

SOME SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS IN OKLAHOMA*

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ABSTRACT

A noteworthy change is taking place in conservation farming in Oklahoma that will influence its agriculture from this time forward. It is the fundamental change being wrought in modes of doing and in ways of thinking of farmers as a result of the state Soil Conservation District program. Hence, it appears that the social implications of these land utilization improvements will culminate in far-reaching effects on future undertakings of the agricultural industry within the state.

Conservation in Oklahoma, in the past, has been measured by the amount of conservation practices applied on the land, or by the amount of work that should be done. Of the 36,162,000 acres in farms, remedial measures are planned for 9,422,962 acres of which 5,152,208 acres are treated. To accomplish the conservation task will require 35,354,000 man days of labor and technical assistance, 4,064,000 days of work by tractors, and 23,452,000 days of work with horse-drawn equipment. This statistical emphasis is peculiar since Ellis early recognized the social implications when he wrote, "Farmers are undertaking a noble experiment in cooperation and self direction, and they are learning something about the social aspects of land and its use."¹

Today, some signs are evident of the return to this early philosophical point of approach to conservation which has been neglected. Governor Roy J. Turner stresses that, "in every element of our economy and living, conservation is vital. Therefore conservation is an important part of our state economy . . ."

Again farmers are gaining some of the conservation philosophy as well as making better adjustment to their land. A farmer, in the Arkansas-Verdigris District began work in 1939. Since, his land has increased in value from \$20 to \$45 per acre and his income has risen from \$861 to \$5803. He concludes, "Although my farming with my district plan has become more profitable every year, I feel that I am just beginning to get the fertility of my soil built up to the point where I can really farm." Truly, this farmer is showing remarkable progress in both agricultural production and conservation thinking.

Recognition of individual and group responsibility as the root of all effective local, democratic planning and action in conservation appears to be growing in Oklahoma because of the enlightened program of the state Soil Conservation Districts. Through the District long-range planning program, it becomes clear to members of the rural community that there must be a permanent conservation program to have sustained, maximum production from agriculture. The basic richness of the soil and its physical condition

*Research on this project is being made possible through a grant-in-aid from the Research Foundation of Oklahoma A. and M. College.

determine the productivity of the farm land. With the evolution of these concepts, there evolves the finest philosophy that is possible, an understanding which should come to fruition in optimum adjustment to the environment. Only with such a philosophical approach can farmers successfully meet physical land problems and the serious challenge of resource deterioration in the state.

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