more than one trillion dollars Gross National Product in the early seventies, the problem of financing resource conservation and development should be solved.

This will be a timely happening for far-reaching changes are taking place on the farms and in the towns and cities. Clean air and water, green forests, and open spaces that we once took for granted now assume new meaning. They are more appreciated as they become more limited. We become increasingly aware of the need for better stewardship of the productive land that has been entrusted to us as we see our land misused and our waters degraded.

Material used by Norman A. Berg, Deputy Administrator for Field Services, Soil Conservation Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., for talk at the Northeastern Area Meeting of the National Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, July 22, 1968, Aroostook State College, Presque Isle, Maine

D. A. Williams, Administrator of the Soil Conservation Service, expressed it this way. "Clean water and air, productive and beautiful land, and space for relaxing need not be endangered. We have the knowledge and the ability to do whatever is required to protect and improve these resources. We have the capacity to assure not only food and shelter, but also hope and dignity and opportunity for all men."

This is the new resource development and conservation climate in which we all find ourselves.

However, George Stewart's new book, "Not So Rich as You Think," had these lines:

"When some future historian sits down to summarize what the present generation of Americans has accomplished, his climactic sentence could read: 'Of the waters, they made a cesspool; of the air, a depository of poisons; and of the good earth itself, a dump. . .'"

A facetious remark would be that when the United States has an annual trillion dollar gross national product, it may have to spend most of it to return the environment to that quality level found when the Nation was new and had no Gross National Product. And Gross National Product is totally colorblind as to quality. Somewhere in the Nation \$20 million is being spent to make a "mess" and both that amount and the \$20 million spent to eventually clean it up, add equally to the Gross National Product.

Too harsh--perhaps so. But I'm concerned--as you are--that future citizens will judge severely a race of men who had the technical knowledge, the resources they needed to provide clean water, air, and land, but lacked the will to do so.

If we let that happen, then future generations will so judge us.

And now to the subject at hand.

The cost of doing business is going up. It has been for a long time.

As a result, assistance provided by the Soil Conservation Service to soil and water conservation districts has steadily declined in terms of man-years of employment--from 11,100 in fiscal year 1967, to 11,025 in fiscal 1968, and an estimated 10,785 in fiscal 1969. This is a loss of 315 man-years of technical assistance from FY 1967 to FY 1969.

At the same time, we anticipate that available Federal funds for assistance to conservation districts will be about \$5 million more in FY 1969 than in FY 1967.

For the first time in many years, there will be no money in the fiscal 1969 SCS budget for staffing new districts. Yet, there is need for continued new district organization, as well as for adjustments in some district boundaries.

SCS is not getting the additional funding required to maintain our staff at the level needed to get the job done.

One alternative is for conservation districts, assisted by State and local governments, to take up the slack, and to provide the additional manpower required to meet growing demands upon the districts and the conservation effort.

The Northeastern Area is an ideal platform for discussion of District staffing, for a number of reasons.

This Area has one of the Nation's progressive soil and water conservation programs. Both resource planning and watershed development are at a high level of development. Your resource conservation and development projects are some of the finest in the Nation. Your districts have progressive enabling laws to operate under. And, with all this, the need for further dynamic progress in soil and water resource conservation in all States remains very great.

This 12-State area has made encouraging progress in meeting an increasingly larger share of the costs of doing business through State and local government support. But it is necessary to bring the Federal and non-Federal contribution more nearly into balance.

National emergencies at home and abroad reflect in SCS funding for fiscal 1969, as with many other worthy programs.

The requirement imposed by the Congress for approval of a surtax that Federal spending be cut back by at least \$8 billion will hurt staffing and operations generally.

The added costs of recent Federal pay increases, which are intended to bring Government salaries more in line with private industry for comparable work, have to be absorbed, and this means fewer employees for the available dollars.

Government, like private enterprise, must expect to pay competitive wages if we expect to employ competent professional workers.

The average salary paid to SCS employees between 1940 and 1968 has gone up more than fourfold. From an average annual salary of \$2,140 in 1940, and \$3,673 in 1950, the average salary rose by 1960 to \$5,605; by 1965 to \$7,631, and in 1967 to \$8,252. The average salary paid by SCS in 1968 was estimated at \$8,689 before the current wage increases.

These salary increases have resulted from two factors. First, the pay increases granted by the Congress to bring Federal pay more in line with private enterprise. Second, it has been necessary, also, in recent years to offer higher service grades to particular categories of personnel because as professionals they are faced with greater and more complex conservation problems affecting more people.

The SCS job, in line with conservation needs generally, is constantly becoming more sophisticated. We need, and must employ, well educated people---educated not only in technical skills, but conversant with social and economic problems that affect our work. They must be able to cope with complex situations--and I need not remind you of the excellent performance of SCS personnel in the field. We are rightly proud of this nationwide staff. We must be certain that we can continue to attract competent people so that our contribution is as effective as it can be. That is what you need, and that is what we aim for.

Reorganization within the Service has created greater regional responsibility for many of our field people. We need highly competent administrative staff in the field as well as highly competent technical staff. I think we have that.

The small watershed program, Outreach, TAP, RAD, Resource Conservation and Development projects, expansion into wildlife conservation, recreation, and other fields related to soil and water conservation have placed increasingly greater demands upon SCS staffing. And the phenomenal growth in the District movement related directly to the heavier burdens on SCS staffing.

We know from experience that within the District approximately 80 percent of the funds needed to provide a man-year of technical assistance are applied to personal services--and about 20 percent to supporting materials and facilities.

A total of 8,754 man-years of SCS assistance to districts were budgeted for fiscal year 1968, and yet 1,692 additional man-years of direct assistance were considered needed to meet the workload.

In the 12 States represented at this meeting 854 man-years were budgeted for SCS assistance to local districts, with 192 man-years additional considered necessary to meet the workload.

Not only have pay costs gone up, but cost of supplies also. These costs wipe out the small increase in assistance to districts expected for fiscal 1969. The total SCS appropriation for fiscal 1969 is subject to a sharp reduction which is not as harsh as it might be only because of funds in the budget reserve available for obligation during the next fiscal year.

This is not entirely a bleak picture, but it is a coldly realistic one. It means that conservation operations which should advance will have to be underwritten by other than Federal sources. It is a challenge

to every conservation district in the Nation to take a close look at what needs to be done, and to look for ways to meet these needs more effectively at the local level.

The Federal commitment has grown with the need. I think every district should ask itself whether it, too, has grown with the need.

Your National Association's Outlook Committee has pointed to needed adjustments in district financing and staffing to meet current and future needs. Additional authorities are in many cases vital to the further development of the district movement.

In addition to this, State and local governments need to recognize their responsibility for supporting soil and water conservation work that is in the larger public interest.

Changes that are being made by State legislatures in district enabling laws are a very hopeful sign. But--although desirable and necessary--many of these changes also challenge the districts to accomplish more in the broad resource conservation field. Enabling legislation in all cases must include power to raise money so that the districts can accomplish their traditional assignments in rural areas and take on the added responsibilities required of them.

The dollar amount of SCS obligations to the States represented here has increased substantially over the years.

In the Northeastern Area, direct obligations by the SCS in fiscal year 1950 totaled \$5,825,028. By 1960, obligations totaled \$11,204,832, better than a 92 percent increase. In fiscal year 1965, SCS obligations jumped to \$19,485,404; and to \$23,663,753 in ifscal 1967. This is a

306 percent increase over 1950. The small watershed program and other stepped-up conservation activities account for the increase in recent years, along with increasing operating costs. But, the point is that SCS is spending more money in this Area, by a very substantial amount. This is the trend across the Nation.

On the State side, appropriations by the 12 State legislatures for soil and water conservation work rose from \$227,288 in 1955 to \$2,872,734 in 1965. And double that again to \$5,685,706 in 1968--about 20 percent of the SCS input.

These are encouraging trends. They are highly commendable trends.

To the extent that it is possible, we want SCS assistance to reflect the local effort. I would like to be able to say that in all cases the local effort--within local capabilities--determines the level of Federal assistance. Certainly, outstanding local effort should inspire Federal assistance. This is not always the case, however. There is no real rhyme or reason in the Federal versus the local contribution.

I would like to say, too, that Congress always responds positively to firm evidence of local participation and responsibility where Federal cost-sharing or other assistance funds are involved. I cannot assure you that if you put in more, Congress will put in more. However, to the extent that local and State participation and support increase, the Federal contribution becomes more meaningful, and the local job that brings local benefits is more effectively accomplished.

With expanding SCS and district interests, it is logical that there should be more State and local self-help. There is much urgency in conservation work these days. Land use decisions must be based on the right criteria. SCS has the technical tools for helping to determine proper land use. But, if these tools are going to be used as effectively as they can be, the districts must take on greater responsibilities.

Three recent committee or task force assignments have come my way that relate to this whole discussion. My Administrator has asked that I chair two Service groups to:

First, recommend to him additional opportunities for further reducing the time now spent by SCS personnel on application assistance. In this study we are examining the degree to which application of conservation measures is now being provided by land owners and operators, contractors, consultants, etc. We are also concerned about the methods used to assure quality work--if performed by non-Service people--and Federal funds are involved. We hope to find added means and methods of jointly doing the big and important job of getting conservation on the land as rapidly as possible.

Second, have a group look into Service working relationships with soil and water conservation districts. The trend developing for multi-district working arrangements and alignments with cities, towns, planning regions, economic development districts and with units of State government suggests that we may need more consolidation and strengthening of our field staffs to meet new challenges.

On both of these assignments we are looking for all the advice we can get to strengthen our work.

The third assignment, from the Secretary, is on a Task Force of ASCS, ERS, and SCS to study the feasibility of limiting USDA free technical assistance and conservation cost-sharing benefits on agricultural production units larger than family type, especially those owned by conglomerate corporations and individuals with substantial other income from non-farm sources.

This activity--I'm certain--will require getting more facts and having more discussion.

So a lot of people are involved in this area of concern.

In summary, there are jobs that SCS personnel now are doing that the districts, local agencies, the land owners, and other participating groups will have to provide for.

The time and efforts of SCS personnel in the field that are required to accomplish complex assignments should not be expended on the more routine jobs that can be done by less skilled--and less highly paid--employees.

It is going to be necessary for the Districts to employ more personnel than can be provided from the Federal level. This may even eventually include professional as well as sub-professional workers. The Districts must be prepared to compete in the marketplace for the high caliber personnel that will be needed to administer and service broader District participation in soil and water conservation activities in developing urban areas as well as on agricultural lands.

11

In District work we might well look forward to multi-county activities. This allows for sharing of highly trained and competent personnel, and for more efficient regional planning. Districts serve the essential function of liaison between Federal, State, and local agencies, and the private sector. This relationship must be strengthened as land use decisions become increasingly critical. The Soil Conservation Service may have to look to regional staffing, with skilled technicians serving broader areas, as a more effective way to assist districts--considering the limitations on Federal funding. We do not need to fear change in how we attack the resource conservation problems confronting us. We should remain as flexible in our approach as circumstances require. Our primary aim must be to extend the benefits of sound conservation policy and practice as effectively as we can. This is essentially a local effort, as it always has been. It is going to do the best it can to help all it can. We look forward to strengthening our partnership with the more than 3,000 conservation districts that have written a proud history of accomplishment. We cannot permit vital progress in the conservation and development of the Nation's soil and water resources to be curtailed or thwarted by fluctuations in the Federal commitment for whatever reason. Progress in resource conservation is first a local benefit--and local response should be in keeping with this fact. The Chairman of the Judith Basin Soil and Water Conservation District in Montana said it best a few weeks ago:

"Local Soil and Water Conservation Districts have, from their inception, been locally organized and controlled, a fact, we may all be proud of. The march of time and man's progress has not changed this concept and let us hope that it never will. However, man's technological and scientific advancement and its changing social pattern has dramatically changed the outlook and complexity of resource conservation and planning. These changes in turn demand a changing and receptive attitude on all organizations and groups administering and sponsoring the broad aspects of conservation. In our Districts, we have failed to meet the challenge of this change. In the matter of District financing, we are a "beggar group" in a world of high-powered finance and advertising. We are the destitute champions of a cause that affects every man, woman, and child in our Nation.

"Our changing social structure dictates that we can no longer be concerned with problems of strictly local nature. Such problems as flood control, water pollution, urban water supply, air pollution, and the many facets of recreation are demanding our attention.

"The Districts, as presently established, are financially and by virtue of statute, unable to effectively administer the multi-interest and multi-purpose resource developments required by our modern day society.

"It is in view of our limitations as Districts that we must look forward toward new enabling legislation, providing new and supporting entities entrusted with new powers and responsibilities necessary to expedite resource conservation and development with the complex interests concerned."