

Future Direction of the Soil Conservation Service

I have been asked to talk to you today about the future direction our agency will be taking. I will concentrate on that topic, as Rich Duesterhaus will be filling you in on current developments tomorrow.

They are interrelated--for our capability by law and appropriation actions--is fairly fixed for the next 18 months. We do know our dollar and people story for the balance of this fiscal year and we know what the Administration wants for us through FY 1982. We will build our future on that foundation.

Let me, therefore, do my job in this sequence:

First, what have I done -- with the help of my staff -- to give direction to SCS?

Second, why have we done this?

Third, how do we do what should be done?

Fourth, what do we expect will happen--what are the results we hope to achieve?

Fifth, and finally, what does it all mean to you--and your role in the SCS--where do we go from here?

A little background and history first. I've been fortunate to have served my Nation for four decades. Ruth and I have been invited to attend our Class of 1941 Reunion in May at the University of Minnesota.

Remarks prepared for delivery by Norman A. Berg, Chief, USDA Soil Conservation Service, at the Virginia SCS All Personnel Meeting, Fredericksburg, Virginia, April 28, 1981

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The invitation stated:

The time has come!
The fabulous Class of '41 has made it to
its fortieth anniversary.

"Born in a war
Raised in a great depression
Graduated into another war
We hung in and made it through."

A remarkable achievement!

That privilege of survival, of experience and opportunity, makes me even more excited about the future of the Soil Conservation Service, and the soil and water conservation movement in general. I can't remember a time with as much public interest in the things we do. I was just interviewed by a reporter ~~for~~ for the Los Angeles Times, whose editors had told him to take as much time as he needed to get a complete story on the extent of this Nation's soil and water conservation problems. He had actually lived with a farmer in Illinois to get some first-hand knowledge.

This interest in soil and water conservation by one of our country's top publications is nothing new. There have been articles in the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, and many, many other newspapers and magazines. They indicate that the public is concerned about the condition and future of our Nation's natural resources.

We knew this, of course, from the results of the Harris poll. The 7,000 people queried said that they ~~wanted~~ wanted continued improvements in soil and water conservation regardless of cost.

So, we have an American press and an American public that are keenly interested in the things we do, and, let me assure you, we have an Administration that shares this enthusiasm.

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A few weeks ago, Rich Duesterhaus, Graham Munkittrick, and I took Assistant Secretary-designate John Crowell over Pennsylvania by helicopter for a two-day crash course in how our field operation works. . .and, also, to get a first-hand look at some of our activities and of their conservation districts.

We had the opportunity to see and discuss a number of important issues on this trip, including farmland retention, the RAMP effort, small watershed projects, the future of RC&D, the incentives necessary to increase the application of conservation practices, the need for local flexibility in soil and water conservation programs, and the importance of the technical excellence at the local level.

He was impressed with what he saw and what we are doing. We met the news media at several stops. He was very complimentary^m about the work we have underway. I think he has a good understanding of the role of our field operation. . .and the importance we place on that part of our organization. At one point, Mr. Crowell described the DC as the "salesperson" for the agency and also remarked on the significance of the AC's role.

If I were asked to rate the success of the trip on a scale of 1 to 10, I would give it a 10. I think we accomplished everything we had hoped for. My new boss came back to Washington with a better feel for the work we do. He asked me to set up another trip to see critically-eroding areas, and I intend to do this. He has been invited to attend the SCSA meeting in Spokane this summer and could tour the Palouse area while we are in the Northwest.

Having an Assistant Secretary-designate who is truly interested in the things we do is certainly a ten, and having a Secretary

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of Agriculture who shares those sentiments is no small number either.

Secretary John Block is a farmer and former Director of Agriculture in an important agricultural State. He has first-hand knowledge of the day-to-day problems facing the farmer, including soil erosion and a host of others. When he was Director of the Illinois Department of Agriculture, that Department earned an excellent reputation in soil and water conservation. Since becoming Secretary of Agriculture, he has stated support of the things we do.

We know that the Administration is committed to expanding U.S. agricultural productivity. . . and U.S. exports. Secretary Block has spoken often of his conviction that we ~~we~~ must have a strong, prosperous, and productive agriculture. He has described the productivity issue as "the greatest challenge facing those involved in American agriculture in this century." He has called on agricultural researchers to help us meet this challenge, but he also has stated that we must take firm action to reduce erosion and to keep good farmland in farming--two things that must be done if we are to increase productivity.

The Secretary endorsed the findings of the National Agricultural Lands Study and called for a national land use policy to slow the conversion of our best farmlands to nonfarm uses.

In a February speech to the National Agricultural Lands Conference in Chicago, the Secretary summed up the farmland retention issue in this way: "Liberty is really what we're talking about today. Liberty doesn't mean the freedom~~x~~ to squander resources and evade responsibility. It means taking on responsibility so that we have the freedom~~x~~ to make deliberate, conscious choices about our future."

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We know from these statements and from others that the Administration is deeply concerned about our country's natural resources. We know that it wants to help protect these resources for both current and future generations of Americans. And we know that it has specific ideas on how this should be done.

The Administration is opposed, for example, to a federally imposed, mandatory approach to soil and water conservation. It shares this view with a majority of private landowners. It is convinced that in a Nation with an agriculture as large and diverse as ours, a Federal law requiring mandatory conservation practices would be counterproductive. . .not to mention a nightmare to draft, administer, and enforce.

The Secretary has also said that while he considers both soil erosion and the loss of good farmland to be extremely serious problems, he does not believe that all the solutions to these problems should come from the Federal Government.

At a press conference after becoming Secretary, he said he believed in encouraging States and local units of government to take more conservation leadership, because they are closer to the people.

Just as we know that the Administration is concerned about soil and water conservation, and how we go about doing it, we also know that it is equally concerned about the state of the U.S. economy. So much so, in fact, that it has made restoring real economic growth to the Nation its top priority. It has focu^sed immediate attention on three areas: 1) budget reform, 2) regulatory relief, and 3) tax reductions.

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Inflation, caused in part by the paid growth in government spending, is not only a problem for all citizens--public enemy number one--it is also a major handicap for public programs. Funding for SCS programs is an example~~x~~ very real for all of us. We have had increases of 68 percent in appropriations over the past ten years, but our real dollar buying power has actually declined by about 17 percent. To have the same capability we had in 1972, SCS would need over \$700,000,000--the SCS '82 budget will be \$552,000,000.

In that setting, I'll now return to ~~an~~^s answering the questions I posed for you and I earlier.

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First, what have we done to guide the future of SCS?

I came to my present position~~X~~ after serving at every level of our agency--in every grade. I was a conservation aide, a soil conservationist, a W.U.C., a D.C., an A.C. (all in Idaho), served in key positions in the State Office in South Dakota, and have spent the last 20 years in our National Office as an Assistant to the Administrator, a Deputy Administrator, the Associate Administrator, and since September 1979, the Administrator/Chief.

This long and varied experience has been of great value. I helped draft the legislation and policy for RC&D's, GPCP, LIM, Water Bank, the Surface Mine Act (RAMP), and RCA. I have had a key role in Land Use and water quality issues.

As a member of NACD's District Outlook Committee since its inception in the 60's, I led the work that resulted in the SCS Framework Plan of the early 70's. This led to RCA--an idea developed by several concerned about the future of the SCS.

It was obvious--based on RCA, NRI, Appraisal data--that we still faced some very serious conservation problems. This led to an early study of how well we were organized for the challenges ahead. After countless suggestions from Service people, study of other agencies, advice from the Secretary's Office, and decisions by our own staff, we set up the present National Office structure. We strengthened staffs for financial management, budget formulation, conservation planning, land treatment, project development and maintenance, social science, evaluation and analysis, public participation, equal opportunity, and international activities. At the sametime, we kept the traditional capability at a high level of quality for engineering, ecological sciences, economics, soil

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science, I&M, carto and personnel.

This organization has been in place for a ~~year~~^{year} now and gives SCS a Board of Directors ~~to~~^{for} Service policy and decisions. These are the Deputy Chiefs, their Associates, and the Assistant Chiefs. We are now well equipped to handle the program and management needs related to \$ allowances, personnel ceilings, procurement, outside consultants, and travel constraints. The recent thrust to increase the field force by 1% per year for the next 5 years is a tangible result of hard analysis of what our people are doing, where they are doing it, and what are the high-priority jobs that need doing.

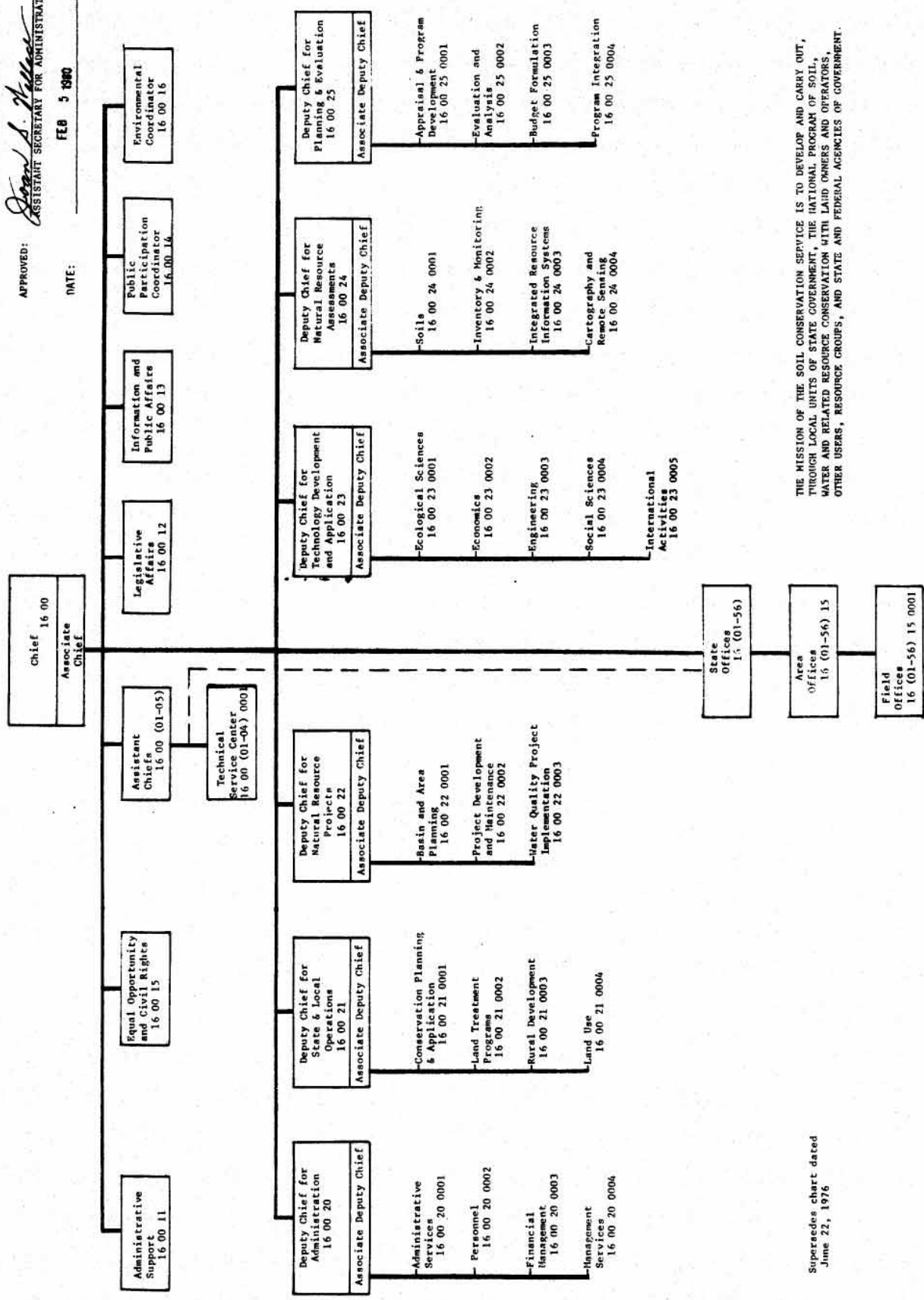
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

RECOMMENDED: *[Signature]*
CHIEF, SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

CONCURRED: *[Signature]*
ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR NATURAL
RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT

APPROVED: *[Signature]*
ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION

DATE: FEB 5 1980



Supersedes chart dated
June 22, 1976

THE MISSION OF THE SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE IS TO DEVELOP AND CARRY OUT, THROUGH LOCAL UNITS OF STATE GOVERNMENT, THE NATIONAL PROGRAM OF SOIL, WATER AND RELATED RESOURCE CONSERVATION WITH LAND OWNERS AND OPERATORS, OTHER USERS, RESOURCE GROUPS, AND STATE AND FEDERAL AGENCIES OF GOVERNMENT.

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Second, why have we done these things?

The RCA America's Soil and Water Conservation Trends booklet and the NAL Study and Report vividly tell what needs to be done about:

Soil quality and quantity

- T value
- Agricultural productivity

Water resources

- supply, quality
- watershed protection

Other related natural resources

- Ag land retention
- Suburban construction
- Organic waste

Therefore, the Service must do those things related to our agenda as its contribution to the total task ahead.

The Agenda lists 14 goals for SCS for 1981 through 1985. A few of these include:

- . Give highest priority to erosion reduction, flood prevention, water supply and management, and agricultural land retention, especially where opportunities to improve the productive capacity of the resource are greatest.

- . Achieve more effective participation by conservation districts, State soil conservation agencies, and other units of local and State government in the Nation's soil and water conservation program.

- . Remove or streamline burdensome and cumbersome policies, requirements, and rules and regulations.

- . Reduce overhead, increase the proportion of the work force providing direct service in the field, and increase financial assistance relative to technical assistance wherever possible.

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All of the activities I've mentioned...from RCA...to our annual plans of operation...to the new Soil Conservation Agenda...are examples of how SCS has attempted to take charge of its own future. We can't just sit back and let the future happen to us. Some things we can control, and we must recognize what they are and what we can do about them. We must work hard to shape the future we want to see.

DRAFT

SUBJECT: A Soil Conservation Agenda

TO: State Conservationists
TSC Directors

As the ~~new~~ Administration prepares to make decisions on the RCA Program for soil and water conservation, I have given thought to those goals toward which the Soil Conservation Service should strive in support of whatever specific approach is selected.

These goals are set forth in the enclosed Soil Conservation Agenda. They have been discussed extensively with Assistant Secretary-designate John B. Crowell, Jr., and my top Staff. They build on the suggestions that we have received in recent months from ^{SCS personnel,} NACD, farm organizations, and others concerned ^{about} ~~with~~ the Nation's soil conservation effort.

This list is not intended to be all-inclusive. It does set forth some key elements for a strong and effective program in the years directly ahead.

These goals should be shared with all SCS personnel, ^{representatives of} and conservation ^{They are to} Districts ^{officials,} and other cooperating agencies, ~~and~~ be used in planning, carrying out, and reporting on accomplishments.

NORMAN A. BERG
Chief

Enclosure

cc:
Deputy Chiefs
Assistant Chiefs
Special Staffs

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Third, how do we do what should be done?

This will come from those policy decisions coming from RCA.

There are a number of things that SCS employees can and must do if we are to shape the future of our agency. Two are particularly important:

1. We must get the maximum work done with tight budgets, and a limit on federal employees. This situation is not likely to change in the near future. We must manage our funds and personnel with the greatest possible efficiency. This is why I have placed so much emphasis on assigning priorities.

We have been encouraging other sources for help, such as increasing our use of district employees and other personnel from the non-Federal sector. We will have to be even more creative in the future.

2. We must work with conservation districts as a team to carry out our important mission of soil and water conservation.

SCS and districts must communicate not only with each other, but with others who are involved in telling the conservation story--State conservation agencies, Federal agencies, farm organizations, State and local officials, and public interest and environmental groups.

Fourth, what do we expect will happen--what are the results we hope to achieve?

Several RCA approaches already are embodied in House and Senate bills, along with other new proposals for improving resource management on private lands. These bills and others will be the subject of hearings this year and next.

In fact, three conservation bills were reported out of the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, and Rural Development this month, including: H.R. 2262, the Soil Conservation Act of 1981; H.R. 2994, the Agricultural Land Resources Act of 1981; and H.R. 1113, Resource Conservation and Development Act of 1981.

The subcommittee sent the bills forward to the full committee with a request that they be included in the 1981 farm bill.

RCA has certainly been a forward-thinking effort that will affect the future direction of our agency. . . but it hasn't been the only one. SCS has always planned for the future of our Nation's natural resources.

We have done this through our annual plans of operation, our multi-year plans, and various management actions to improve effectiveness and efficiency. Other recent examples include the 1979 Task Force Report on the Future Direction of the Soil Conservation Service, our support of the National Agricultural Lands Study, the National Office reorganization, and a Soil Conservation Agenda.

The "targeting" approach is a reflection of our work with the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act of 1977, or RCA.

As you know, RCA identified 8 resource areas that need attention now and in the future. While all are important, 2 have been singled out for special emphasis: (1) protecting soil quantity and quality, and (2) preventing upstream flood damages to farms and rural areas.

As for the status of RCA, the recommended program, as well as the results of our 3 years of study is available to the Administration, and Secretary Block's top staff for review. We have had a number of briefings with Assistant Secretary-designate Crowell on the subject. Once the Administration decides what form the proposed program should take, it will be prepared and there will be another 60-day public review period. The two-volume Appraisal should be ready for dissemination this July.

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Fifth, and finally what does it mean to you--and your role in the SCS--where do we go from here.

That's what this meeting is for. I've noted your agenda--and each will contribute to defining and discussing your role in the future.

As we do this we build on our past record.

SCS Progress in 1980

Our preoccupation in 1980 with the solution of long-range problems and our consideration of ways to strengthen our programs in no way diminished our ongoing conservation activities. On the contrary, 1980 was an exceptionally productive year for the Service.

. Through the conservation districts, SCS assisted nearly 900,000 individuals and groups in 1980. More than 55,000 new district cooperators were signed up, seeking conservation help with nearly 27 million acres.

. With SCS help, farmers continued to increase their use of conservation tillage, including no-till, during the year, farming an estimated 55 million acres under reduced tillage systems that conserve both soil and fuel.

. Construction was completed on 11 SCS small watershed projects, and more than \$100 million in construction funds were obligated.

. SCS published more than 300 county maps showing the location of important and unique farmlands and we arranged to make copies available to many more libraries.

. Clean-up and aerial reseeding around the Mount St. Helens volcano were carried out by SCS to prevent new flooding and to restore stream channels. Special funds were voted for these purposes.

. SCS also obligated more than \$14 million to repair flood damages under the Emergency Watershed Protection Program.

. The 1982 National Resources Inventory was begun last year. It is the most comprehensive SCS inventory of resources and conservation practices ever undertaken.

. A total of 74 contracts were signed with landowners in 1980 under the Rural Abandoned Mine Program (RAMP) to reclaim coal-mined land in rural areas. Reclamation is complete or under way on 57 contracts signed earlier.

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. A record 135 soil surveys were published during 1980 and 82 more surveys were sent to the printer. More than 59 million acres were mapped during the year.

. For the Department of Agriculture, SCS participated in 60 river basin studies in 40 states, aiding state and local agencies in developing water resource plans.

. Our National Soil Survey Laboratory in Lincoln, Nebraska, began analyzing rain and snow samples for acidity and heavy metals as part of a long-term effort to measure the amount of "acid rain."

. Our snow survey operation accurately forecast adequate summer water supplies for much of the West in 1980, and automatic SNOTEL telemetry was installed at most of the remote sites in 11 western states and at about half the survey sites in Alaska.

. SCS served as a leader in a conservation incentives study and SCS professional employees detailed to the National Agricultural Lands Study helped wind up the 18-month study of the causes and impact of agricultural land losses.

. Moving more vigorously into an important new field, SCS established a 3-member National Aquaculture Activity team at Auburn University and began pilot activities to increase aquaculture technical information in 8 states.

. We put far greater emphasis on the protection of flood plains during the year and helped 36 states in developing flood plain management plans.

. In the Southern High Plains, in cooperation with local districts and the Texas Department of Water Resources, we set up 18 trailers, staffed and equipped to help farmers measure the efficiency of their center pivot irrigation systems.

. SCS Plant Materials Centers released six new conservation plants during the year, and in a series of public meetings, citizens advocated continued SCS management of the Centers.

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. We signed an agreement with other USDA agencies and with the Department of the Interior to improve the public's involvement in Federal resource planning and decisionmaking.

. During the past 12 months, a total of 16 Resource Conservation and Development areas have been approved by the Secretary of Agriculture and are now eligible for assistance from USDA agencies. The latest approvals, made in January 1981, bring the number of RC&D's approved to date to 194, including all or part of 1,324 counties in the United States.

. In the Great Plains Conservation Program, 957 new contracts were signed with farmers and ranchers covering 2.5 million acres, bringing the total acreage covered to date in GPCP contracts to more than 110 million. Contracts were completed on 3.7 million acres.

These milestones are evidence of a responsive program of service in a growing number of areas to America's land users, and our aim is to make the program of even greater service this year and in the years ahead.