

SCS OVERVIEW AND OUTLOOK

I. The setting for our Soil Conservation Service (SCS) activities: Food and energy prices. . . water quality . . . land-use laws and ordinances . . . increasing environmental awareness . . . floods and water shortages.

A. We are likely to see:

- 1. A broader understanding of agriculture and our basic mission of soil and water conservation.
- 2. A renewed emphasis on controlling soil loss; upgrading water quality; preserving prime farmlands; saving water in agriculture and elsewhere; and conserving energy.
- 3. A full-scale information campaign to encourage farmers to "Plant the Best--and Save the Rest."
 - a. Secretary Bergland announced that there will be no set-aside program in 1980.
 - b. In the early 1970's, under "full production," farmers plowed up at least 9 million hard-to-protect acres that might have been better off remaining in grass and trees.
- 4. Some positive benefits from our environmental problems of the past few years.
 - a. The environmentalist approach is becoming more practical, less emotional.
 - b. There are new policies and guidelines on environmental issues.

Outline for a talk by Norman A. Berg, Administrator, USDA Soil Conservation Service, at a meeting of SCS employees, Auburn, Alabama, December 11, 1979.

B. We are working through the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act (RCA) process to help the American people design conservation programs for the future.

1. The quality of the job we do will help determine how districts and USDA will operate in the future.
2. A review draft of the 500-page Appraisal Part I has been published, containing a wealth of resource data. Drafts of the Appraisal Part II, the program report, the environmental impact statement, and the summary will be out soon. All were prepared under the USDA leadership of Dave Unger. Tentative dates for public review of the draft documents are January 28-March 28, 1980.
3. Tentative RCA objective levels were discussed by Rupe Cutler at the recent National Conference on Soil Conservation Policies in Washington, D. C. They relate to seven areas of concern:
 - a. Soil resource quantity and quality.
 - b. Water quality.
 - c. Water supply and conservation.
 - d. Fish and wildlife habitat.
 - e. Upstream flood damages.
 - f. Energy conservation and production.
 - g. Organic wastes.
4. RCA includes the biggest public participation effort ever made in the United States.

- a. Meetings have been held around the country; we have been impressed by the hard work of districts and State conservation agencies.
 - b. We expect to hold 18 regional public meetings next spring to talk about program alternatives.
6. To supplement the meetings, SCS is conducting a national public opinion survey with Lou Harris and Associates.
 7. RCA is truly a joint effort, with people involved inside and outside the government at local, State, and national levels.
 8. The final RCA appraisal and program will go forward to the president and the Congress by 1981.
- C. We have continuing assignments in many individual programs, including:
1. Rural Clean Water Program (RCWP).
 - a. Congress appropriated \$50 million for a FY 1980 experimental RCWP that will require its own set of rules, regulations, and procedures. Secretary Bergland wants to get the program implemented as soon as possible.
 - b. SCS will provide technical assistance reimbursed by the Agricultural Conservation and Stabilization Service (ASCS), essentially the same setup used in the Agricultural Conservation Program (ACP).
 - c. Individual water quality plans and contracts setting forth "best management" practices will be the primary basis for the program.

- d. Draft rules are expected to be out by the first of January. Following a 30-day public response period; final rules probably will be issued in mid-February.
 - e. Current applications will form the primary basis for project selection. There will be an allowance for additional application which obviously will delay program implementation.
2. Research Conservation and Development Program (RC&D)
- a. Congress authorized six new starts and a \$32-million budget for FY 1980. Approved CAWACO in FY 1979.
 - b. House-Senate conferees on 1980 appropriations directed the General Accounting Office (GAO) to conduct a complete study of the program and its costs and benefits.
 - c. We don't know exactly when the GAO report will be released, although Congress asked that the study be done this fiscal year. It may well determine the future of the RC&D program.
3. Rural Abandoned Mine Program (RAMP).
- a. The RAMP manual is being revised and will be issued early in 1980.
 - b. The income tax status will be clarified early next year.
 - c. In FY 1980 we hope to enter into 70 new contracts. This compares with the 63 contracts totaling \$6.4 million that we began in the last fiscal year. Three of these were from Alabama.

D. We have begun to implement some of the President's water resources policy recommendations.

1. We have approval from the Office of Management and Budget to cost-share on nonstructural measures, and we are getting ready to publish guidelines. TSC's have been sent advance copies, and you will receive yours soon.
2. SCS has issued final rules and regulations on implementing the President's Executive Order on floodplains and wetlands.

E. We are preparing a reorganization plan for the Washington Office to strengthen our leadership as we move into the Action Eighties.

1. The plan is being developed with input from all levels of the organization.
2. It will not require any more positions than we currently have budgeted.
3. It will move more decisionmaking to a lower level in the organization and allow more time at the top level for policymaking and leadership.
4. Field representative positions will be restructured--they no longer will serve the dual role of technical service center directors.
5. I have proposed that my title be revised to "chief," as it was in the early days of the agency. . . other top staff titles will be changed.

II. Because of today's setting . . . in some cases in spite of it . . . career opportunities in SCS are tremendous.

A. We must be ahead of the times--not standing still.

B. We must be advocates.

C. We must emphasize and reemphasize quality.

D. We must set priorities . . . work on the right things in the right order at the right time . . . stress the "must do" jobs, eliminate the nice-to-do.

E. We must build an even stronger partnership with conservation districts.

III. We need to expect of all SCS employees:

A. Competence.

B. Integrity.

C. Loyalty.

D. Dedication--to public service and to the Soil Conservation Service.

IV. We need to expect that SCS supervisors will:

A. Place the right employee with the right skills in the right spot.

B. Provide him or her with the right motivation.

C. Provide equal opportunity for women and minorities in employment and in the use of our technical assistance.

D. Provide leadership.

V. In the middle of all these expectations, I am very proud of you.

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