

Special Soil Conservation



Meet the Soil Conservation Service staff

Brown leads individuals dedicated to assisting farmers

VINTON— At the Benton County Soil Conservation Service office in Vinton, being a member of the "office staff" means more than typing, filing and answering the phone.

All the members of the staff, from the receptionist to the volunteer who works two months out of the year, have some knowledge of what farmers and others can do to preserve the soil.

The office is located in the southern part of Vinton, on 2nd Avenue across the street from the Benton County Fairgrounds. The phone number (it's in the U.S. government listings in the phone book) is 472-2161.

Heading the office staff is District Conservationist Jim Brown, who has been with the Benton County Soil Conservation Service for 1½ years. His job is to supervise and administer the SCS office, and to develop soil conservation plans for farmers and farm owners in Benton County. He also works closely with the district commissioners, who are elected.

Brown and his wife, Gloria, have two children— Karrie, 4, and Joshua, 9 months.

If you call the SCS office, the person who will probably answer the phone is Connie Lange.

In addition to performing secretarial and receptionist duties, and taking care of the county's soil conservation records, Lange also serves as the administrator of the Iowa State Cost Sharing Program for Benton County. This program gives incentives to people who start using conservation practices,

Loren Dickinson



by helping to pay for such things as terraces, windbreaks, etc.

Lange also serves as secretary to the elected board of commissioners of the SCS, and records the minutes of their monthly meetings.

Lange has been employed at the Benton County SCS office for 13 years. Before that, she worked at the county Extension office.

In November, Lange will leave the

Benton County office to work for the Johnson County SCS in Iowa City. At Iowa City, she plans to attend classes in business, computers and art at the University of Iowa.

She now lives in Brandon. Her children are Robin (Mrs. Tom) Sutton of rural Rowley and Reid, who is a senior at Independence High School.

Becky Clark and W. Robb Morrow do much of the design and cost-estimating

for permanent soil conservation measures which Benton County farmers may elect to begin. In addition, they must inspect conservation modifications, such as terraces and tiles, to be sure they do what they were designed to do.

Morrow, who has worked for the Benton County SCS for seven years, is an employee of the federal government.

Clark is employed by the state of Iowa. Benton County was given permission to have a state-employed staff member in addition to the federal employee because of the severity of the soil depletion here, and because of the county's heavy dependence on agriculture for its economy, Morrow said.

Both Morrow and Clark make frequent visits to farmers to try to convince them to begin conservation practices. They also speak at about four township meetings on conservation each year.

Before coming to work for the SCS four years ago, Clark worked for Van Horne veterinarian Dr. Bruce Baxter, and before that, for Hansen Accounting in Vinton. She has a two-year-old son, Joshua.

Morrow worked previously for Hummel and Sons, a Vinton tiling company, starting there in about 1959 or 1960.

He and his wife, Alice, have five children and eight grandchildren. The children are: Joyce Erickson of Vinton, Nancy Woolison of Vinton, David Morrow of Vinton, Kenneth Morrow of

Vinton and Elaine Schirm of Garrison.

Derek Merchant works part-time for the SCS as a conservation technician, and assists Morrow and Clark in their work. A 1982 graduate of Jesup High School, Merchant said he will probably remain with the SCS "until the ground freezes." Until then, he works about 24 hours a week.

Morrow and Clark got their own educations on soil conservation from a variety of sources.

The SCS may send them to training camps and seminars for general education and updates on methods for conservation. And, if they want to learn about a new method, an engineer from Des Moines can come to Vinton to teach them.

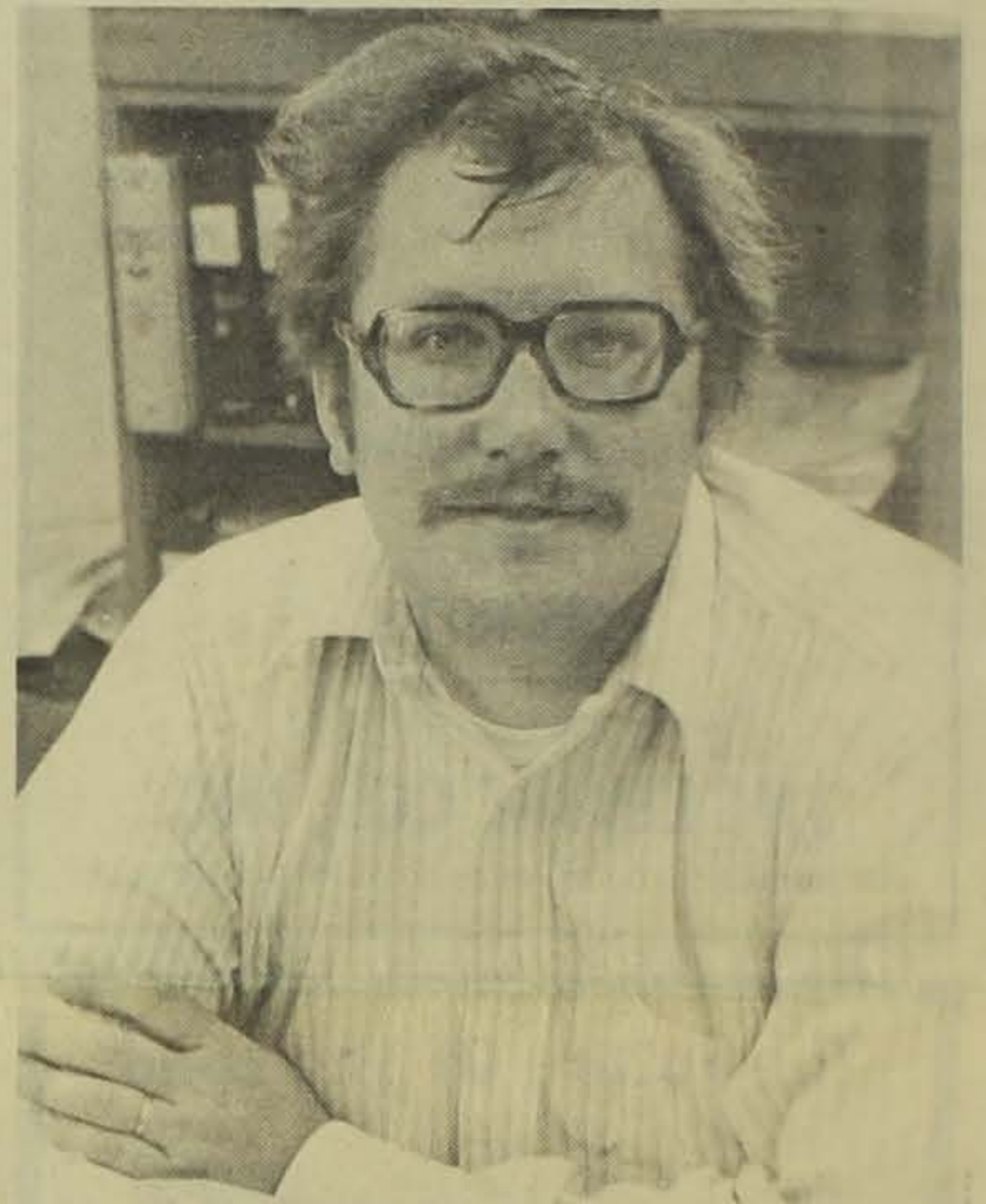
Morrow's previous work— he was employed by Hummel and Sons, a tiling company from about 1960 until he came to work for the SCS in 1976— is a source of background on conservation.

"It was easy for me to step into this job," he said. "I used to install things, like drainage systems, that I recommend to farmers now."

Loren Dickinson is using his expertise, gained from more than 32 years with the Army Corps of Engineers, to advise the Benton County SCS on ways of protecting soil.

STAFF

Continued on page 11



DISTRICT CONSERVATIONIST— Jim Brown has served as the District Conservationist for the Benton County Soil Conservation Service for 1½ years. His job includes supervising and administering the SCS, developing conservation plans and working with the elected commissioners.

Connie Lange



Derek Merchant



In implementing Iowa 2000

Cost-sharing gets healthy \$2.9 million boost

DES MOINES— An increase of \$2.9 million in cost-sharing funds and legislative approval for 21 new state conservation technicians make it possible to begin implementation of the Iowa Soil 2000 program on a statewide basis, according to James Gulliford, director of the Iowa Department of Soil Conservation.

Under this cost-sharing program, state funds complement federal assistance offered through the Agriculture Conservation Program (ACP) and special targeting efforts of the U.S. Department of Agriculture to deal with areas of severe and critical erosion.

This money is used to reimburse landowners for 50 percent of the cost of installing permanent soil conservation

practices. As a condition of receiving funds, they agree to maintain practices like terracing, grass waterways and sediment control basins for a period of 20 years.

The Iowa program is administered through the state's 100 soil conservation districts. Five elected commissioners set priorities and approve project applications under state administrative rules and program guidelines.

The state-funded cost-share program has provided nearly \$50 million for conservation since its beginning in 1973, Gulliford said. However, demand for assistance has always been nearly double that of funds available. During the 10-year history of the program, nearly 36,500 landowners have applied for assistance, and 20,675 of those received cost-share assistance.

The Iowa Soil 2000 Program was established in 1980 to provide educational, financial and technical assistance to landowners to reduce excessive soil erosion from all land within the state by the year 2000.

During the past year, two pilot areas— in the eastern Iowa districts of Dubuque, Jones and Winneskiek and the western Iowa districts of Cass, Page and East Pottawattamie—have initiated Iowa Soil 2000 Program efforts. These pilot districts identified areas of most concern and started distributing conservation folders that

outline pertinent soil conservation information, available assistance and obligations under Iowa law to tenants and landowners.

"Overall, pilot project feedback has been positive," Gulliford said. "Most landowners realize that the soil conservation practices outlined in the folders would be beneficial."

Based on this positive feedback and because of increased assistance, Gulliford said all 100 of Iowa's soil conservation districts will begin distributing conservation folders next year.

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In sharing responsibility

Hannen Lake watershed project began with landowners

By DAVID STRABALA
Times Staff Writer

BLAIRSTOWN— Farmers in the 600-acre Hannen Lake watershed area were soil conservation-minded, even before 75 percent cost sharing funds became available to aid the estimated \$165,000 cost for remaining conservation measures needed there.

Jim Brown, District Conservationist with the Soil Conservation Service in Vinton, says there has been gery good landowner cooperation with the Hannen Lake Watershed Project, for which state funds became available since the Iowa Conservation Commission chose it as a high priority lake early this year.

While Benton county regularly allows 50 percent cost sharing on soil conservation measures, from terraces to ponds, Brown said the increased reimbursement rate for this project has encouraged further participation. At an SCS meeting last winter with area farmers, landowners were told funds would be available for at least three years, if there was a high participation rate.

Because the \$40,000 spent this year

exceeded the \$32,000 allocated, the project should be adequately funded next year, Brown said. Regardless of the financial benefits of cost sharing, he said, "Conservation had more to do with it (participation)."

Brown added, "Sometimes the benefits don't have a monetary value, if you raise more crops and sustain the bushels per acre. If you don't do something, bushels per acre might drop," as farmers face a future of more intensive farming to increase the food supply.

"The main idea behind the project is to keep silt out of the lake," while aiming for improved farmability of the land, through reduced soil loss, he said.

Russ Glime, Benton County Conservationist, said the lake, built in 1961, was dredged in 1978, at a cost of \$25,000. He says Hannen Lake received high priority project selection among others in the state, based on Iowa State University research, the watershed, amount of area, and proportion of cropland and pasture.

Brown pointed out that although the landowner participation rate in the

watershed area was 75 percent, the eastern section is predominantly pasture land, requiring little conservation effort. Overall, 37 percent of the watershed is pasture land, and 22 percent is crop land; Hannen Park makes up 30 percent, and the remaining 11 percent of the 600 total acres consists of timber, roads and farmsteads, he said.

As of the beginning of the year, the 30,000 feet of needed terraces in the area have an estimated cost of three dollars per foot, according to Brown,

who's taking into account anticipated future cost increases. He estimates the 7,500 feet of needed water and sediment basins at four dollars per foot. Other costs, such as for ponds, brought his approximate cost total to about \$165,000 for the project.

Not taken into account are conservation measures completed in years past by farmers such as Ed Fry, Wayne Rabe, and Henry Grunewald, Brown said. He said John Harder's conservation efforts will be mostly finished this year, after recent work on about 35

acres.

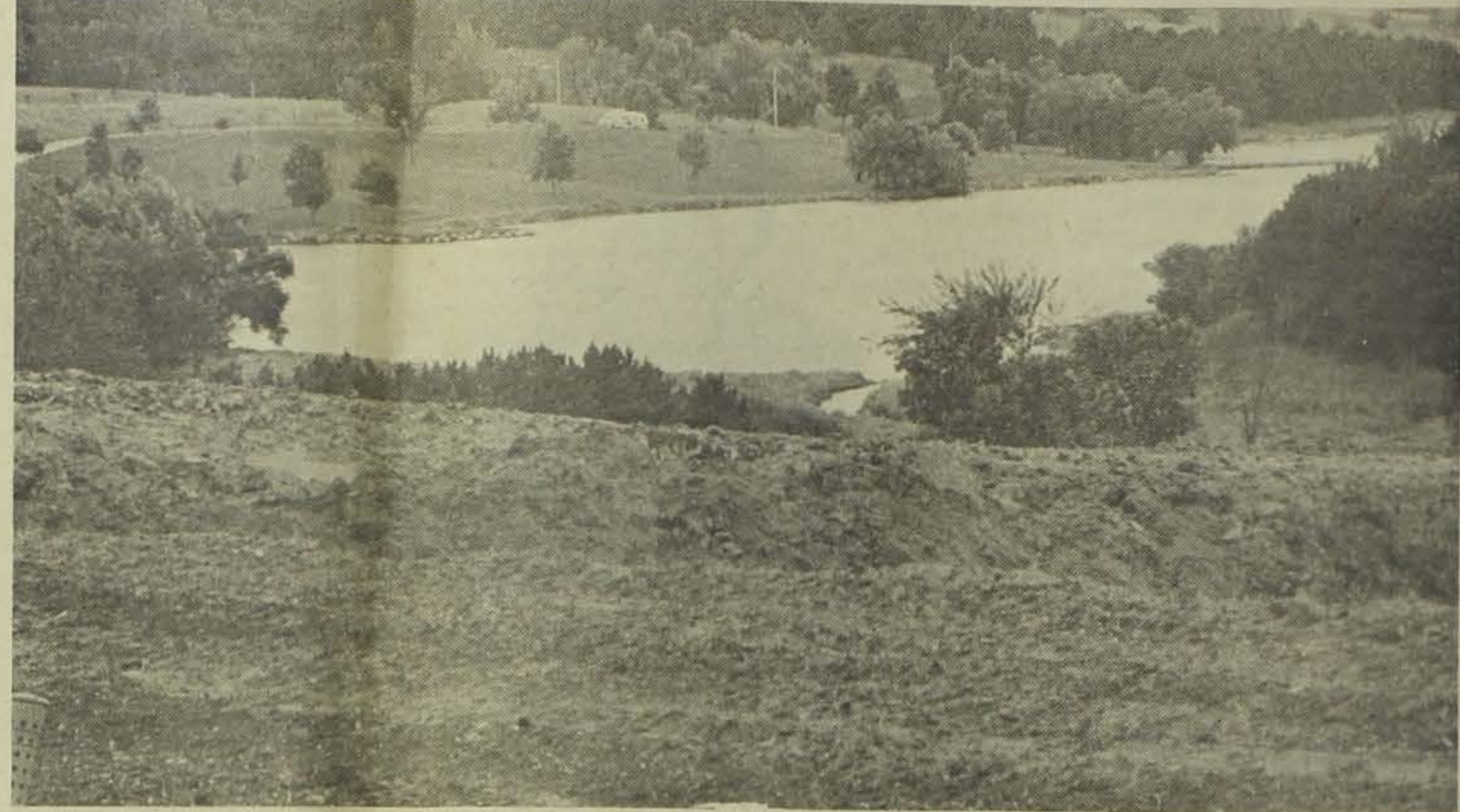
One farmer who bought land in the watershed area almost the same time as the project start is Myron Schulze who says a lot of this land was overdue for terracing and tiling. Work will be complete on 50 acres of this land soon, and "If funds are available, I'll do it all"—the remaining 80 acres, he says.

He calls the project cost sharing a "good deal," and said, "I like to cooperate with soil conservation."

In comparison with other similar projects, Brown said, "Because it's

such a small watershed, we're getting a lot done...It's easier to work with smaller (project)." He said large watershed projects sometimes have only a 20 percent participation rate.

More overall participation is needed for conservationists to reach the goal of only five tons per acre per year of topsoil lost, the level at which future productivity of soil can be maintained. Current average losses range between 25 and 50 tons lost to erosion, according to Brown.



WATERSHED AREA— Hannen Lake, pictured (above) from the north, on Myron Schulze's land, includes a 600-acre watershed area. At right, this northern terrace on his property will be completed soon, but Schulze said another one down the hill, beyond the left of the picture to the south, will be built next year. On the other end, farther north of the pictured terrace, he has plans for a pond, which would first need to be surveyed.

The "self-loading scoop" machine, as Schulze calls it, descending the hill, is moving dirt to build a "grass backslope terrace." With this type of construction, the steep backslope isn't farmed, but provides for a flatter area on which to farm next to it. Also, this type requires less soil and cost than broadbase construction, but costs more than narrow base construction.

Schulze said he plans to plant corn in this field next year, and to rotate crops in a corn-oats-grass-grass sequence. He said he thinks his crop yield next year may be only slightly lower because of the terrace construction this year. (Times photos by David Strabala)



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Good news, bad news associated with soil saving measures

Staffers inform farmers of alternatives to practices

By LYN HANSON

Times Staff Writer

VINTON— There's good news and bad news about the soil erosion situation in Benton County.

The bad news is, the county is losing an average of 13 tons of topsoil per acre per year—which means an inch of soil is lost every 12 years.

The good news is, Benton County farmers are becoming more and more aware of the need to preserve the soil, and are taking steps to do so.

That's what W. Robb Morrow and Becky Clark say. They both work for the Benton County Soil Conservation Service, and one of their jobs is to "sell" farmers on soil conservation.

According to Morrow, the number of Benton County farmers who begin no-till plowing grows by half again each year. And, he and Clark receive numerous requests each year for advice on terraces, contour plowing and conservation tillage.

Morrow and Clark do almost identical work for the SCS—designing conservation measures like terraces, estimating the cost, visiting farmers, conducting township meetings on soil conservation, analyzing soil loss on individual farms.

Morrow, however, is employed by the federal government, while Clark is employed by the state. The federal government permitted the hiring of Clark because of the seriousness of soil loss in Benton County, and because of the county's heavy dependence on agriculture for its economy.

Both of them said their job consists of not only of answering questions from farmers who approach them, but also

Becky Clark



taking the initiative to visit farmers. "We stop and visit farmers, to let them know we're here, and what services we offer," Clark said.

At one of these visits, Morrow or Clark might conduct an analysis to determine how much soil the farmer is losing. What usually follows is a recommendation of conservation practices to curb the erosion; which practices are recommended depend, of course, on the farmer's individual situation.

If a farmer decides to initiate a conservation practice, Morrow and Clark will design the conservation device, estimate its cost and, when it is built, check on it to see that it is doing what it was designed to do.

The results, both said, have been an increased use of conservation measures in the county.

Clark said contouring and minimum tillage have been the means most farmers have chosen to preserve their soil.

"Contouring doesn't cost you

anything, and in most cases, it can cut your soil losses in half," she said.

Farmers choose minimum tillage, according to Clark, because it requires little new machinery—usually, just a chisel plow instead of a moldboard—and because minimum tillage requires much less fuel than conventional plowing, because the farmer makes fewer passes over the field.

No-till is also growing in popularity, Morrow said. This is not only because leaving the stubble in the field saves soil, but also because it is so easy to do—"you just go through the field once, and you don't need any big machines and equipment."

However, Morrow said, there are holdouts in the county, who are reluctant to try conservation practices.

Those who grow hybrid seed corn, for instance, often tell Morrow that straight rows are needed for pollination of the corn, making it impossible for them to plant their crops on the contour.

To overcome skepticism, education is needed, Morrow said.

"Mainly, we educate by show and tell," he said. "We take farmers on tours of farms where conservation measures are used, and invite them back to see the results."

Morrow said his awareness of the problem of soil loss was intensified when he went to work for the SCS. "I think you really notice soil loss after you've been on this job awhile."

According to Morrow, mathematical calculations show that, to maintain soil productivity, no more than five tons of soil per acre per year can be lost. And, because Iowa's topsoil, which was once an average of 16 inches thick, now averages only eight inches, he is concerned.

So are Benton County farmers, he believes.

Though attendance varies at the township meetings he and Clark conduct about four times a year—sometimes crowded, sometimes sparse—Morrow said he believes soil conservation is catching on in the county.

Farmers in the northern part of the county—including mainly Jackson and Bruce townships, and the Garrison area—have been, on the whole, the most receptive to conservation.

"But it's hard to generalize," Morrow said. "Because there are good conservationists and holdouts in every county."

Robb Morrow



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Commissioner from Newhall

Don Weichman has always been interested

By BILL MARTIN

Times Staff Writer

NEWHALL— Don Weichman says he's "always been interested in soil conservation," and that should be obvious to even the most casual of observers—now in his third six-year term as a Benton County soil commissioner, Weichman has been practicing what he preaches for more than 30 years.

Weichman and his wife Shirley live on their 300-acre family farm 3½ miles northeast of Newhall, own another 80 acres in the county and rent 243 acres across the road from their home. That's plenty of soil, and Weichman is doing his best to keep it where it should be. "I contour all my fields, and we built a three acre pond on the family farm and built terraces that run off to the pond," Weichman said.

That pond, stocked with bass, catfish and bluegills, was up to 17 feet deep at one time. The summer's hot weather and lack of moisture has left the pond with a maximum depth of 15 feet, and Weichman, who has two stock cow herds and plants corn and soybeans, said, "The unfortunate thing is that I haven't had time to fish."

The Weichman family farm was named a Century Farm in the late 1970's. Weichman was born and raised there. After two years of military service during the Korean Conflict, he returned home to become a full-time farmer in January, 1953.

A continued dedication to conservation led to a seat on the county soil conservation commission.

"I was interested in soil conservation," Weichman said, explaining why he sought election to the commission. "I've always been interested in it, and I started practicing it in 1953."

His responsibilities as a commissioner are just as varied as are the means of conservation.

"We have guidelines set out by the state soil conservation service and we try to carry them out and improve them in our county," Weichman said. "We have business meetings once a month and carry on demonstrations, such as no-till, to encourage conservation work."

That encouragement has proven to be successful, as more Benton County farmers have adopted different conservation projects, like terracing, building windbreaks and contouring.

"There have gotten to be more and more farmers in the county doing it, I think more in the last few years than ever," said Weichman. "I think when they see their neighbors doing it, they can see how it's conserving the soil. There's no question they're saving the soil. One farmer sort of sets an example for another."

County farmers might be able to do more to help save their soil, and Weichman said, "I think there are a lot more fields that could be contoured, to minimize the number of trips over a field as much as possible. I think contouring is good, and more and more farmers are going to it every year."

"No-till is growing in popularity," Weichman said. "The new types of terraces (with tile intake) have become common in the last few years, but it all depends on the individual and the best purpose."

The business and practice of farming have changed over the past years, and one of the biggest of those changes has resulted from the federal government's Payment In Kind (PIK) program, in



HELPING TO CONSERVE— Don Weichman of rural Newhall is serving his third six-year term as a member of the Benton County soil commission, and has practiced conservation methods himself since 1953. The family dog, Prince, helps him inspect one of those conservation efforts, a man-made three acre pond which takes runoff from the terraces.

which farmers left fields idle and received crops from Uncle Sam's surplus in return.

Weichman participated in the PIK program and said he believed it achieved the goal it was intended to, reducing the amount of surplus grain in the United States and boosting prices for farm products—with a little help from the weather.

"It (PIK) achieved its purpose. Of course, this year with the dry summer it curtailed production and spurred prices. It served its purpose I guess, but Mother Nature helped out, too."

Among the more permanent or longer-lasting changes, Weichman said, "The biggest difference is, of course, is that no-till came into the picture the last couple of years. And some farmers have now gone to wider-based terraces to eliminate some of the waterway. The newer-style terraces can accommodate bigger machinery."

Weichman also said there may be a different look on the farms in Benton County over the next decade, partly as a result of increased efforts to help conserve the soil.

"I do feel there is more conservation taking place. I think the younger generation of farmers has seen the benefits of it and will practice it more," he said. "Unfortunately, we have had rain storms once in a while, but they're a reminder to the farmer who gets them, to try to do as much as he can to keep the soil where it was originally put."

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Field mapping of soil survey to be completed in Iowa

AMES—Field mapping for a 40-year-long modern soil survey program will soon be completed in Iowa, according to Gerald Miller, Iowa State University extension agronomist. Although the surveys may be done soon, Miller said the process of updating those surveys had just begun.

By 1989 modern soil surveys are scheduled to be finished in 97 and perhaps all of Iowa's 99 counties, Miller said. Survey fieldwork has already been completed in three-fourths of the counties. Of those counties, 80 percent have published modern soil survey reports; published reports for the remaining counties will be available within the next four years.

Fieldwork for the modern soil survey probably will peak next year. Because no new surveys are scheduled to begin after that, plans are being made to shift staff of the Iowa Cooperative Soil Survey to provide more service support for existing soil surveys.

When the fieldwork is completed, Miller said, the soil survey process will not stop because existing soil survey information must be updated continually to keep resource materials accurate and reliable.

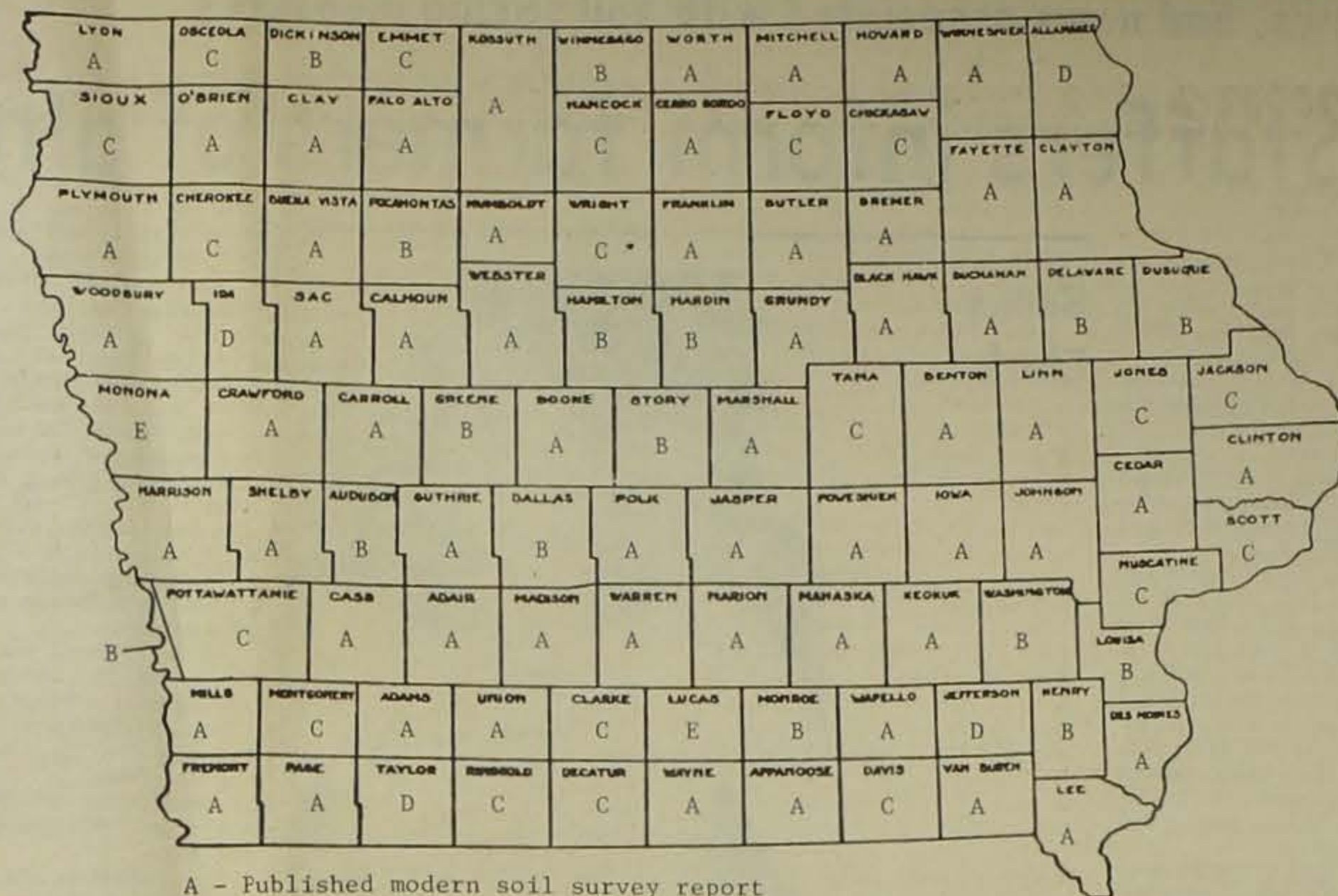
In addition to updating new information about Iowa's soil resources, Miller said the Iowa Cooperative Soil Survey must work to "repackage" that information in a form that will be most useful to land owners and users. For instance, when the present round of modern county soil surveys began in

the 1950s, Miller said there was no need to interpret soil properties for herbicide use and management. Because of more intensive use of farm chemicals, Iowa farmers now need access to information that rates soil in terms of herbicide sensitivity.

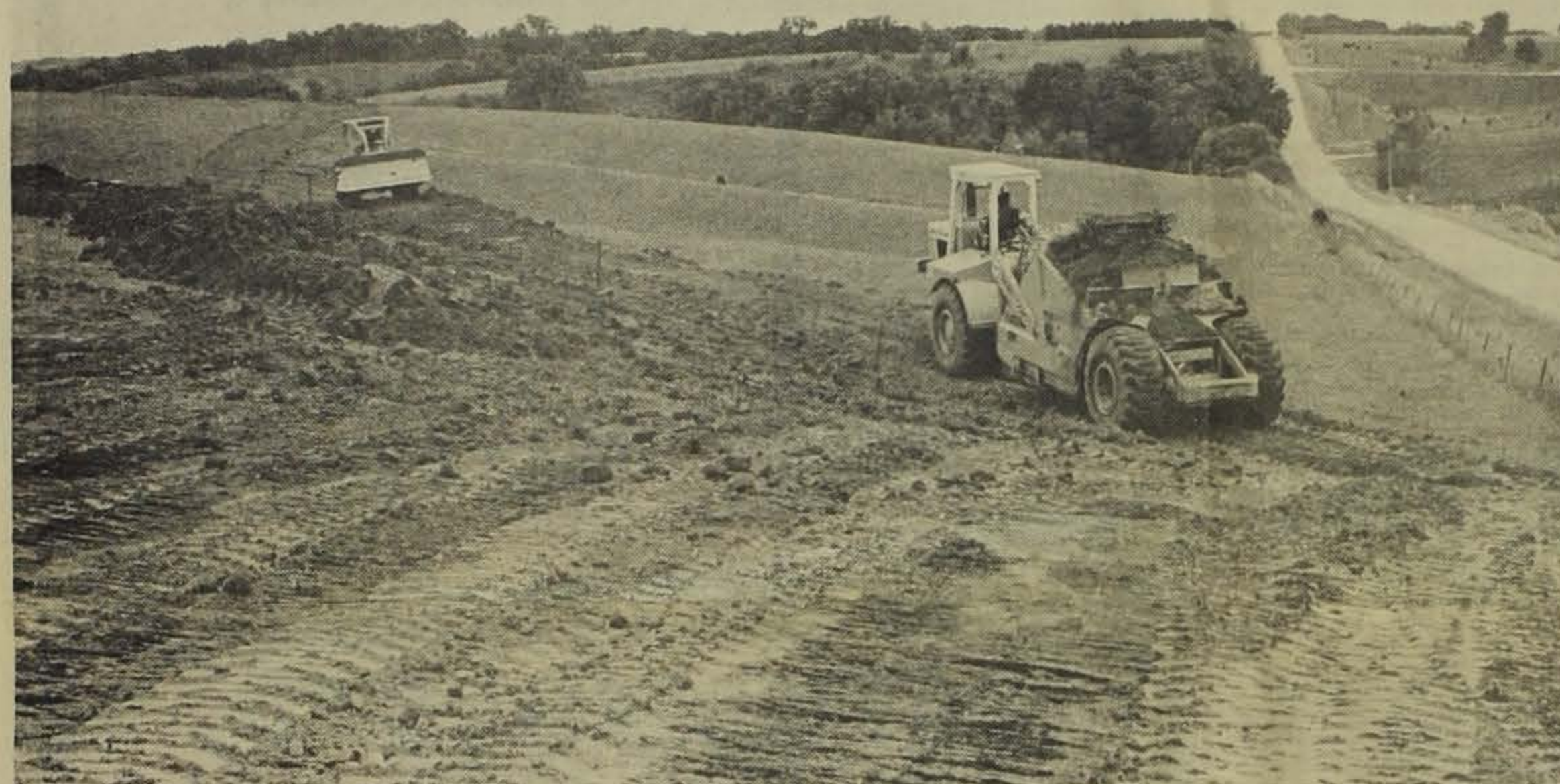
Other types of information land owners will need in the next five, 10 or 25 years may not be included in the current county soil surveys. In that case, soil scientists will have to go back into a county to conduct the necessary investigations and collect new data, according to the specialist.

Identified as prime candidates for ongoing soil survey work are those counties where fieldwork was conducted during the 1950s and early 1960s. The existing soil maps of these counties may be adequate, but new interpretations and updates of existing information are needed. In some instances, more fieldwork and limited resurveying may be required to accomplish this, Miller said the new process will not be nearly as costly as the complete standard soil survey has been, however, additional funding from local, state and federal sources will have to be found.

The cooperating agencies of Iowa Cooperative Soil Survey are the USDA Soil Conservation Service, the Iowa Department of Soil Conservation, the Iowa Agriculture and Home Economics Experiment Station, and the Iowa State University Cooperative Extension Service.



- A - Published modern soil survey report
 B - Fieldwork completed, modern soil survey report to be published
 C - Fieldwork in progress
 D - Fieldwork scheduled to start in 1983 or 1984
 E - Published modern soil survey in need of major updating



EARTHMOVING—This picture of terrace work on land north and west of Hannen Lake, owned by Myron Schulze, shows a southerly point of view, with

the lake just hidden at the far left of the horizon. This is part of a 50-acre section Schulze is terracing this year. (Times photo by David Strabala)

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Staff

Continued from page 10

He is part of the federal Volunteers in Protecting Soil, or VIPS, program. He usually works only in March and April, and is unpaid.

His work includes help with layouts and designs of conservation measures, surveying, designing small structures

and general fieldwork.

Dickinson is originally from Cedar Falls, but spent his childhood in various Iowa towns, where his father was a superintendent of schools.

During his years in the Army Corps of Engineers, he lived in Rock Island, Ill.

Currently, he and his wife, Elsie, live on the farm near Shellsburg where Elsie grew up.

They have four children—Earle of Cedar Rapids, Steve of Cedar Rapids, Richard of Decatur, Ill. and Marian of Denver, Colo.

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