

The National Outlook

For

SCS - USDA

I consider it a high privilege to be able to participate in your conference.

The recently retired President of Harvard University, Nathan Pusey, has said, "We live in a time of such rapid change and growth of knowledge that only he who is in a fundamental sense a scholar--that is, a person who continues to learn and inquire--can help to keep pace, let alone play the role of guide."

Change is the word of the day--rapid change in every corner of the Nation...Physical change...Change in people's attitudes, values, and priorities...Accelerating change. And this means that there must be change in the needs and the activities of Conservation Districts and the SCS.

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Material for remarks by Norman A. Berg, Assoc. Administrator at a conference of SCS District Conservationists, Spokane, Washington, March 7, 1972.

Consider these U.S. forecasts for the year 2000 or beyond:\*

(1) Population will be somewhere between 250 million and 360 million--that's quite a spread. It certainly reflects uncertainty about trends for the future.

(2) The Nation's Gross National Product may leap 600 to 700 percent by the year 2020.

(3) We will consume more than twice as much in agricultural products.

(4) Demand for industrial timber products and pulpwood will double.

(5) Farms and ranches will be larger in average size, smaller in number.

(6) Water needs for major uses will triple.

(7) More than half of the acreage expected to move out of farm use in the next 50 years will be used for building sites or transportation.

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\*NOTE: These forecasts represent the best indications available from many sources on the likely setting in which the SCS and other agencies will have to work. They should not, however, be considered SCS projections of developments that may or may not take place in our society.

(8) Annual flood damages may reach \$2 billion in upstream areas.

(9) Municipal waste loads will more than double.

(10) We'll need construction or rehabilitation of 26 million housing units.

(11) Family purchasing power will be two-thirds higher.

(12) Annual working hours will be shortened nearly 10 percent; and recreation demands will triple.

I think you'll agree that these forecasts indicate there is an atmosphere of continued heavy resource demand, and therefore a big job ahead for SCS.

Because we need to get with it, the "District Outlook" committee--on which I have served as SCS representative from day one--developed recommendations that districts across the country are busy implementing. SCS has now developed a Long-Range Framework Plan. These two efforts dovetail perfectly.

We will continue to help each other implement the recommendations and on that basis Districts and the SCS can continue to be a real force in the years to come.

Our Framework Plan lists 67 major goals, all directed toward the attainment of three basic SCS mission objectives: The achievement of quality in the natural resource base, in the environment, and in the standard of living.

There are two areas of the plan which foresee such a significant change in emphasis for the Soil Conservation Service that I would like to tell you about them today.

The first of these is the expansion of our knowledge of resources through more complete and accurate surveying and monitoring. We need much better data on the extent, condition, and rate of change of soil, water, and related resources.

We are convinced that you and district leaders and cooperators have training and experience second to none in appraising the state of our soil and water resources. You also have the ability to look at the supply and condition of our soil and water to determine the impact on those resources when a new force or change is interjected into the environment.

Our framework plan sets forth a number of specific goals in surveying and monitoring.

First, it calls for a soil survey of the Nation that is complete and current.

Second, it calls for systematic studies to produce basic resource data and interpretations for units of government, planners, and other people concerned with resource management.

Third, it calls for an expansion of our present Conservation Needs Inventory into a comprehensive system for monitoring the condition of our soil, water, and related resources.

Fourth, it proposes a sediment monitoring system that includes information on sediment sources, deposition, characteristics, and effects.

Fifth, it calls for even more timely and accurate snow-survey data.

I cannot over-emphasize the importance of expanded survey activities. The need for more reliable data about our natural resources has never been more apparent than during the past few years, as a public debate has raged over the condition of our environment and what to do about it. A number of the conflicts have not yet been resolved to the satisfaction of the general public simply because no one has the information on which to base an informed judgment.

A second area forecast for our program related to planning assistance. The districts and SCS are already up to their ears in planning work. Last year, nearly 23,000 units of state and local government asked for and received district and SCS assistance.

We provided nearly 11,000 resource inventories and evaluations to government units. We counseled on land use and treatment of proposed sites for more than 2,000 schools, hospitals, sanitary landfills, and other public facilities.

The SCS framework plan anticipates a far greater demand for this sort of planning assistance in the Seventies and it sets forth several principles to guide our employees.

One principle calls for maximum citizen involvement. We have known for a long time that a successful conservation plan can be developed only when the farmer or rancher participates fully and makes the necessary decisions. Experience also confirms that plans for communities, townships, or counties--if they are going to be supported--must have local people participating from the very beginning. It is not our job as SCS employees to make decisions for local people, but rather to help local planners themselves to recognize the alternatives which confront their communities when they make resource decisions.

We also ask you to pay attention to the principle of interaction. This means simply that everything you do about resources interacts in some way with something else; it sets off a whole series of effects.

In one city, for example, there has been a deliberate emphasis on building high rise apartments to beat the high cost of providing utility services to detached single-family homes. But one unforeseen result of the confinement of apartment living has been a mass exodus to the country on weekends. This Friday-night migration, in turn, has led to problems of waste disposal and pollution at nearby lakes and campgrounds and to increased congestion on the highways, with accompanying increases in the weekend accident rate.

We hope that you can share your training and experience with local people to help minimize such unforeseen effects of planning decisions.

One of the most challenging tasks for both Conservation Districts and SCS is in communicating the facts about our program to a changing public in a changing American society. For years soil and water conservation was of interest chiefly to those people who were directly involved--the farmers and ranchers who were both the prime movers and the principal beneficiaries of the program. Support for SCS came from the people who worked with us on a day-to-day basis, and it is no exaggeration to say that our work was accepted with enthusiasm.

Today this acceptance is no longer universal. The unprecedented national concern over the environment has brought every resource agency and institution under searching public scrutiny. Every action with an impact on the environment is being carefully studied to determine whether or not it is truly in the public interest. This represents a basic change in the social environment in which we work, and we must learn to understand that and deal with it.

This is one reason for some of the controversies which have touched our program. Clearly, America's resource decisions are going to have to be based on solid information, instead of unfounded fears, guesswork, or wishful thinking. And I believe that Districts and the SCS should have a more significant role in obtaining that information.

The Framework Plan also focuses on the tasks that need to be done to improve and maintain all the resource management systems that make up our environment so that we can have and maintain a quality environment. It points up the effects and benefits that result from resource system improvements. And it discusses the kinds of technical action--in conservation needs, in watershed development, in Resource Conservation and Development--that SCS will need to concentrate on in the years ahead to help insure a highly quality environment.

In addition to broadening our activities in monitoring and inventorying resources, and improving our planning assistance, the Framework Plan also calls for:

- Adjusting our technology to changing conditions and to important concerns such as pollution control; and
- Working closely with conservation districts to make soil and water conservation principles and techniques a part of planning and regulatory standards used by state and local governments and private groups and organizations.

In my opinion, all of the elements of this Framework Plan give our agency an outstanding opportunity to contribute importantly in the years ahead to meeting the environmental improvement needs of this Nation.

And to a large extent, that opportunity rests with you.

It is you in the field who will determine the shape and success of the Soil Conservation Service tomorrow. Only two percent of SCS people and money are back there in Washington. Our work and our image are shaped right here.

Each of you has helped make the Service what it is today--  
an agency with a proud past, and a very challenging and satisfying  
present.

You can help us invent the future.

You already have been helping invent the future in your  
everyday work assignments--

1. Working to strengthen agriculture;
2. Working with governmental units on resource planning;
3. Developing centers for environmental learning outdoors;
4. Managing the soil as a big part of pollution-abatement  
efforts;
5. Coping with increasing amounts of animal waste; and
6. Developing better conservation technology to meet  
cooperators' needs in the 1970's.

I'd like to stress that our Framework Plan will work--  
will help us to a strong role--only if every SCS employee reads and  
understands it and helps implement it in every District in the  
Nation.

You will need to help explain it to other employees, to  
other agencies and organizations, and to district leaders and  
cooperators.

How you help implement the Plan is most important. We  
can't make a plan that fits the situation in every work unit or  
area. You still have a responsibility to assess the total needs  
within your sphere of work and the resources you have to work with--  
and design the best conservation program you can that touches all  
the bases.

We must move ahead quickly in SCS to implement the  
Plan. Some of the priority items for FY '73 are: 1) developing  
and implementing an effective surveying and monitoring system;

2) discussing the plan with all SCS employees and district officials to achieve understanding of our goals; 3) reviewing how well our resources are oriented toward meeting the plan's objectives; 4) developing effective institutional arrangements; and 5) involving ourselves more aggressively in land-use planning activities at all levels of government.

In summary, the Plan states some present needs and gives some forecasts about what we think will be the future. Predicting the future is difficult business. You will need to use your own crystal ball based on trends and opportunities where you are, and above all face the realities that unfold as you move along.

Nationally, here are a few of the realities that have unfolded recently:

You remember that last May, President Nixon requested adding \$40 million to our fiscal 1972 budget. The Congress agreed and boosted RC&D to 20 starts and boosted some other programs.

As of the tenth of August, then, our outlook was more promising than in several years. It looked as if we could add 1,200 badly needed men and women at the field level.

August 15 dawned and we and everyone else faced the freeze--budget and personnel restrictions. Later came Phase II. The payraise was welcome for each of us, but SCS may have to absorb part of the added costs. At this moment, we're about where we were before May 1971. Of course, this is a matter that affects the whole government and not just SCS or USDA.

Another recent reality--a positive one this time--is a new Secretary of Agriculture. Earl Butz is a friend of SCS. In his first week on the job, he spoke to USDA employees in Jefferson Auditorium. He held an open house for all employees near his office. He visited SCS and talked with us about our activities, major issues facing us, and our Framework Plan--and then shook hands with all our Washington Office employees and later sent each employee a picture of their meeting.

He has held regular staff meetings with agency heads, and has met with the national Rural Development committee. He is on our side-- and he is willing to be very articulate and positive about SCS and Districts.

Of course, the subject of reorganization is alive in the Administration and in Congress. The first proposals last year would have split SCS, with our water resource activities going to one department and the rest of us to another. This was changed to transfer SCS intact to the Water Resources Administration of the Department of Natural Resources. A later change was to retain a USDA, restructured to serve the farmers and remove "peripheral activities." SCS is one of those "peripheral activities."

But wherever your agency hangs its hat, your activities are not peripheral in any sense of the word. While the organizational charts are being turned inside out, the work you are doing in the field had better continue to be done:

- Conservation practices on the land
- Watershed structures built and operating
- Soil surveys made and used
- Rural development needs given a major thrust

That last item is under national discussion, too. Rural development, like the environment, is a subject of growing attention and urgency throughout the Nation.

You need to assess what the rural development process is or should be in your State, area and county and help fill whatever the needs are.

In the years ahead, then, the job of the Service will be a challenging one. It will call for employees who are skilled in the jobs we've always been called on to handle, and a lot of newer assignments.

We'll be asked to provide information for one farmer's land-use decisions, and at the same time we'll be working with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to make use of data from an "Earth Resource Technology Satellite" that will photograph the world completely every two weeks or so.

We'll be helping one irrigator improve his efficiency of water use--and at the same time we'll be gathering snow survey information electronically from "snow pillows." They'll send daily radio signals from the high mountains to a central office and save our skiers a lot of difficult work in assessing the probable streamflow for the following spring.

We'll be making soil survey interpretations for agriculture--but we'll also assess how soils might do in holding, filtering, or breaking down solid wastes.

We'll be running off a few facts on the typewriter for a landowner--and at the same time we'll be asking a computer to lay out all the facts and plans on any 40-acre tract in the counties around a major metropolitan area.

Whatever we will be doing, on whatever front of environmental improvement or rural development, its success will depend on you--on your legwork, brainpower, and teamwork as professional conservationists. It will be a demanding role, but a satisfying one.

You'll need to use all the tools and knowledge at your command. You'll need to keep alert to new ideas and new technologies that can be adapted to serve our goals. You'll need to understand not only the science of conservation, but also the social and political processes that govern conservation action.

You'll need to be concerned with not only the immediate effects or benefits of the improvements you help put on the land, but the second and third-order effects of what you do. You'll need to stay on top of current issues.

Every one of us will need to accept a challenge of personal growth, of intellectual curiosity...of reading, of learning new things, of working with new people and new organizations. This is self-improvement. Its thrust, and its motivation, must come from within.

Every one of us will need to accept the challenge of reaching out to the individuals and organizations that need the information we can supply but don't know about its availability. We will need to help every citizen understand how soil and water conservation benefits him and how he can have a role in it if he wants to become involved personally.

We will need to work more closely with conservation districts and with the other agencies and organizations that are part of the conservation team.

We also will need to work more closely with many groups and individuals who do not share our viewpoint or our experience. Some of the newer environmental groups are philosophically opposed to certain aspects of our program, particularly channel improvement in watershed projects.

Calm and open discussion often seems difficult or impossible with members of some of these groups. But we cannot afford to give up in our efforts to communicate with these people. If we pull back from our critics, if we fail to talk with them and work with them and argue constructively with them, we are going to increase their suspicions and their animosity.

On the other hand, I am confident that positive information efforts and the best use of your well demonstrated talents for working with people will pay dividends in the long run. Those who have a sincere interest in environmental improvement and who understand your programs and your missions can become valuable allies.

Americans are concerned about the world they live in. You can help them understand the alternatives for improving their communities, the real costs and decisions necessary, and then help them get things done.

This is a major role. Let's have at it.

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