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Editorial

Conservation vs. pollution

There can be no doubt whatever that one of the biggest sources of stream pollution in Iowa comes from the valuable topsoil washed away by heavy rains. When this soil finds its way into creeks and rivers it brings with it any chemical residues and other pollutants that have accumulated on the land. The only way this can be prevented is by extensive conservation practices on a scale not yet seen anywhere in this country, not even here in Iowa where our farmers are far ahead of most in this respect.

We believe a crisis of sorts is approaching. Environmentalists are demanding action. Many farmers have good reason for resisting because while they realize conservation practices will eventually mean some dividends for them in the form of better crop yields by saving topsoil, they just can't stand the expense involved. Now it appears a plan has been worked out that we feel ought to appeal to everybody. First of all it will be voluntary at least until events prove it won't work. That means the federal government will not be putting itself into the business of regulating the program. It will be up to farmers themselves aided by free professional help of Soil Conservation technicians. Farmers will be given cash incentives to spur them into going along with this program aimed at curbing water pollution. They will likewise receive information of an educational nature to help them achieve the goals being sought.

Last week the officers of the Iowa Department of Soil Conservation meeting with the Water Quality Division of the Department of Environmental Quality reached an agreement on this voluntary program. A public hearing on the program which will require an appropriation of funds by the Iowa legislature, will be held October 25th. After that hearing formal approval of the voluntary pollution control plan will be submitted for a final okay by the federal Environmental Protection Agency in Washington.

Robert Buckmaster, chairman of the Iowa Department of Environmental Quality and also chairman of the Water Quality Commission has this to say about the proposed voluntary program: "What Iowa farmers choose to do with this program likely to be offered to them soon may well set the pattern for what will be done in other states. Our own farmers generally speaking have been far out in front in conservation practices but now there is greater need than ever before to achieve cooperation from many more farmers than are presently in such programs. It is really a critical decision overall. If we can't get voluntary agreement from farmers to launch conservation projects that will curb land run-off and resulting pollution of our streams, then the federal government will almost surely move in and with that will come harsh, unyielding regulations and all the red tape and blundering that so often accompanies federal efforts of nearly every kind."

Farmers in counties like ours which is a real showcase for examples of sound conservation practices hardly need to be reminded of the value of these programs. There is an added incentive now, not only by way of money which will make it more feasible financially, but by the knowledge that clean water in our streams cannot be achieved any other way.

We commend the public officials who have produced this voluntary program and hope we will see it come into being.