

Conservation Trends

Voluntary Approach Encourages Cooperation

BY CARROLL J. HOBSON
Hardin County Commissioner

Much in our short lives is not clear. However if you live long enough, you learn to see some trends and cycles. We can be sure though if people waste enough, long enough, severe measures will have to be taken and everyone will suffer pain and sacrifice.

The time to prevent pain and sacrifice is before the waste and ruin has taken place, whether the loss is money, time or resources. The American Indians revered their food crops and the native animals which sustained them and regularly celebrated having sufficient corn and meat to keep them well and healthy. They showed much reverence for the Great Spirit that they thought provided these bounties.

They were rightly horrified with white men when they slaughtered thousands of buffalo and beaver just to make coats and hats for the eastern wealthy. The resources seemed endless, why worry.

We all know the story of the buffalo and the beaver. Our top soil was following those same lines in the 1930's. When the skies became dark in Washington D.C. with Oklahoma top soil, Congress was finally impressed and appropriated money to create the Soil Conservation Service to do some much needed preservation of top soil.

Like many other men and women, I wanted to do something that would help save soil and provide clean water. I was born on a farm and lived there continuously except for time spent in wartime service, therefore it was natural for me to become a Soil Commissioner and add my bit of help to support an organization like the Soil Conservation Service.

In the 1960's, almost all the people I knew in and out of the SCS were sincerely dedicated to their work-the keeping of top soil, water, fertilizer and chemicals up on the hills and rolling land where these nutrients belonged. Every good soil commissioner knew that proper drainage was a key to outstanding production. That's why inch drainage coefficient is necessary for successful life intake terracing.

Great public watershed projects under Public Law 566 were carried out and very successfully in many states. Later, long range projects allowing a land owner to plan large soil and water saving systems to be paid for over a ten year period with some help from the federal government were offered the farming public.

Later still, several Resource Conservation Districts were organized in Iowa and other states. Those RC&D districts were the United States Government's answer to rural development and community cooperation with heavy voluntary citizen involvement. I was impressed by all these good works, however over the years a great many changes took place.

Now we are living in a time of over active environmentalists, animal rights, people that believe that vegetables are the only things that should be consumed and those dedicated to carrying the endangered species act to what I think is the height of the ridiculous. Millions of dollars worth of expensive homes were burned because homeowners in California were not allowed to disc down the dead sage brush around their homes which would carry fire to their back doorsteps in case of an accidental fire. All this to save some kangaroo rats that a minority

claimed were an endangered species.

Most people that read know about the Snail Darter, (a three inch fish) with no essential use that held up the Tennessee Valley Authority for several years and cost millions of dollars in contract delays and a delayed finished project. Of course, there is the \$13 million spent to put a few wolves in Yellowstone Park.

Lately, it's a \$60 million study to temporarily flood part of the Grand Canyon along with \$30 million in lost power revenues. We have many essential public facilities that need that money. What's happened? Are people so ignorant and well fed that they think they can ignore the extremists who sneak these laws and regulations into action while the rest of us work harder to pay the taxes.

We have whole sections of the Federal Government that has wasted and idled until we are nearly five trillion dollars in debt. Of course, the people living off the bureaucracy and the recipients of the monies appropriated will struggle to save their pet projects. We have bridges, college buildings, state government buildings including our state capitol that all need funds for repair and maintenance while scarce tax money is being wasted.

The Soil Conservation Service has even changed its name trying to project a different image. Now Paul Johnson NRCS, formerly SCS chief in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (since the Clinton Administration) and the man who sets policy says he is convinced their wet lands policy was not the right way to go. He also seems to think it was not a good idea to try to play policeman for the Highly Erodible Land Law and its regulations.

Do we discern a cycle? I certainly hope so. I don't believe the NRCS will ever be successful playing policeman. The voluntary approach is the only approach that will work in my opinion and the best system to get the cooperation and support of both farmers and the urban people.

Our county has a legacy of quality soil and water conservation put on the land over a long period of time. It has also had the dedication of quality people who respect the soil and the great crops of food it produces. Let's extend our efforts into the next century. Let's make a special point to teach our young to respect our many blessings and the high value of all our natural resources.

If you need help with your conservation problems, call your local NRCS office or your local Soil Commissioner for assistance. We will look forward to the future with renewed confidence.



Natural Resources Conservation Service Staff Members

Natural Resources Conservation Service Staff members are, left to right: Cristine Birks (Soil Conservation Technician), Kent H. Holmgard (Soil Conservation Technician), Jennifer Welch (Coordinator of Pine Creek Water Quality Project), Gary L. Hillmer (District Conservationist) and Susie L. Reece (Secretary).

Commissioner Volunteers Make It Happen

BY JOHN GILBERT
Hardin County Commissioner

Every civilization that has failed has done so because it exceeded its cultural ability to feed itself. For us to assume we face any different fate is to commit hubris of the most grievous magnitude.

Our forefathers recognized this danger and instituted a system of soil and water conservation districts to help protect the productivity and prosperity of our agriculture base. It is to their eternal credit that they placed these districts under the guidance of people from each locality. Maintaining this connection with our cultural backgrounds is why it is important that citizens serve as democratically elected commissioners.

Hardin County has been blessed with

many dedicated citizens who have served this district well in the last half century. Maintaining this tradition is part of what guides the actions of your commissioners, and is only one reason why soil and water conservation activities here have been successful.

In an era when many people perceive governments as ineffective and too intrusive, the function of citizen commissioners as a buffer between citizens and a bureaucracy become even more important. Each of your Hardin County commissioners is interested in making protection and wise use of our natural resources as effective as possible. But because we can't do most of what needs doing, we must maintain and rely on the good will and cooperation with those who own and use this area's

resources. We consider that good will the key to future success of district activities, and try to use it wisely.

There are regulatory functions the professional staff are required to perform that are not always popular. In many of these, the commissioners can only insist that they be performed equitably, respectfully and in ways most fitting local needs and conditions. We have and will continue to object to what we consider unreasonable directives from either the state or federal level. Conservation work involves a local-state-federal partnership, with each party having certain functions and responsibilities. Your commissioners take seriously our role in this partnership.

As industrial forces try to usurp the cultural component of our agriculture, a whole different set of concerns confront our communities. Some of these concerns the Hardin County Soil and Water Conservation District can help bring into focus. Most concerns involve solutions that are not as clearcut as waterways or terraces or windbreaks, yet require critical attention.

The future productivity of our region is affected by the fact that we have enough farmers to farm the land, but not enough to care for and use it wisely; by the fact that much of our land resources are held by people nearing or in retirement with little moving to young farmers; because the cultural forces and values which underpin this area are being eroded by the myth that farming is competitive rather than cooperative; because our children are not learning the important cultural lessons essential to caring for ones home; and because faith in the future is not strong.

The Hardin County Soil and Water Conservation District is committed to working for the wise use of area resources to insure their future availability. The scope of this process will continue to change, but the need does not. It is important that your friends and neighbors serve as commissioners for the district to insure this part of your government does its best to meet local needs. Your commissioners greatly appreciate your support.

Planning Important To Cropping CRP Acres

BY GARY L. HILLMER
District Conservationist

While the options are varied for Hardin County's CRP acres, many will return to row crop production.

There are contracts that should be used for hay production, stockgrazing, trees or wildlife habitat. However, with planning and precaution, crop production is still a viable use for much of the ground.

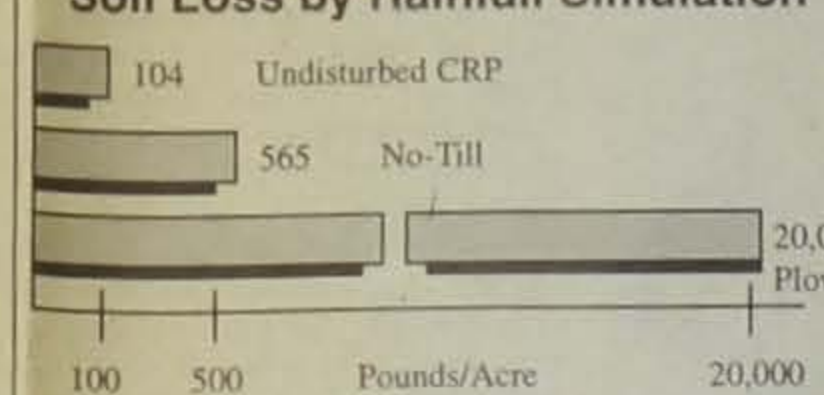
This is an opportunity that would be lost in one swift turn from the plow

CORN YIELD RESULTS

YEAR ONE	85.2	Conventional
YEAR TWO	94.1	
YEAR ONE	81.6	No-till
YEAR TWO	98.5	
	75 80 85 90 95 100	Bushels per Acre

The wet spring of 1995 slightly favored conventional tillage in Year One corn trials. Yet by the second year, the long-term benefits of improved soil quality and moisture retention soon tip the balance in favor of no-till.

Soil Loss by Rainfall Simulation*



* Applied 3.74 inches over a one-hour duration two days in a row, July 1994. With the undisturbed CRP, water erosion took just 104 pounds of soil per acre. The no-till plot lost over 560 pounds of soil per acre. And where the soil had been plowed, the rainfall carried away more than 20,000 pounds of soil per acre. That's 35 times the erosion of no-till!

7-Hardin County Index, Friday, April 19, 1996

Soybean Yield Results

TILLAGE METHOD	YEAR ONE	YEAR TWO
Conventional Tillage	64.8	40.3
No-Till/Fall-Till	67.3	38.8
No-Till/Spring-Till	65.0	29.2
Second-Year No-Till	---	45.5

In 1994, top soybean yields of 67.3 bushels per acre went to a plot with no-till into fall-killed sod.

Although the wet spring of 1995 hurt soybean yields, top results were found on second-year no-till following CRP.

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Strip Till Insures More Even Stand

BY MARK BALVANZ
Hardin County Commissioner

If you have been reluctant to try no-till corn because a share of your soils are heavy and slow to dry in the spring or early cold soils at planting still pose a challenge, then strip-till may be for you. Farmers in central Illinois have used this technique for several years, so in the fall of 1995, I decided to give it a try.

The strip-till rig I used is basically an anhydrous applicator set on twelve 30-inch rows with a set of markers added. Fall strip-till insures a more even stand and quicker emergence due to an eight to ten degree temperature difference between the tilled strip and the residue strip between the rows. The mound formed by the knives and covering

disks need to be at least two inches tall in the fall to allow for settling.

These mounds are then directly planted into in the spring. Since the experts tell us to wait until the soil reaches 50 degrees F at a depth of four inches, these warmer and dryer strips may gain us a week to ten days in earlier planting, resulting in a possible higher yield.

I had the opportunity to work with Prairieland Co-op and Greenbelt Elevator to strip-till roughly 260 acres for the 1996 season. After completing five years in a no-till program, I am excited with strip-till. If you want no-till to work, it will. There's enough equipment available and variations in how to do it that anyone can make it work.



Fall strip-till on this land operated by Mark Balvanz insures a more even stand and quicker emergence due to an eight to ten degree temperature difference between the

tilled strip and the residue strip between the rows. These strips have been fall tilled by an anhydrous bar in this no-till bean field to allow the soil to warm up for earlier planting.

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