MANPOWER NEEDS OF THE DISTRICTS

I'm pleased to be able to respond to your offer to let me join this group. There are many fond memories of my work and personal associations in this Northern Great Plains area.

In this area, with your leadership, there are five resource conservation and development projects in the planning or operations stage, and six more in the application stage. There are more than 340 watershed applications with over 190 of these in the planning or operations stage. Your 430 districts have more than 266,000 cooperators. But what is far more important than numbers is the outstanding conservation on the land--land that a generation or two ago had its share of sorry examples of misuse. Real progress has been made and I commend you for it; but, as you and I also know, there is still much that remains to be done. That is at least part of the reason why your program committee has asked me to discuss manpower needs of soil and water conservation districts. But before I do that, and because it may be a good preamble, I should like to briefly discuss the long term relationships between districts and the Soil Conservation Service.

A productive working relationship has existed all these years between SCS and districts. It has prospered because of many common tasks, opportunities, and shared responsibilities.

Wherever the two parties involved have each recognized the shared responsibilities, but have also been able to separate their own particular assignments, the relationship has been truly effective in resource conservation and development. Where this has not been the case, conservation work has sometimes been hindered.

SCS is a few years older than Districts. We developed the technology needed to control erosion and to apply sound conservation practices on the land. However, it soon became apparent that if a truly effective conservation program was to be a reality, landowners and operators themselves had to assume a major role in charting its course. It could not be just a Federal program.

Out of this idea the soil conservation district was born. Districts provided local people with a chance to assume responsibility, under State law, for the creation of a new unit of government--one in which they were

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Talk by Norman A. Berg, Associate Administrator, Soil Conservation Service, at the Northern Great Plains area Soil and Water Conservation District (NACD) meeting, Witchita, Kansas, August 28, 1969.

the driving force, in which they had a voice, in which they could become an energizer for local action. It was a sound approach then and it is a sound approach now. Your horizons are broader, your job is more complex, but you have a solid base on which to build.

In our common endeavors it seems to us there has been good understanding and acceptance. There is no question that districts have made a tremendous contribution to resource management. They have also clearly operated in the best traditions of American democracy to weld together many people and interests.

Recognition of all of this still requires that we examine and re-examine some of our SCS-SWCD working relationships. I think we would agree that all districts are not equally effective, just as all SCS employees are not equally productive. We could certainly agree that some districts have moved further than others in areas such as rural-urban relationships, watersheds, conservation education, and so on.

Likewise, SCS employees have influenced district program development by their special interests. In some instances one may have helped to pull the other further or faster than he would otherwise have gone. This is not necessarily bad--in fact it may frequently be good--provided, and this is the key point, provided one has not usurped what rightly belongs to and should be the responsibility of the other.

Let me explain that statement further. It is a bad mistake for an SCS employee to try and become Mr. Soil Conservation District--in other words, to dilute the supervisors' and district's effectiveness by taking over their local leadership. He must know their thoughts, their concepts, their plans, but he must not become the district in the local people's eyes. Just as it would be inappropriate for, say, our SCS state conservationist to be the State Association president, so it is clearly inappropriate for the district conservationist to be the chairman (even ad hoc) of a Soil and Water Conservation District.

At the same time it would be equally inappropriate for supervisors to make the decision on the structural design of a floodwater-retarding structure. These are obvious examples, of course--many relationships are much more subtle and not as well defined.

Let's discuss another difference. Soil and water conservation is a full time job for the district conservationist. It is his vocation and frequently his avocation. Soil and water conservation is of tremendous interest to a district official and as a local, dedicated individual he gives a great deal of his time, effort, and money. And yet in most cases he still has other employment as a vocation. He is concerned with making a living.

It therefore is not unusual--in fact is to be expected--that a DC will have more time to develop certain ideas on how to get a job done, or the priority of jobs. This is fine and you as supervisors have the right to expect this. But, while he will have ideas to suggest, you have the responsibility to judge, to decide, and take the proper course of action. You are the ones who must act with the local government because you are a fellow local official--not the district conservationist or any person you have hired to help you.

You are elected, or appointed, district governing board members and in turn you may hire assistants. The Soil Conservation Service likewise selects its staff. The closest sort of relationship is certainly desirable among both parties. You are, of course, concerned with who services your district. But as you know, SCS is a career for its people. We have a responsibility to our employees and they have a responsibility to SCS.

Just as you may, over a period of years, change farms or leave the area entirely, so must SCS employees be responsive to their career objectives and to the needs of the Service. Nothing remains status quo. As our needs and goals expand or alter, so do our resources and techniques. Change is the one certain fact of life; our job is not to blindly resist innovations but to see that the changes we participate in go in the right direction.

One almost certain change for all of us is that our conservation jobs will continue to enlarge. In the SCS we do our best to attract first-rate people and to give them the kind of training they need for first-class performance. This develops good employees--and it means topnotch conservation assistance--a goal both districts and SCS share.

And that brings up a question that concerns us all. What are the possibilities of putting more trained SCS technical people--DC's, soil scientists, engineers--into your districts?

This isn't a new question, of course. A 1957 survey of districts--12 years ago--showed that more than three-fourths of the districts reported a serious shortage of SCS technicians. Your latest survey indicates that you are short nationwide 2,026 man-years of technical assistance needed to meet your workload.

What are some of the reasons that soil and water conservation districts are asked for more help? I think your President has defined very well the increased demands that districts face. We see, in the decade ahead for instance, more need for:

(1) A better inventory of our natural resourses;
(2) More use for soil surveys in planning and operating decisions;
(3) A need for identifying and preserving valuable water storage sites; and for
(4) Knowing the extent and location of critical sediment sources.

(5) Where the best agricultural land is and how to keep it in agriculture;
(6) Where the 22 million acres of poor cropland are located;
(7) Our wildlife and outdoor recreation possibilities;
(8) And the magnitude of the agriculture-related pollution problem.

We see more planning work ahead, both with individuals, including nonagricultural land users, and with groups and communities. This will certainly include more small watershed projects; preliminary work shows there are nearly 9,000 small watersheds where flood erosion control work is feasible. There are currently more than 100 applications for resource conservation and development projects. Multi-county and State planning work has increased. And river basin planning work continues.

We see more conservation installation work ahead. Two-thirds of the total conservation job still needs to be completed. New techniques and technology will be employed; perhaps more lagooning--certainly more work with processing plants and feedlots on waste disposal, as well as more work on urban construction sites.

We see more education and information work in the conservation field. School outdoor conservation centers, demonstrations, and improved conservation materials in the school curriculums are a part of this.

The quality of the environment will receive a great deal more attention from now on--and districts have a key role in this as in all phases of soil, water, and wildlife conservation.

Therefore, the Soil Conservation Service does recognize the expanding job that faces districts. We know that your responsibilities for suburban land use planning, water pollution control, road and streambank erosion, and so on, have greatly increased. Above all we would like to provide every district with the full quota of conservationists their workload indicates is needed. But we all know that our national commitments are great and the competition for available resources is keen.

I am sure that you have been keeping up with the appropriation process through the Tuesday Letter. In total, SCS won't have quite as much Federal money available for the program in 1970 as it had in 1969.

President Sam Studebaker, at the NACD Upper Mississippi Area Meeting, August 11, said:

"We all know about money. There isn't enough of it available in every place to buy all the things and services we want in any given year. The banks, counties, States, and the Federal government as well would all like to have more money--honest money, not inflated money. The shortage of honest money is a problem for landowners, districts, state commissions, and all who want to do something constructive and lasting for conservation and resource development. The situation isn't likely to change in the near future so we will all be well-advised to cut our cloth accordingly.

"The shortage of SCS technicians and the shortage of staff help from our State Commissions are directly related to the shortage of money. As we prepare for the Seventies, we need to devise ways to reduce the shortages and make better use of the manpower that is available. It seems clear to me that we will not be able to operate in the Seventies as we did in the Fifties or even the Sixties."

Of the money that SCS does have, the overwhelming percentage earmarked for salaries goes to employ people in the field. Last year 91.1 percent of SCS money for salaries went to State, area, work unit, and other field offices. The remainder staffed our four regional technical service centers, our cartographic units, and the Washington office.

In addition to budgetary limitations, SCS and most other Government agencies this past year faced congressional limitations on hiring new employees to replace those who retired or left for other reasons. These limitations were imposed by the Revenue Expenditure and Control Act of 1968. The impact of that law was that SCS could fill only one out of every two vacancies beginning last September. This resulted in a loss of over 500 employees--so we had an SCS manpower pinch all over the country.

Since last September, we have had to close a few offices. We have had to spread some of our work force a little thinner. We know this has slowed down conservation work, and we've received some angry calls and letters from honestly concerned district people. This bothers us, naturally. But at the same time, if no one had been concerned about the closing of an office that had been serving the public for many years, this also would have been cause for concern.

In short, SCS has had some hard decisions to make. We have tried to make them as fairly as possible, taking into account the whole program. We have asked our state conservationists to make a very special effort to be certain that there is full participation and discussion when such actions are taken. We can't ask you to like it--but we hope it is possible to arrive at mutual understanding.

Recent actions by Congress have added new restrictions on filling vacancies and in expenditures. Until all the decisions regarding personnel ceilings are made, however, it is premature to spell out the exact situation for fiscal year 1970. But things will be very tight.

Now what's the outlook for increased financial aid for districts from nonFederal sources? This has bright spots. The estimated nonFederal contribution to district programs last year totaled $95,235,000 from State and local governments and individuals and private organizations. The figure is a 12-percent increase from the preceding year, and almost a 400-percent increase from 1958.

Your area received nonFederal funds of $7,943,000.

The trend is clearly toward more financial support from State and local sources. You can be very proud of this grassroots effort and we in SCS hope, along with you, that it continues to grow. Conservation programs, are, after all, local-Federal partnerships and they deserve strong support at all levels of government.

Specifically then, how can we both better meet the manpower needs of districts in the 1970's?

We believe districts have three different manpower needs.

First, a need for active district supervisors or commissioners and the necessary support staff. Good districts are built by dedicated men and women. They--you--have a big job; and while you can never delegate your responsibility, you can relieve your workload in various ways. Based on your own individual situation you may utilize assistant supervisors or commissioners, or full or part time executive and clerical assistance.

The second manpower need is for trained technical help--SCS assigned personnel, and other Federal and State employees in a position to cooperate with districts.

And the third manpower need is to draw more local citizens into an active role in district activities.

I'd like to expand on the three categories:

First-- Active supervisors and support staff. Here, you are the experts. Soil and water conservation districts have always attracted good men and women. Today, while the bulk of supervisors, commissioners, and directors, are still farmers and ranchers, they have been joined in increasing numbers by doctors, bankers, and many others who also recognize that conservation problems do not respect farm boundaries and that they need to become active participants in the conservation efforts.

In many districts clerical and field assistance has been provided by local funds. This has certainly been helpful.

In a few instances paid staff assistants have been employed. This is in line with District outlook recommendations and we welcome them to the combined effort. When they are employed, however, it seems to me that special effort is needed on the part of governing boards to be certain everyone fully understands the role each party assisting districts is expected to perform. We are all too busy and the conservation job is too big for there to be any lost motion.

Second-- Technical staff. SCS is your biggest source of assistance, but there are many others who are working closely with you. This is fine,

and as it should be. In SCS, we intend--as far as it is within our capability--to make our people available in kinds and numbers that will best meet each district's needs. Such a policy requires constant review and understanding of work priorities for our total conservation needs and responsibilities. It also requires recognition that needs are great and resources are limited. It requires consideration of total manpower resources of the district. In some instances, it requires willingness of various levels of government to share costs--as in soil survey acceleration and watershed planning, for example.

Third-- Local citizens. Think here, of young people--college students and others--looking for something meaningful. Think of busy men with valuable skills--lawyers, newspaper reporters, doctors--who want an absorbing avocation. Think of retired people with time. We think that many of these men and women would welcome a role in a watershed project, an RC&D project, an open space development--something where they can stop wringing their hands about the environment and do something concrete to change it.

A Gallup opinion poll this spring showed that 3 out of 4 Americans are willing to pay more taxes for environmental improvement. Eighty-five percent of those interviewed said they were concerned with their environment and over 50 percent said they had a "deep concern" about air or water pollution or soil erosion. Let's try to harness some of that concern. Let's try--all of us--to see that concern reflected nationally and locally.

In summary, meeting district manpower needs has never been easy--shortages have been clearly evident for years. We will have to continue to put emphasis on partnership arrangements.

We in SCS will do our best to allocate our manpower resources in the fairest possible way, and we will work to increase their effectiveness. We will fully inform districts of our capabilities.

You in districts will need to consider your opportunities to make further strides toward meeting total needs, using whatevever resources are available to you, on a paid or voluntary basis.

This Nation faces a major problem in the 50-percent increase in population between now and the year 2000. If we are to have 100 million more citizens--and I think we will sometime in our future--we shall have to think deeply about "how can we best use the land space of the U. S. What patterns of growth will best serve our prupose?" There are ample resources for all uses, providing we dedicate land and water to those uses for which they are best suited. I have discovered that many people are deeply concerned about the issues you are discussing here today.

On August 4, Secretary of Agriculture Clifford Hardin, speaking in Urbana, Illinois, said: "The USDA will give strong emphasis to the vital educational phase of the rural development effort--continue to expand its resources conservation and development and small watershed projects--vigorously develop programs in areas where it is the custodian of forest resources--intensify efforts to improve rural housing and modernize water and sewer facilities--make increased use of economic appraisals of rural problems and needs--and participate to the maximum extent in nonmetropolitan planning and development.

"In every feasible way we will assist rural communities to develop an environment of jobs, education, community services, and attractive living that will hold out to all our citizens, urban and rural, the opportunity for a brighter future in rural America."