

ANNUAL REPORT

POWESHIEK COUNTY SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT

The commissioners of the Poweshiek County Soils Conservation District wish to present to the farmers, all cooperating groups, and others in the county interested in soils conservation this report of the progress of the district for the year 1947 and the outlook for 1948.

ANNUAL REPORT -- 1947

POWESHIEK COUNTY SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT

The Poweshiek County Soil Conservation District during its two years of operations has made good progress. This progress has come about mainly because the district has made good use of local neighborhood leaders. This leadership has accepted responsibilities which are necessary and can only be carried out by individuals having frequent and close contacts with their neighbors. Some of the important responsibilities handled by these men are:

1. Breaking down wrong opinions, such as "soil conservation can be put off" or "conservation is only needed on worn-out farms"
2. Convincing his neighbors that soil conservation is practical and profitable
3. Demonstrating that farmers can establish many of the practices without assistance
4. Arranging local meetings and demonstrations and assisting with on-site training jobs

Each year of district operations, it becomes more apparent that technical assistance is becoming more limited. We also appreciate that there never will be enough paid workers to give on-site assistance to every farmer. Therefore, new techniques, methods or ways are needed to train farmers to do most of the job themselves.

The demand for assistance points out that the paid workers must be alert, well-trained and cooperative, and can make a real contribution if the district program and operations are well planned and active.

The work of the Poweshiek County Soils District is directed by the commissioners consisting of J. J. Boatman, chairman; Howard Sears; and Elmer Dunnick. L. D. Brown, County Extension Director, serves as secretary. Elmer Dunnick was re-elected commissioner for a term of six years at an election held in the county courthouse in Montezuma, Saturday evening, June 14, 1947. The technical work for the district is under the supervision of Morton C. James and Robert Lord. Richard Hogue also assisted during the year 1947 until his transfer. Lyall Mitchell is District Conservationist.

A great deal has been said and published, especially the past year by organizations, agencies, institutions, and individuals about duplication and overlapping. The Poweshiek District has not experienced duplication or overlapping of efforts, and its commissioners are of the opinion that if such a situation exists elsewhere, it is mainly because: (1) The District program and plan of operations are not too definite, well planned, or clearly understood by the agencies, organizations, institutions, and individuals who are in a position to assist. In other words--"they do not understand the job or how to get it done". (2) Each organization or agency is not willing to make its contribution. (3) The local governing body is not accepting its responsibilities.

The Poweshiek District commissioners believe that there should be a long-time soil conservation program which is of national scope. The soil conservation district movement provides such a program, and if many difficulties are encountered it is because of the lack of general understanding and the spirit of cooperativeness.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The soil improvement and conservation program in Poweshiek County is developing very successfully. With the county having been settled only 100 years and with over one-half of the top soil now eroded or worn away, soil improvement and conservation is becoming one of the most important educational programs in the county. This program is a cooperative enterprise between the Extension Service, Soil Conservation Service, and the Soil Conservation District. The Extension Service Personnel directs the Educational work.

The Soil Conservation District program is being developed around local groups. It is realized that individual work is too slow and ineffective, so the group effort is used. Where interest is evidenced in soil conservation, group meetings are arranged through a leader in the community, farmers in the area invited to these meetings and the soil conservation program outlined to them by representatives of the Soil Conservation Service, one of the soil commissioners and the Extension Director. After an explanation of the program has been made and if there is enough interest in the group to make it worthwhile, a request for Soil Conservation Service help is signed by those present and a leader selected for the group. This request for help is then acted upon by the county commissioners who place a priority for work on the request and the soil technicians then go ahead with the developing of farm plans as rapidly as possible.

A series of contour demonstrations were held during the month of April. In the areas where soils groups were organized, the soils technicians held demonstrations. In the other areas demonstrations were held by the County Extension Director and Forrest Road, of the AAA. Demonstrations were held at the farms of A. A. Sears, Chester Township; Dick Seeland, Chester Township; Arthur Keller, Madison Township; Bruce Ostrom, Jefferson Township; Shirley Eichhorn, Grant Township; Lyle Bauman, Malcom Township; P. V. Gallagher, Bear Creek Township; Louis McCoster, Warren Township; Robert Burns, Scott Township; Harley Hillman, Lincoln Township and Marvin Watson, Sugar Creek Township. These demonstrations were attended by approximately 150 people.

A very successful Soils Field Day was held on the Bruce Livingston farm near Montezuma, September 3, 1947. This event was sponsored by the Poweshiek County Soils District in cooperation with the Extension Service and the Farm Bureau. Committees were appointed for looking after the plans of this event. A chairman was selected for each of the three planned activities and committees appointed to secure machinery, seed and look after other plans of the event. Events scheduled consisted of contour plowing contest, waterway demonstration, and pasture improvement demonstration; but due to extremely dry weather, it was only possible to hold the waterway demonstration. A ditch approximately 100 rods long was filled by the aid of bulldozers and farm plows. The waterway was shaped, reseeded and mulched. As a part of the demonstration, bulldozers grubbed out a number of trees. Approximately 750 people attended this demonstration.

Plans are being discussed for an even larger and more expansive demonstration for the next year.

A fertilizer meeting was held in the Brooklyn Town Hall on December 3, 1946, with Mr. Horace Cheney from the Extension Service discussing fertilizer problems of feed and fertilizer companies.

Several meetings were held in the county to discuss the use of commercial fertilizers. It was found that there is a need for considerable education among farmers on the subject of commercial fertilizers. Some of the companies selling fertilizers in the county have attempted to dispose of any fertilizer which they might have on hand, in spite of whether or not the fertilizer was adapted to this area. It is planned to conduct more meetings on the use of fertilizers during the coming year. It is estimated that a total of 1,000 tons of commercial fertilizers was applied in the county and nearly 50,000 tons of limestone spread during the past year.

In planning the work for another year groups are to be organized in areas of the county which have not been reached with a definite soils program. It is felt that by organizing groups in these areas that soil conservation work will grow in, not only through the individual farms in the program, but also by these farms serving as demonstrations for adjoining farms. It is impossible to reach every farmer with a definite soil program. Some of the conservation work will have to be done by farmers taking it upon themselves to do the work.

FIELD OPERATIONS

Soil Conservation Planning Groups

Two soil conservation planning groups were organized in 1947 - one in Sugar Creek and one in Lincoln township. These, added to old groups, increased the total of 20 groups. Bear Creek and Scott are now the only unrepresented townships.

In the development of farm plans Group No. 12 (Adelbert Sears, chairman) was practically finished by the end of the year. Eight groups, containing approximately 150 farms, therefore remain to start the new year.

Conservation Plans

Fifty one farmers were assisted in the preparation of conservation plans in 1947. This is a reduction from the 86 prepared in 1946, and was expected due to a much greater proportion of the technicians' time being required in applying the practices planned the previous year.

Apparently, interest among farmers in developing farm plans is as good as ever and a high percentage of those attending group planning meetings came through with conservation programs. Those who have dropped out quite often have not attended the original organization meetings, and have not had a very clear idea of what it was all about.

Application of Conservation Practices

Taken as a whole this has been a good year for application of conservation on the land.

There have been some bad spots due mostly to weather. In the line of crops, nothing looked too good regardless of how well done. A normally good practice looked like a bad practice this year. During June when the rains were pouring down it was too wet to cultivate corn and even though rows were on the contour no ridges were present to impede soil loss. And finally, when the soil became dry enough to cultivate, no more water came to save or to cause erosion. At best corn got off to a very late start, was weedy and nothing to admire. Likewise, the same was true with corn planted up and down hill.

Forage crops were slow in early spring due to cold wet weather. When the rains stopped and the weather began getting hot, bluegrass and red clover-timothy meadows started browning while alfalfa-brome meadows remained green and succulent. As the drouth continued blue grass and timothy pastures cancelled clear out.

Progress in terracing got off to a good start in the spring but dry soil conditions in late summer and fall made the job out of the question. Approximately 10 miles of terraces were constructed in 1947.

Good progress has been made in the shaping of gullies for grassed waterways. Some of this has been done with ordinary farm equipment but more commonly with bulldozer outfits. Approximately 32 miles of waterway was shaped for seeding this past summer.

On many farms a large uncontrolled gully prevented development of a satisfactory conservation plan. During 1947 a good start was made in gully control work. One structure has been completed on the Marion Palmer farm in Union Township. With the assistance of Engineering technician, Dilman Moothart, plans are being made for structures on four additional farms which will be constructed in 1948. There is a need and active demand for such engineering assistance far in excess of the districts ability to supply.

Much interest has been shown in tiling. No doubt much of this is due to good farm income and the recent wet weather. Progress has been retarded by lack of tile and tilers, and as these bottlenecks are eliminated, activity will pick up.

Four farm ponds were finished during the year and one which was built a year earlier (the Roy Utter pond) was stocked to bluegills and bass. More ponds will be ready for stocking next fall.

Preliminary conclusions from the field trials with grasses and legumes in the district indicate that Alta Fescue may be useful for rotation hay, partly substituting for timothy and brome. According to Mr. George Wilson on whose farm the trial was located, Alta Fescue seems to do quite a bit better on poor soil than brome, is more drouth resistant than timothy, and makes a good seed crop which is easy to handle.

Birdsfoot trefoil and ladino clover both established good stands and look promising but it is too early to say much about their pasturing qualities.

Assistance Given to Groups Organized But Not Planned

During February and March just prior to the spring layout season, meetings were held in all organized groups - both those which had been planned and those which organized only.

With the planned groups this provided the means of setting up a schedule of work or assistance calendar saving time for the technician as well as the farmer. With the unplanned groups the meetings served to stimulate interest, to encourage applicants to install conservation practices not needing assistance and again to give the technician an idea what help was needed, when and how much.

It has been the policy of the district to make group applicants second in priority only to farmers with farm plans in extending technical assistance. In line with this policy several individuals have been helped with waterways, small structures, ponds, terraces, tiling and seedings throughout the year.

As a service to organized groups contour demonstrations were held in several of the unplanned groups by district technicians. This can be continued in 1948 if desired or perhaps something a little more advanced may be demonstrated such as alternate strip cropping.

W. S. McLennon and Son, and Russell Winburn, farmers cooperating with the district in the production of Fischer bromegrass seed, harvested seed crops amounting to something over 100 pounds per acre in August. Each cooperator had approximately 6 acres. This is an average good yield for the first year's seed crop. If this brome passes certification requirements the district will be entitled to 25 per cent of this seed for reissue to other prospective seed producers in the county.

PROBLEMS AND OUTLOOK

Educational

Educational activities in this district have been very good in the past and there must be no slackening in this respect in the future because there are still many people to reach. This includes not only many farmers who are not acquainted with or lack the desire to start conservation, but also many non-operating owners who feel that the land should continue to produce without any necessity of returning plant food and fertilizers. We commend the many commercial groups who have taken up the "call to conservation" and urge them to continue the good work.

Formation of Additional Groups

The commissioners have in the past urged and have assisted in the formation of groups with the result that 20 groups have been formed to date with 12 groups having been taken through planning meetings. After a study of the situation, the commissioners have decided that it may be best for an organized group not to have to wait too long for assistance in planning as they tend to lose interest, but to assure that there are sufficient groups to supply the planning needs for a season in advance. However, they will not discourage any group from organizing which desires to do so. From interest shown by various individuals in different localities, it is evident that more groups could be organized if only a little encouragement were given.

High Prices

There is a very strong temptation to continue the high percentage of clean tilled crops on land which may have had too much corn and beans during the recent war years. Keeping in mind that high production is necessary, the commissioners urge each farmer to seriously study the need of using good rotations because it is so easy to lose thru erosion more than is gained by forced production and high prices. There are no short cuts to high organic content and wise land use.

Conservation Practices

Even though the thought on the formation of groups has been modified, it does not effect the starting of the use of simple practices such as contouring, preparation of grassed waterways, and pasture improvement. Thru demonstrations and assistance even by neighbors, every farmer should use these where needed.

It is expected that there will be another increase in the amount of assistance requested for layout of the more technical practices. Group application can assist in this respect.

There is the prospect that more gully control structures will be built this coming year and a working relationship with good contractors should be established in order to get these installed.

Technical Assistance

We consider that our number one problem is that of the lack of technical assistance. There are a number of things which the farmer can do with a minimum of information or instruction, but there are other things which need technical assistance to plan and apply. Therefore, we urge that more funds be provided for technicians.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the commissioners of the Poweshiek County Soil Conservation District wish to voice their appreciation to everyone who has participated or assisted during the past year. This will include the Extension Service, the Soil Conservation Service, the Production Marketing Administration, the newspapers, the schools, the bankers association, the various planning groups, the machinery dealers and any others which we have not listed.

DATE

January 29, 1948

(SIGNED) Poweshiek County Soils Commissioners

J. J. Boatman
J. J. Boatman, Chairman

Elmer Dunnick
Elmer Dunnick

Howard Sears
Howard Sears

ANNUAL REPORT OF CONSERVATION PRACTICES

DISTRICT Poweshiek County
(Name)

Brooklyn, Iowa
(Hdqtrs. Dist. Gov. Body)

(State)

Period Jan. 1 , 1947 to Dec. 31 , 1947

Agreements Signed:	This Year	To Date	Amendments:	This Year	To Date	Agreements Cancelled:	To Date
Number:	<u>51</u>	<u>151</u>	Number:	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	Number:	<u>0</u>
Acres:		<u>26,298</u>				Acres:	<u>0</u>

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