

Impact of USDA Programs on Conservation District Activities

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate this chance to again meet with the NACD District Operations Committee ^{Discussion Forum} and your agenda participants.

As you who are District Officials know so well, urgent demands for District ^{help} service assistance no longer come ^{only} from farmers and ranchers ^{alone}.

Our work with all cooperators will continue to be carried out ^{primarily} through the 3,027 local (soil and water) conservation districts, located in all 50 States, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. Since the first district was chartered under State law in 1937, this experiment in Federal-State-local relations has grown into one of the Nation's most practical devices for providing Federal help under State and local leadership.

^{USDA + SCS}
Demand for the technical help provided by ~~SCS~~ people is at an all-time high. The bulk of our help ^{still} goes to American farmers and ranchers. During the past year, our employees helped prepare nearly 70,000 ^{new} conservation plans covering nearly 29 million acres. They helped ^{old} revise plans covering another 20 million acres. More than 586 million acres of private land in the United States now are covered by conservation plans that insure resource protection and proper land use. This coverage has been secured on a cooperative, voluntary basis by landowners and land users who are personally committed to conservation and environmental improvement.

See 2/3 '0 of our Land
Material used for remarks by Norman A. Berg, Associate Administrator, Soil Conservation Service, USDA, at the NACD 26th Annual Convention, February 14, 1972.

More than 22,800 units of State and local government received help last year. We provided nearly 11,000 resource inventories and evaluations to planning commissions or other governmental units. Field investigations and recommendations on land use and treatment were made on proposed sites for 2,042 public facilities, including schools, highways, water and sewer facilities, and recreation areas.

We also increased the level of our work in pollution abatement, the publication of soil surveys, sediment control in developing areas, and in watersheds, and Resource Conservation and Development Projects. These increases ~~are not only of our making but rather~~ reflect changing needs and demands for the types of services that we have to offer.

As you remember

The President in May, 1971, requested Congress to add \$40 million to this year's budget for Conservation Operations and small watershed work, saying,

"I believe we should now be providing more help for our dedicated corps of soil conservationists whose numbers have dropped sharply in the last four years."

As a matter of fact, the total personnel program in SCS had been *solely* tempered by the following reduction in number of employees available to help conservation districts as follows:

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Employees</u>	
1967	15,758	15758
1968	15,408	14302
1969	14,872	
1970	14,496	- 1456
1971	14,302	
1972 (present)	14,350	

1400 M.Y.R.
 This reduction was achieved entirely by attrition during a period when the monthly turnover rate for SCS has averaged less than 0.6%/month.

The efforts of district officials to secure additional funds for SCS personnel and other vital programs in 1972 fiscal year were highly successful. The President ~~asked for a~~ budget supplement, *was timely* and both Houses of Congress joined wholeheartedly in appropriating funds to begin rebuilding the force of SCS technicians that had been steadily dwindling over the past six years.

The President signed the USDA Appropriation Act on August 10. Then came the August 15 decision to fight inflation with a series of economic and budgetary controls. Personnel ceilings for *Federal* government employees, reductions in average salary grades, and impoundments of funds were used. *among others to slow inflation pressures*

Here's the final outcome: Essentially, SCS is being permitted to hold steady. This is not what was planned, *for some* but most government agencies are getting reductions. The work of Districts last year had the effect of protecting SCS from the economy drive which is sorely hurting other programs. As it turned out, success this year meant staying at the present level while many others went backward.

REAP

Another area where districts helped turn the tide was the Rural Environmental Assistance Program (REAP). The Administration asked for only \$140 million for the 1972 program, and after Congress appropriated \$195.5 million (with a good deal of persuasion from NACD and others interested in REAP), the extra \$55.5 million was held in reserve.

As the Tuesday Letter reported recently, Secretary of Agriculture Earl L. Butz has announced that the impounded funds have been released. He said it was because there are indications across the country "that farmers are willing to match, or exceed, the additional investment in soil and water conservation and pollution prevention and abatement practices."

Available to you as handout material are four items that can help you judge the status of the impact of USDA programs on your work:

1. The February 1 Tuesday Letter showing the budget estimates for FY 1973. *- All agencies - USDA/US OI*
2. The table that summarizes the non-Federal *US OI* appropriations to conservation work.
3. The table that summarizes all contributions to conservation work.
4. The summary sheet projecting needed technical help in the Nation's 3027 conservation districts.

Now I want to finish by acquainting you with the response of the SCS to your long-range district outlook work over the past several years.

Lights out please.

Show slides.