

New Wine in Old Bottles

I'm pleased to be in delightful Colorado and to have the chance to discuss district leadership in some very fluid times. You've already had an excellent program that touched on most concerns that face conservationists today.

This is an exciting time in soil and water conservation, or as your theme suggests, a time of and for energetic conservation. Some of the new problems, conflicts, responsibilities, ideas, questions in American life seem to tug at and stretch and test the thing--almost to the breaking point--we call a conservation district and the relationships that the district has with the Soil Conservation Service and other agencies. This is what I call "new wine in old bottles."

Marv asked me to say a few words about conservation aspects of the new farm bill. I will also briefly cite some other stuff you may need to think about.

The full effect of the farm bill probably will not be felt for two years by either farmers or consumers.

Major provisions are:

...Extended cotton, wheat, feed grain, dairy, Food for Peace, and

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food stamp programs for four years--crop years 1974 through 1977.

... Established a new "target price" payment system under which the government would pay farmers the difference, if any, between the market price they received and a higher target price written into the bill.

... Provided for an increase in the target price, beginning in 1976, to reflect increases in the cost of production.

... Set the target price for 1974 and 1975 at 38 cents per pound for cotton, \$2.05 per bushel for wheat, and \$1.38 per bushel for corn.

... Set price-support loan rates at 22 cents per pound for cotton, \$1.37 per bushel for wheat, and \$1.10 for corn.

... Set a subsidy ceiling on payments under the bill to \$20,000 a year for each farmer.

... Authorized the secretary of agriculture to enter into long-term land use contracts with farmers and landowners to deal with conservation and pollution problems.

... Authorized the secretary of agriculture to make payments to farmers and landowners for implementation of land use contracts.

... Provided for creation of an advisory board in each state, appointed by the secretary of agriculture, which would make recommendations about the types of land use contracts to be negotiated in that state.

... Authorized a forestry incentive program under which farmers and landowners would be encouraged to increase timber production and protect privately held forest lands.

Wednesday marked the passage of 40 years since the beginning of a national effort in soil and water conservation. On September 19, 1933, a Division of Erosion was set up in the Interior Department and was later to become the Soil Conservation Service in USDA. The new office was headed by Hugh Hammond Bennett--even then regarded as the country's leading authority on soil erosion problems.

Dr. Bennett had long been connected with the Bureau of Chemistry and Soils of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. He took a leading part in the development of the Soil Survey of the Department. He originated the national plan in 1929 for carrying out soil erosion studies, under which several erosion experiment stations had been established. He wrote "Soil Erosion, a National Menace," which was the first published account of the full gravity of the erosion problem. According to Mr. Bennett, erosion had already essentially destroyed 35 million acres of formerly cultivated land, and had greatly impoverished an additional 125 million acres of cropland.

In agreeing to Secretary Harold L. Ickes' request that Hugh Bennett be released from his duties in USDA, Secretary Henry Wallace said, "Dr. Bennett is the best qualified man available to take over these duties. He has devoted more study to the problem of erosion than any other man in the country, and it was he who developed a national plan for measuring the

destructiveness of this evil under varying conditions of soil and climate, and for working out control measures applicable to the various soils and cropping practices of the Nation. "

The work, it was announced four decades ago, would be carried on in close cooperation with the USDA, operating on large watershed areas in various parts of the country where soil erosion was a problem of the first magnitude.

The purpose of the work was not only to cut down land depreciation through excessive washing, but to complement efforts to bring about better flood control. The new Division was to operate on \$5 million allotted by the Public Works Administration.

The Districts were to start soon in 1937.

In September 1933 it was a time of drouth and depression. As a farm lad of nearly 16, I was still a decade away from starting my SCS career, but was already gaining valuable training and experience about land, water, grass, trees, crops, livestock, wildlife, and people. I was destined to be a conservationist. My home county in Minnesota was Pine, my post office and school at Grasston. My first jobs were at Meadowlands and Floodwood. I owe much to my decade of work in Idaho as a district conservationist and area conservationist at Pocatello--and to my work in South Dakota.

So, even as we strive to recall some long-forgotten names, we nevertheless still thrill to the spirit and the inspiration that comes with the memory of men who saw the true potential for Conservation Districts and this work.

It's timely to regain our perspective and look at what's right with America and Conservation Districts starting with these facts:

We are the recipients of a great heritage.

We are proud that the American economy is by far the freest, strongest, and most productive in the world.

Our economy gives us the highest standard of living of any nation on earth.

We are in the middle of one of the biggest, strongest booms in our history.

More Americans have jobs today than ever before, even at inflated prices.

Even the people on welfare in our country live better than the top third of any other nation in terms of the things they have--electricity, running water, central heat, indoor toilets, radio, television, automobiles, public health, food assistance--and dozens of other items.

Those are for openers. When we hear the professional pessimists bewail our Nation's problems, we have an obligation to respond and set the record straight about what is right in America.

I suppose that throughout history, each oncoming generation has believed it had reason to criticize the previous generation for making a mess of things.

I, for one, don't feel ashamed of some of my generation's accomplishments. That generation put America on wheels, made electricity available to homes throughout the land, created the wonders of television, wiped out the scourges of typhoid, diphtheria, bovine tuberculosis, polio, and succeeded in getting men to the moon and back.

My generation made it possible for all of us to be here today--alive and healthy, instead of one-fifth of us having fallen victim to the Grim Reaper, before age 20, as was true a couple of generations ago.

It was my generation that made America the best fed nation in history, at a high level of nutrition; at a cost under 16 percent of take-home pay.

That's not too bad a record. We have helped keep this America of ours pretty solid. We have kept the doors of opportunity open--we have maintained a viable economic and social system for our maximum benefit and for the benefit of society. At the same time, we recognize that the comforts, food abundance, and affluence of this nation have been achieved at heavy cost.

We've been through a lot over forty years. Agriculture has been a big yo-yo. Several times the farmer or rancher has been called on to produce just as much as he possibly can...and at other times America has wrestled with very difficult problems of what to do with mounting crop surpluses, how to adjust production. Now we've come full circle again.

Secretary of Agriculture Butz has removed all acreage restrictions and freed the farmer to make his own decisions on planting. We should welcome the chance to quit holding back, the opportunity to make more decisions at the market place rather than at a calculator in Washington, D. C., or a state capital. America and the world does need more grain... more red meat... more farm and ranch income.

At the same time, there are some real concerns here. Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Robert Long raised them very strongly at a meeting of the Iowa Soil Conservation District Commissioners. He said:

"While the farmer or rancher works to produce agricultural goods he has a responsibility not to jeopardize the quality of the land he farms or degrade the air and water which he uses... I am very concerned as we produce that we fail to produce and protect... Right now, careless use and short-range exploitation of land to produce more and earn more could bring about a repetition of the staggering soil and water problems the nation faced earlier in this century."

He was very concerned that as farmers and ranchers try to "fine tune" every aspect of their operations for 1974 and beyond they include very careful conservation planning. "This is no time," he said, "to have a Great Plow-Up followed by a Great Wash-away; if our soils become pollutants instead of a resource, the long investment that they and we and you have made will go down the drain and a good many futures with it."

What about the conservation gains you've made over the years in the Southwest Area? Are some of them in danger? Or have you sufficiently instilled a conservation ethic in the landowners out here so that they will recognize the need for continued conservation work and revision of plans to reflect new production goals--not only to protect the land but to get good crops with efficient use of fertilizers and pesticides and labor?

What about the Great Plains country where you've worked with SCS in special efforts to tie down the land and get land-use adjustments made to clear the air of dust and help people make a living? Some of that land belongs in grass. On some of it crops already have been lost, soil has already blown.

While we've had continuing concerns about what's happening on agricultural land, of course, there have been a lot more new ingredients added to your old bottle.

Conservation districts are experiencing changes in their makeup and structure to reflect these new challenges--thanks in large part to the District Outlook effort that surfaced several years ago, and to relationships with state legislatures and executive departments.

I'm sure you recognize that you have to continue to "fine tune" your relationships with state and local government on legislation and on financial support. You need to continue to broaden your base of support through closer relationships with other agencies and organizations in the field of natural resources. Because just at the time when conservation

demands are greatest and the broadest, budgets and personnel ceilings are as tight as I've seen them. The U. S. is in a wide-scale effort to cool off its economy. It is trying to strike a better balance among Federal and State and local expenditures for public business. Within limited budgets, conservation districts and the SCS are not automatically going to achieve the priorities for funds they need.

The president of the Iowa SCD Commissioners Association put it this way at the meeting where Mr. Long spoke:

"During the first three decades of district operations there was a mixture of evangelism along with the job of providing on-the-land services to cooperators. The public awakened, and as we moved into the fourth decade, there was a demand for districts to broaden further their horizons to represent the managers and users of both agricultural and non-agricultural lands for the benefit of the entire community.

"Conservation Districts are now in the unenviable position of having the greatest reduction in their ability to carry out programs at any time in their history because funding of USDA programs is being curtailed at the very time that their needs and responsibilities are greatest.

"We asked SCS technicians to serve the broadest cross section of resource users in our history. These resource users and planners included everyone from individual farmers or homeowners to city and county planners to urban developers and highway officials.

"These increasing demands for technical assistance stem from the concern of Iowa people, rural and urban alike, for the conservation of their soil and water. They recognize the need for more care in planning the use of these resources. This is especially evident as decisions are made and action taken to bring about greater production in corn and soybeans to meet domestic and world demands. As a more intensive approach is taken, the need for soil and water conservation measures on the land is going to be greater than ever.

"Conservation Districts have had a positive action program to wisely use our soil and water resources for many years. We will, however, need technical support if we are to continue and carry out effective conservation programs to support a growing population. "

I know you, too, have concerns about the level of support from SCS and others in your activities. You need to look for as broad support as possible, and make your needs and views known.

There is legislative action at the Federal level in aiding conservation efforts. The Rural Development Act of 1972 that we talked about provided new authorities in resource inventorying and monitoring. It provided for new aid in land treatment work and structural measures in watershed and RC&D projects. It made changes in USDA financial assistance programs to boost rural development opportunities.

As far as SCS is concerned, within the funding and manpower limits we have, we are doing our best to provide the most direct assistance possible. That means that more than 80 percent of SCS employees are at the field level, providing direct help to landowners and local communities and other units of government. State and regional staffs comprise another 15 percent, and back there in Washington, D. C., we have only 2.6 percent of our nearly 14,000 employees. That is not exactly a top-heavy agency.

We'll work to improve the field-level percentage with any new hires when we can and as Assistant Secretary Long said in Iowa, SCS field personnel will be asked to spend an increasing proportion of their time working with landowners on conservation plans and practices to protect the land while crop production is expanding.

There is other activity at the Federal level in a wide range of bills under consideration that would affect your activities, including land use planning. You need to acquaint yourselves with these bills and with the issues behind them, come up with some policy positions on them, and let your views be heard. We are concerned that the need for preserving prime agricultural land have early and full consideration in the land use policy bill. If you agree, now is the time to let your Representative know of your interest.

Within your own districts, how good a job are you doing in letting your views and your capabilities and your actions be known by the people you serve? As John Wilder said in a recent Tuesday Letter, "Never has the need been greater to show and tell the public about the work of your conservation district and the services it provides."

Today's public is very conservation conscious or environmentally aware--but may not know much about the soil and water conservation work you've done for so long. Furthermore, the public may not readily understand that some of your actions have a positive effect on the environment. Some question or even oppose your actions --probably they do not understand them.

Your conservation district is important to your home county, and to all citizens in it. You need to prepare yourselves to meet all your responsibilities and to meet them in full public view. There is no way you can work well in isolation. There is no way you can concentrate on farmers and ranchers alone--in your region less than 5 percent of the population lives on farms and ranches.

There is ample evidence that you are gearing up to serve all the people. I hope you will step up your "show and tell" so that all the people know you are serving them.

I hope you will work with SCS people to continue refining the relationship between us. I am convinced that that relationship--the old wine bottle of cooperation--represents one of the finest examples to be found anywhere of local self-government working in close partnership with state and Federal government to get things done!

Winemaking is one of man's oldest hobbies. The Book of Genesis speaks of Noah's vineyards and throughout the Bible the importance of wine and wine making is stressed. Is it a happy accident or a reward by our Creator that a few fruit juices and a little fermentation and a little time produce a drink that warms the heart and cheers the spirit? Wine has lubricated the wheels of mankind's progress in war and peace and in joy and sorrow.

Amidst a man and his companions, the bottle of wine stands as the symbol of celebration and ceremony. And you know, that bottle (SCD's--SCS) hasn't changed dramatically over the years. Our prime job is still important.

The relationship between districts and their cooperators and the Soil Conservation Service is just a symbol that has been able to accommodate many new ingredients, the fermentation of many new ideas, the aging in four decades of work. I'm proud that the old bottle of working together seems to get stronger the more we test it.

I'm proud too, that many people in America are discovering the usefulness of some of the ideas in resource management that you and SCS have brought forth a long time ago. Or as T. S. Eliot put it,

"And what there is to conquer... has already been discovered
Once or twice or several times...

There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
And found and lost again and again. "

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Together we have made dramatic advances in soil and water conservation, on new and old assignments. Our primary mission still must be to seek quality in the resource base for sustained wise use.

Whatever new jobs may bubble up, I think we'll be ready for them.
