

EXCELLENCE FOR TOMORROW

I am pleased to be in North Carolina where the Service had its roots in the dream of Hugh H. Bennett, and where our agency has some of its most important work and success today.

I like to join in occasions like this; to take time out from our daily conservation challenges to recognize service and excellence in our ranks. But in a real sense an awards program is not a break from the action, it is an important part of the action. It gets right at the heart of what has made soil and water conservation the outstanding work that it is today.

The success of our program does not depend primarily on the size of its budget, or the complexity of data processing machines, or even on the number of its employees and field offices, important as these things are.

Talk by Norman A. Berg, Associate Administrator, USDA Soil Conservation Service, at the SCS Awards Banquet, Raleigh, North Carolina, September 25, 1969

It rests primarily on the quality of its people--on a combination of technical excellence, a spirit of individual initiative, and dedication to those goals which unite us all. We have been blessed with many such employees in the Soil Conservation Service, and many of them are here tonight in North Carolina. You are proof that ours is not an occupation, it is a vocation; it is not so much a career as a calling. That is our strength, and that is why we have been able in a little over one generation to change the landscape of a Nation.

You, and the conservation districts and their cooperators, have written a proud record on the land here in North Carolina. I am glad to have this chance to salute all of you in person--you who are being honored, your families, and at least two of the people who have contributed a career to SCS and now are strengthening the ranks of your state's soil and water conservation districts--Earl Garrett and George Winchester.

The large burden of conservation leadership weighs on our state conservationist; I think Charlie Bartlett would agree with me. So I want to take time out to recognize Earl Garrett for his service in his hot spot. His compatriot in current work of the Wake district, George Winchester, is in another hot spot of the conservation job--the presidency of the State association. We were glad to have had these men in SCS, and happy to see them find a new challenge with our agency's senior partner.

There is no more important work in America than the work conservationists are doing today--whether you are in SCS or in a conservation district. You may not make the headlines...or interrupt television programs with bulletins...but more than any other group of people, the future of America is in your hands.

And what a future that is going to be! It is an exciting future, but it also is filled with serious challenges. It is a future with many unanswered questions about land use, about environmental problems and the solutions for them, about manpower and money, about the respective roles of conservation districts and the Service in the conservation effort.

Finding answers to these questions before time runs out for us, will be possible because of the loyalty, creativity, and dedication to service of people like you in this room.

We have traveled a long road together already, you and I and the thousands of people we represent. Along that road are many battles won, some lost, and many still pending. We have kept to that road over three decades because we believe in our work--in our mission. Russel Lord wrote something 31 years ago that eloquently expresses that belief and the challenge it represents. I'd like to read from it for just a moment. Mr. Lord said, "There will be no need to advertise workers in soil conservation. The work will grow and attain to the quiet prestige of those professions to which men and women are attracted by the nature of the work, not by the price tag. But it is necessary, in a sense, and proper to advertise this new calling to young people who now are wondering what to do with their lives. There is work here for you... It will never make you rich, but it will support you; and it is decent, vital, and absorbing work."

Soil and water conservation is decent, vital, and absorbing work for all of us. Some of our roles in the work are local, some statewide, some national; some are separate, many are combined. All these roles can be fulfilled with mutual understanding.

For a few minutes tonight, I want to discuss what some of these roles are likely to be in the decade of the 1970's. I want to talk about excellence and about service--because we are going to need these qualities more than ever in the decade ahead.

The seventies will make new demands on each conservationist as America experiences accelerated change in many ways. The conservationist will be working in broader areas and face new conservation problems of great consequence and urgency. He will have the important job of helping to educate land users and the general public in resource management matters. He will be working with people who are more affluent and have more time for community affairs. He will need to know how to use the tools of an advanced technology.

You may think that the conservationist I'm talking about is someone who at this moment is in college or just beginning his career. Not entirely. Whether you have thirty years left in your career or only one, you are important to America's resource future and you have a responsibility to make the most meaningful contribution possible in your work. Every single one of us has the charge to use all the tools, skills, and knowledge at his command, and to keep alert to new ideas and new technologies that can be adapted to serve our goals.

Every one of us also has the charge in his everyday activities to be a recruiter--to interest young people in conservation careers, and, when he has the opportunity, to work with educators and organizations in their programs. In this way each of you can give young people that "decent, vital, and absorbing" something to do with their lives; you can help make sure that there are enough conservationists for tomorrow; and you can impart to others the understanding and the knowledge that you have gained in your career.

I emphasize that everyone has a contribution to make because I believe the land-use and other resource decisions made within the next few years will strongly influence the shape of our nation for a long time to come. We haven't much time to get ready.

In North Carolina, as in every other state, you have the continuing challenge of keeping prime agricultural land protected and productive. The closer that agricultural land is to the city, the harder the job to keep the land agricultural. The big word today is urbanization. The other big word today is environment. Both go hand in hand, and in too many cases they go skipping off down the wrong road.

Citizens in the path of population growth face tremendous problems that call for proper resource planning...for adequate road systems to handle increased commercial and individual travel... for fitting agricultural, residential, and commercial development into a harmonious pattern...for adequate water supply, recreational facilities, and many other services...and for pollution control.

These are complex problems. Arriving at proper solutions will require a lot of knowledge, a lot of cooperation, and a lot of perception--and in many instances, a substantial amount of money. Until recent years, land developers and planners other than farmers didn't seek or use information available to them on soil and water conservation. Either they didn't know about it, or they didn't know how to fit it into their planning, or they didn't think conservation measures were a justifiable investment.

Now our help is being sought at many levels, from small towns to whole regions. Thirty states already are active in multi-county planning. In Washington, we just finished a two-day National Conference on Sediment Control, at which county government and conservation district leaders joined state and Federal officials to work together on a guidebook for sediment control through community action. The book will set forth the kinds of help available; what techniques are already known or can be adapted from our farm-based technology; and what guidelines or procedures or local regulations may be needed.

Our aim is to bring about suburban and urban growth without producing a billion tons of sediment a year to pollute our water, shrink water-storage capacity, and damage downstream property.

A key word heard often at the conference was planning. As I told the group, the time for action is not when you need the dredge. Orderly growth without environmental degradation takes good planning--not only for sediment control, but for careful selection of suitable building sites, for protection of open space and wildlife habitat--and preservation of vital agricultural land--and many other long range community needs.

I know that planning is certainly not a new word to SCS or to conservation districts. Long ago we tested the concept of looking at a unit of land, treating it according to its needs, and using it within its capabilities and in line with the owner's desires.

We helped prove that this same planning concept works, no matter how large the unit of land, no matter what its present use.

The planning concept is the basic stuff of watershed projects, of studies on whole river basins, and of resource conservation and development projects like yours--the North Central Piedmont.

We know, too, that a plan isn't worth much if it is only on paper, except perhaps to hold a door open or prop up a table leg. The plan has to be applied--put on the land--to be effective.

The Soil Conservation Service has an opportunity to provide valuable information and counsel in making resource plans and in helping translate them into action. This will help communities grow without destroying the very environment they seek to enjoy and without spending unnecessary sums repairing the damage caused by careless use of soil and water.

We have a chance to help town and country America grow together without having one absorb the other and destroy their desirable qualities.

We can't help rural and urban America grow together by spending all our time with urban people, to the exclusion of our longtime friends and responsibilities in the agricultural field. We're not ever going to stop serving the interests of people in rural areas.

On the contrary, we have increasingly a critical role in helping to improve the quality of living in rural areas, in assuring the kind of environment that satisfies the needs of the human spirit as well as the material needs of the individual.

You have rolled up an impressive record in North Carolina in conservation action--a record that not only looks good in our progress reporting system, but also is readily visible and attractive on the ground throughout the State. Your work shows--and you can be proud of it.

Still, I know you sense that resource management in rural North Carolina has much that remains to be done.

Together we will pitch in and do it; but it will take a lot of down-to-earth understanding, a willingness to compromise, and a desire to cooperate--just as it always has. It will take a keen ear to stay attuned to the needs of local people, and a keen desire to help all people live a better life. It will take a recognition that there are others in the conservation game whose programs deserve to be meshed with ours in the most comprehensive package possible. When we seem to be at cross purposes with other agencies, or with our district friends, let's sit down together and figure out what the trouble is, and come to a meeting of the minds, and go on together to get our mutual job done in a real spirit of friendly cooperation. That's how we've worked for thirty-five years, and it does work; if in isolated cases we haven't worked that way, then let's get started now.

We all have a challenge to be of greater service in helping mix conservation with economics, with human relationships, to fuse a better state and a better country.

Will we be of greater service? Only if we all have that quality of excellence that we honor here tonight....

Excellence in gathering and interpreting basic information for all kinds of resource planning...

Excellence in our everyday activities to merit widespread support for conservation work and at a level of financing that will meet the needs of the times...

Excellence in finding ways to serve the public better with the resources that we have now...

Excellence in sharpening and nurturing the strong and viable partnership arrangement that we have with conservation districts...

And excellence in professionalism and in technical competence. Each of us needs to accept a challenge of personal growth, of intellectual curiosity, of dedication to service. You who are being honored tonight--especially Ned Jests and Karl Graetz and Hubert Willis who were North Carolina's nominees for the superior service award--obviously have accepted these personal challenges. I wish all three of you could have been in Washington last May to receive the thanks of a grateful Department. I hope all of you will continue to keep at your personal challenges.

I've thrown a lot of challenges your way tonight. But I know you can handle them, because you've already proven yourselves. I think we can work together in the decade ahead to be of even better service to America. I think we can communicate the importance and the principles of conservation to landowners, community authorities, and all citizens who may be involved in decision-making about conservation issues.

I think we can help get those principles used in every corner of
North Carolina and every corner of America.

It's that important.

And it's a satisfying assignment.
