

WHAT ARE WE DOING ABOUT OUR ENVIRONMENT?

I appreciate being here. You asked me to join you in Phoenix again and that is an honor--I think! I helped celebrate your Silver Anniversary. Now, a year into your second quarter century of concern about districts and the quality of life in Arizona, it is a good time to assess what we are doing and where we are going in the environmental field.

We live in strange and confusing times. Old values tumble--or go underground for a season. New values, discoveries and attitudes arise to delight or disappoint us. We land men on the moon--but our earthbound problems remain. We speak to people around the globe instantaneously--but have difficulty communicating with our own children at home. Often we know one thing but we do another, as science, self-interest and genuine uncertainty join to confuse us.

Material for talk by Norman A. Berg, Associate Administrator, Soil Conservation Service, at the 26th annual convention of the Arizona Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Phoenix, Ariz., January 7, 1971.

We live, in short, in the best and worst of times.

Like most speakers, I mention some of the things wrong with America. But I part company with many others because, in the interest of reality, I will also speak of the many, many things right about America and Americans in the 1970's. I want to tell it like it is--which is that, in my opinion, less hysteria and more hard work will see our Nation through the seventies--and eighties--and nineties--stronger than ever.

Recently, a good friend called my attention to an old story I had learned as a boy. You will remember...it went something like this. One day, as Chicken Little was walking through the woods, an acorn fell on her head.

"Dear me," she thought, "the sky is falling. I must go and tell the king."

So Chicken Little hurried off to tell the King that the sky was falling. On the way she met Henny Penny.

"Where are you going, Chicken Little?" asked Henny Penny.

"The sky is falling and I'm going to tell the King,"

said Chicken Little. "You come, too."

So Henny Penny and Chicken Little hurried on together.

Soon they met Cocky Locky.

"The sky is falling and we are going to tell the King."

said Henny Penny. "You come, too."

So Henny Penny and Chicken Little and Cocky Locky hurried

on together. Soon they met Drakey Lakey..

Well, I don't want to keep you on the edge of your seats,

so to condense an old story, Chicken Little and her hysterical

friends, including a couple of late-comers named Goosey Loosey

and Turkey Lurkey, kept running through the tall timber shouting

"the sky is falling" until they encountered a very cool, thoughtful

chap--Foxy Loxy--who, in the general panic, saw it to his advantage,

and ate up all those bird-brained Chicken Littles.

This disturbing tale of farmyard ecology is, perhaps, relevant to your theme--my talk--and our joint outlook for the future of our Nation.

It is true that several acorns have recently fallen on U.S. citizens. When asked to list the two or three most serious problems facing their own communities, 34 percent of those interviewed in a nation-wide Harris poll conducted in November named pollution, while 25 percent mentioned crime. Other domestic problems listed were drugs (14%); schools (12%); housing (11%); transportation (11%); employment (10%); taxes (10%); youth problems (9%); and all others (24%).

There are, however, those in our society who then see accelerating population growth, the growing GNP, chemicals and pesticides, electric power brownouts and energy shortages, endangered species, filthy water and foul air all as signs of impending disaster--catastrophe in the sky if you will.

And they have pushed the big, red, panic button--stop the world they want to get off and return to some vague yesteryear--some better day that got away. They would like to turn out the lights, turn down the heat, lock the garage door and walk away from this civilization, back to some medieval setting of supposed splendor--forgetting such medieval splendors as the black plague, the serf-and slave system, the endless wars, and the grinding poverty and short lifespan of most people.

This desire for a return to the pre-Industrial Age could be comic--but unfortunately too many believe the forecasters of doom. Their dream of "the total beautiful society"--smogless air, unpolluted rivers, swift public transportation--is ultimately not so much the reform of society as the reform of human nature--somebody else's human nature, preferably.

I, for one, say it's time to stop listening to this nostalgic yearning for the past and start telling the whole story. I believe there are many like us who would join a movement that says, "Hell, no, the sky is not falling." It's not as blue as we'd like, but the sky is not falling--and if all Americans move together on this issue, the best of times--the bluest of skies--can certainly be ahead of us.

Now, as dedicated conservationists, you all know the Nation's environment is not above reproach. There is dirty water--and foul air--and misused land--and something should be and is being done! I'll detail this a little later.

But first, I want to dwell for a few minutes on successes in this better environment you have been working toward for a long time without much fanfare, and with even less pay. I do understand that district supervisor's salary will be doubled this year...but for those of you confused by the new math your kids are learning, two times zero is still the same rate of compensation.

Farmers and ranchers have been getting a lot of criticism for polluting everything, and accepting doles for not growing something, and conservation districts and agencies have been stomped on for this and that.

But let me read you some excerpts from a speech by President Nixon last month. The President said:

"Some of you have noted that in a recent speech to the National Association of Manufacturers in New York I referred to a new Commission on Productivity that we have set up in the United States. That Commission has had several meetings. And as I sat with those top leaders of American industry..a very significant point was made, not only in the first meeting, but in the second and in the third. On every occasion, it was this: that the area of the American economy with the greatest growth in productivity and that has the highest productivity per man hour, any way you want to rate it, is American agriculture. ...There is nothing in the United States that even approaches this growth in productivity.

"That is a great record...due, of course, to the fact that we have had good people on the land, farmers."

President Nixon then went on to say, "I checked a little further. And...I found that...the American housewife pays a smaller percentage of her family income for food than she has ever paid in our history (although this) is by far the best fed country in the world."

This means, said President Nixon, "That despite all the problems that we hear about American agriculture, despite the condemnation we hear of farm programs, that American agriculture, and particularly the American farmer, must be doing something right. It means also that the Nation owes American agriculture a very great debt...which perhaps has not been adequately reflected in agricultural income."

That's quite a testimony. This productivity we all benefit from--this great food supply, not to mention other uses of our land and water, could never have occurred without the stewardship of soil and water and forest resources displayed by men and women like yourselves all across our 50 states. You've changed the face of the land, and you've changed the lives of people for the better as a result. From President Nixon on down, let's all "tell it like it really is" to the uninformed, or misinformed, who mistake a falling acorn for the apocalypse.

There are many aspects of our lives as Americans that we can be grateful for, as we look back at the first year of the present decade.

--Better schools, colleges and universities.

--Abundance in agriculture, industry and commerce.

--The highest wages in the world. And, despite some

unemployment, the percentage of unemployed is not as

high as the eight percent that occurred several times in

the so-called boom years of the 1950's.

--Major medical advances.

--Conveniences by the dozens--in the home, office, factory,
farm and ranch.

--Recreational opportunities of every description. Arizona
has the second highest number of pleasure boats per
capita in the Nation.

--Stimulating arts--on canvas, film, tape, screen and
the printed page.

--The freedom to speak our minds about our government or
anything else. This is rare in much of the world.

--Over 3,000 conservation districts, and 18,000 members
of local governing boards, and a growing number of
volunteer helpers of every age. In 1970, districts
helped assist more than 19,000 units of government with
resource planning as well as more than a million other
cooperators.

--And a governmental concern for resources that is reflected in research, education, loans, cost-sharing, and technical help.

Now, of course, there are serious problems and challenges facing the Nation. President Nixon has called our environmental problems "urgent." But, he has added, "they do not justify either panic or hysteria. Their resolution will require rational, systematic approaches, hard work and patience. There must be a national commitment and a rational commitment."

That commitment extends to you in conservation districts. You've made many contributions to environmental improvement, sometimes without even having that as your primary aim. But you can do more--you need to do more to stay attuned to the needs of the resources and people in Arizona.

To see the problem through other eyes, let's look at the National Wildlife Federation's recently issued Environmental Quality Index, in which it rates each of the Nation's major natural resources. Every rating has slipped since the first Index last year, but soil is still rated the best--which is a tribute to your efforts.

But, the Index report says, "There are warning flags. Due to lack of broad land use planning, we needlessly cover rich soil with concrete. Soil pollution is becoming a growing problem as we load the soil with nitrates and pesticides and other chemicals, whose runoffs imperil and pollute our streams." The Federation called for national land and water planning, with Federal encouragement to states to develop state-wide zoning. And it called for giving more people a voice in helping to plan the kind of America they want.

There are warning flags in Arizona.

The 1970 census figures show that your state had the second highest growth rate in the Nation, and that you gained almost half a million new residents. These gains mean changes in your use of land and water. They mean new opportunities and a new tax base for communities, but they also mean the need for new services. Guiding the growth of communities--without imperiling agriculture--is a job that conservation districts are eminently qualified for--and that they have, in fact, been doing in hundreds of areas. Last year, Arizona districts assisted 182 different units of government; helped prepare 55 inventories and evaluations, and helped 84 other groups, in addition to their work with individual cooperators.

In working with local communities, you can provide information that will, for example, help contractors and developers avoid building on shifting soils, flood-prone soils or areas where the land will do a poor job of filtering wastes. You can help reduce sediment and dust from construction practices that leave soil bare for long periods of time.

But you can--and you need to--go beyond this to help communities find new or better water supplies, new opportunities for recreation, and a host of other positive aims that will mean better lives on a better resource base. I know you are working with "new-town" planners near Tucson; with a minority-group community near Phoenix on a better municipal water supply; with a shooting preserve in the Florence-Coolidge conservation district area, and with many many groups using natural resources in other ways.

You can--and you need to--see to it that the needs of agriculture and of rural communities are known and considered in community decision making.

You can--and you are--working to improve water for irrigation and other purposes, and to use crop and rangeland in better ways. The amount of land under irrigation water management in Arizona increased 1,700 percent in the last 20 years--from 34,100 to 580,000 acres. Minimum tillage practices are increasing; river basin studies are going on; flood prevention projects are moving ahead.

You can--and you need to--play a vigorous role in land-use planning, from one-acre tracts to entire planning districts.

I know you worked hard in 1970 to reorganize current and proposed RC&D areas to match sub-state planning regions.

You can--and do--cooperate vigorously with other resource planners and users. There will be a savings of over three million dollars* in highway bridge and culvert costs in the Buckeye watershed project area, because of 4-way cooperation among local conservation districts, the Arizona Highway Department, a flood control district and an irrigation district. Drainage work above the highway will divert potential floodwaters and reduce the need for certain types of engineering work.

You can--and you do--work with your state association and state legislators on legislation to improve resource use in the state.

You are doing a great deal in the environmental field.

You know it.

I know it.

But--how many other people know it? An important assignment--a vital one--is to let more people in Phoenix and Tucson and every other urban center know of your experience, your role, and what you can offer.

Some of these people may need your direct assistance--when they find out what you offer. Others may be looking for involvement--something they can do about the environment that is more satisfying, perhaps, than a one-day spring cleanup drive. You need to welcome new hands and new ideas, since, of course, the day when a handful of hardworking district supervisors could "go it alone" ended a long time ago.

All of the people in your cities need to know of the importance of your work. You can help them--and you need their help. They have a large measure of control over fiscal decisions that affect you. Recently, Secretary of Agriculture Clifford Hardin said that this Nation was approaching a consensus about the environment. And it was this sense of national purpose, he said, that had earlier brought about the Soil Conservation Service and conservation districts, that had defeated polio, that produced major action in the field of civil rights. This kind of national commitment, the Secretary pointed out, should help get things done in the environment field.

At the end of his talk, one listener asked why this consensus wasn't making it any easier for the USDA to get sizable appropriations for environmental work. Mr. Hardin's answer stressed two points: (1) that we have a tight budget situation for most national programs or issues, and (2) that--in his words-- "we haven't convinced the public that we are active in this area."

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You may be doing great things--but who knows it? How many people realize they live in a conservation district? How many people know about the Soil Conservation Service out of the thousand or more Federal programs in dozens of Departments and independent agencies? At appropriation time, the SCS competes with these other thousand programs for the hard-pressed Federal dollar, and no agency gets what it thinks it needs. At a time when the cost of doing business has continually increased, SCS has had to cut back or relocate some of its staff in Arizona and in other states.

Headlines in the press--magazines, newspapers, television--indicate that too many writers and luncheon speakers think little or nothing has been done to improve the environment--despite more than three decades of significant soil and water conservation work.

You--and we--need a little more public relations, if you will. And the classic PR textbooks say there are two parts to good public relations:

- 1. Doing good things; and
- 2. Telling people about them.

Both are vital.

Let's ask ourselves--are we doing good things in the best possible way?

- . If the workload is too large, do you take a continuing look at priorities so that the most meaningful or pressing work gets done first?

- . If an environmental or community problem arises, is your thinking broad enough to look closely as how you could help, or do you prefer to stick with the tried-and-true activities?

- . Are you working to get more basic information, and to interpret it for your community needs?

- . Are you making sure that every conservation practice is planned and installed and maintained in a way that makes the practice's impact on the environment the most favorable possible?

. Are you looking at your long-range program, your state enabling act, your working arrangements with other institutions to see that they are up to date?

And if you are doing good things, then you'd better tell people about them--not just in the good old countryside or other already friendly audiences, but also out where all the people are.

. Does your district have a newsletter? If so, how much time do you spend on it? Where do you send it? Who reads it?

. Do you seek out editors and reporters who always print your stuff, or do you work actively to reach the people who need to know about the information and assistance you can provide?

. Do you know the school administrators in your district, and have you worked with them to put the out-of-doors in every classroom and to put every student in the outdoors so that tomorrow's decision-makers have an environmental understanding on which to base their actions?

There are perhaps more questions than answers. I simply want to stimulate your thinking about matching people and their concerns and interests with yours.

We in Washington also plead at least partial guilt in not speaking up more strongly about our work. But earlier this week--two days ago in fact--a USDA-wide, day-long meeting was held in Washington in which 40 major editors and writers--representing Life, Time, the Readers's Digest, ABC and so on--heard about USDA involvement in environmental activities. The combined circulation of these editors and reporters was estimated at somewhere over 50 million people.

The Soil Conservation Service presented information on our general work, and on conservation districts, as well as detailed presentations on two items of special interest to urban people: how to develop a subdivision without polluting everything downstream, and where to put a sanitary landfill and how to operate it safely.

It's too early to tell the results of this intensive exposure of media people to this information. But we hope that in the future there will be more knowledgeable presentations of environmental work in the press and on television.

Finally, what about the future? What does my organization, the Soil Conservation Service, and your organization, see in the way of future goals, attitudes, developments?

For more than a year now the SCS has been working on a long-range plan. Our three overall objectives are:

1. Quality in the natural resource base for sustained use.
2. Quality in the environment to provide satisfying places to live and work.
3. And, quality in family standards of living based on community improvements and an adequate living standard.

These are broad goals. To be more specific, by the end of the 1970's, we hope to complete, or be involved in, these projects:

--Three-fourths of the entire land area of the U.S. covered by soil surveys--a 50 percent increase over the present total.

--River basin studies completed for all major drainage areas in the U.S. These will give states and regions a starting point for resource development.

--Resource Conservation and Development projects covering more than a third of the U.S. Some 68 RC&D projects now underway involve 413 counties.

--Great Plains Conservation Program work completed on at least 130 million acres in more than 450 counties on the Plains.

--Conservation Needs Inventory data expanded to include urbanizing areas and public lands, and to cover more environmental factors than they presently do. This would be a major tool in monitoring the Nation's resource base and environmental conditions.

--Watershed projects underway on more than a fourth
9,000 watersheds in which land and water problems could be
erated by P.L. 566 type project action. With changes in
program, this could help clear upstream watersheds of all
or sources of pollution--not only sediment, but farm chemicals,
wage and industrial waste--before storage facilities are put in.

--Waste-disposal systems for thousands of communities,
installed on the basis of soil survey and other data. SCS and
districts will have the capability of showing communities anywhere
in the Nation which locations are hazardous for use as sanitary
landfills; where to find suitable soil for landfill covering, and
how to use soil and plant cover to recycle human, animal and
industrial wastes.

--Improvements in the use and restoration of surface-
mined land.

--And, more accurate snow surveys for the Western st
through greater use of electronic equipment.

These are some specific aims and goals that we are working for in the present decade.

In this decade, changes and challenges will come to all of us very quickly. But I believe that soil conservation districts are capable and viable organizations that will meet these challenges-- and then go on ahead of problems to help decide the future of their communities.

Conservation--environmental concern--is, in stock market parlance, a growth product...a forward looking product. That concern is a form of ultimate realism--a recognition that the condition of the environment is our responsibility. That concern is also hope--and nothing in this world will succeed without that.

Early in 1970 a Gallup poll commissioned by Look Magazine found that, "When asked whether America is still the land of opportunity, 88% of all adults answered yes. So did 87 percent of our supposedly disillusioned teenagers."

I'm reminded of a statement made by a famous American--
when he and his neighbors had a bad case of the "blahs."--

"We have no men who are fit for the times," he said
gloomily. "We are deficient in genius, in education, in travel,
in fortune, in everything. I feel unutterable anxiety."

Those words were spoken over 180 years ago. The
speaker was a Boston lawyer--John Adams. He became the second
President of the United States.

I think our country has had some occasional clouds.
There are problems to be solved--and conflicts to be resolved.
But NO--the sky is not falling--it's brighter and more promising
than ever--and this is only the beginning!

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