

1949

ANNUAL REPORT

POWESHIEK COUNTY SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT

BROOKLYN, IOWA

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 1949 and the outlook for 1950.



THE DISTRICT GOVERNING BODY

Howard Sears, Malcom, Iowa	Chairman
J. J. Boatman, Montezuma, Iowa	Commissioner
Elmer Dunnick, Montezuma, Iowa	Commissioner

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The Poweshiek County Soil Conservation District, at the completion of its fourth year of operation, now has visible results of applied conservation. The work is spread over a wide area and although every township does not have groups organized for conservation, evidence points to that situation becoming a reality in the near future.

Some of the impatience on the part of the farmers for assistance experienced earlier is abating but the demand is still strong and an understanding of policies and procedures are better known.

We are attaining results from educational and technical work that is developing a healthful condition for the District.

No county contour plowing match was held in 1949. This caused some criticism because it did not afford contestants opportunity to enter other advanced competition. The moisture and weather conditions were deemed unfavorable to a successful contest in this area and we considered a poor contest would be detrimental to the work and to the District.

Your District has as commissioners Howard Sears, J. J. Boatman, and Elmer Dunnick. Howard Sears was reelected to a six year term and has served as Chairman of the District during 1949.

Lyall Mitchell, District Conservationist, Morton James, Farm Planner, and Archie Casebolt, Conservation Aid, have given valuable assistance as representatives of the Soil Conservation Service.

Loren Brown, County Extension Director, has directed an active education and information program and has served as secretary of the District to the mutual satisfaction of all concerned and particularly the commissioners.

Material assistance in the form of financial aid given by the State of Iowa to the Poweshiek County Soil Conservation District is very much appreciated by the commissioners especially in view of the prospects of reduced acreages in intertilled crops which will cause a further demand for Soil Conservation work.

This aid has made possible the addition of personnel, namely Loren Shaw and O. H. Van Zee, technical aids to the staff working from Brooklyn District Office. They will be working with and under the direction of Morton James.

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

It is felt that one of the most important phases of the educational program in the district is that of soil improvement and soil conservation. Farmers are becoming more conscious each year of the need for soil conservation practices. One only needs to observe the erosion in any area to be aware of the fact that in some places the work is not starting soon enough.

The soil conservation program is a cooperative enterprise between the Extension Service, Soil Conservation Service, and the Soil Conservation District. The county extension director served as secretary of the county district and as representative of the Extension Service, directed the educational work.

The organization work in Poweshiek District has been directed toward the group plan. It has been felt that through these groups development of the program might be carried on with less effort and more quickly than where just individual farms are planned. When there is enough interest in an area to develop a group, an interest meeting is called at which time the program is explained by representatives of the various agencies. If there is enough interest for the forming of a group, plans are laid and a leader elected. Priority for work is then made and the technicians develop farm plans as soon as possible.

A very successful soil conservation banquet was held the evening of February 28, 1949 at the Malcom school. The banquet was served by the Malcom Parent Teachers Association. One hundred and forty-eight people attended. Howard Sears, chairman of the district commissioners, acted as chairman of the meeting. Program consisted of piano music by Mr. Anderson, Music Instructor of Brooklyn school, vocal music by Mrs. Lyall Mitchell, Oskaloosa, accordion music by Mrs. L. V. Willison of Montezuma. Frank Mendell, State Conservationist of the Soil Conservation Service, made brief remarks and R. K. Bliss, former director of Extension Service, addressed the group on the values of soil conservation work. Morton James, District Farm Planner, showed colored pictures of soil conservation activities in the county.

In the election for district commissioner, Howard Sears was reelected for a six-year term.

The third annual Soil Conservation Field Day was held at the George Dale farm in Deep River township, Tuesday afternoon, September 13, 1949, with about 250 people attending. The event started with a contour walking contest with nine participants. Maurice Boatman placed first, Clem De Meulenaere, second and Robert Walter, third. A hand level was awarded Burdette Cranston for being the farthest off the contour. The demonstration program consisted of pasture renovation with Ralph Krenzin, Extension Agronomist, leading the discussion, fence removal demonstration, grassed waterway demonstration and conversion terrace demonstration. Farmers acting as leaders for demonstrations were: Dean Cranston, Arthur Reed, Alvin Schuldt, Wayne Reams and Harley Hillman.

Something new was attempted in Poweshiek County in August when a soils air tour was held. Arrangements were made with the Neiderhauser Airways of Grinnell, to furnish an airplane to tour the county. Fourteen farmers participated in this tour which took them over their own farms and their neighbors farms where an exceptional job of soil conservation work was being carried out. Those taking part in the tour expressed their pleasure in this trip and it is anticipated that in another year there will be more interest.

A soil sampling training school for PMA men was held at Brooklyn, April 14, 1949, with farmers from Benton, Tama and Poweshiek counties attending. The demonstration was held at the Melvin Doty farm near Brooklyn. H. B. Cheney and Darrell Russell, Extension Agronomists, conducted the meeting. There has been considerable interest in Poweshiek County during the past year in soil testing work and through the cooperation with the county PMA 158 samples of soil were tested during the year. Over 100 samples of soil were tested in the extension office for lime requirements.

Because of the interest in the use of commercial fertilizers, meetings were planned during the month of February and March with the township Farm Bureaus. The county extension director and County Farm Bureau Fieldman and Farm Service Company manager assisted with these meetings and presented information relative to the use of commercial fertilizers.

FIELD OPERATIONS

PROGRESS IN DEVELOPMENT OF CONSERVATION PLANS

Since the beginning of the district, 22 groups have been organized. Planning work is almost complete on 19, leaving 3 groups ahead or something under 57 farms waiting for technical assistance. With the present staff, about one year will be required to take care of applications on file.

To date a total of 221 farms amounting to 38,735 acres have been planned. During 1949, 40 farmers were assisted in developing conservation plans, comprising a total of 7,242 acres. The rate of progress has improved from 1948 by the addition of Mr. Casebolt as an aid.

Interest among farmers in developing conservation plans remains good with a high percentage of those attending group meetings developing conservation plans.

Application Of Conservation Practices:

Weather — One of the most important factors influencing conservation practices is the weather. In 1949 the weather was similar to 1948 except that in 1949 there were no highly erosive storms as was the case in early February 1948.

In most of the county, at least, no rains occurred during the entire crop season that could be considered severely destructive. Rarely in the spring has there been such an opportunity for establishing sod in grass waterways without washing rains. Unfortunately, only a few took the chance, because ordinarily spring is a poor time to start waterways. In August and September the weather was too dry for satisfactory establishment of waterways.

Most seedings came through the winter of 1948-49 in good shape. It is too early yet to determine how well 1948 spring seedings survived the rather dry summer of 1949.

Results of Field Trials — An evaluation of trails of Birdsfoot Trefoil and Ladino clover on the Geo. Wilson and J. J. Boatman farms indicates that birdsfoot trefoil gives the greatest promise of value. The ladino clover was almost entirely destroyed by winter killing. On the other hand, birdsfoot has made a steady improvement and is looking even better than in 1948. It appears that it is well adapted to the kind of land that needs to be in permanent pasture or permanent hay. In view of these observations, a district sponsored program might be initiated to encourage farmers to become producers of birdsfoot trefoil seed.

Multiflora Rose Plantings — Multiflora rose plants were secured in 1948 for trial planting on several cooperating farms. The ultimate purpose was for living contour fences. Unfortunately very few plants survived, probably due to weak planting stock and to unfavorable weather. In 1949 the district obtained 1500 multiflora roses which were used as partial replacement. Unlike the 1948 stock the plants were strong and healthy and it appears that a high percentage have survived. With increasing interest and greater availability of roses the program of establishing multiflora rose fences is expected to expand greatly.

Fischer Brome Seed Increase Program — Two farmers were added as cooperators in the production of certified Fischer brome grass seed. They are Lauren Wright, Montezuma and Raymond Tarvin, Malcom. Seed issued them was grown by Russell Winburn, Malcom. It is not known at present how much seed will be available for new cooperators for 1950 seedings.

Grassed Waterways — Establishment of grass waterways remains one of the principal bottlenecks in installing a complete conservation program on farms. Successful contouring, strip cropping, terracing and diversions depend on adequate waterways. Even in the groups organized but not planned, considerable emphasis could well be made to start the program of seeding waterways.

Although the weather is the most important factor in successful waterway establishment, more emphasis could be placed on the use of brome and reed canary grass. Reed canary, without doubt, is the better of the two, but it still presents a difficult problem in establishment. If a "sod bank" (one-tenth to one-half acre) could be started on every farm, sod would be available to establish stands in waterways, reliably and at low cost. A more active campaign to get Reed canary sod banks on every farm would be a big step toward control of cropland ditches. Brome grass seeding has been reasonably successful.

Strip Cropping — Strip cropping in some form has been used as a control measure on about half of the farms planned. Where terraces are feasible and acceptable to the cooperator they will accomplish a higher degree of control and permit a simpler system of rotation pasturing. Even though less simple, rotation pasturing can be arranged on strip cropped fields if a long rotation is used.

Terracing and Diversion — Progress of terracing in the spring was better than anticipated due to favorable weather and slower than expected in the summer due to dry weather. Terracing on many farms is being held up for lack of suitable waterways. Three miles of terrace and almost 5 miles of diversion was constructed in 1949.

Ponds and Structures — Ponds were constructed on five farms during the past season. Six were stocked with fish. Inspection of the Roy Utter farm which was stocked with bass and bluegills in September 1947, has shown satisfactory fishing with good catches of bluegills and some bass.

Engineering plans were completed on the Carl Tokel farm and Harley Reimers farms during the year. It is expected these will be built as soon as a contractor can be obtained to do the work.

Tiling — There has been a lot of tile laid during the past season - - some by hand, some by large machines, some by Jeep outfits, and some with mole blind ditchers. The quality of some was good, some bad and some indifferent. The district office has made an attempt to give technical assistance to cooperators when requested. Not a lot was requested, but enough checking has been done to indicate that where tiling is done on flat land technical assistance should by all means be obtained - - before, to survey line and afterward, to check for adherence to survey. In this respect the district is in a good position to give reliable, unbiased service.

Assistance Given To Groups Organized But Not Planned

Early in February letters were mailed to each group chairman asking if meetings would be helpful in maintaining interest and scheduling application assistance. Favorable replies were received from about half the groups. In these, meetings were held with good interest and moderately good attendance. It was possible to schedule considerable assistance for spring layouts which was an aid in preventing a pile up of requests in the spring rush season.

PROBLEMS AND OUTLOOK

The weather was quite favorable in 1949 for the application of conservation practices. This was especially true of the late fall as the weather permitted various earth moving jobs up close to December 15. No unusual difficulty was experienced in keeping contoured corn clean although an increased use of 2,4-D was seen.

Corn borer infestation saw an increase in 1949 and unless a more universal plan of eradication is practiced by all farmers or unless weather conditions are adverse for the borers we will probably see this continue to increase. Various methods of control are receiving increased attention.

The killing of meadows during the winter of 1947 and 1948 still has its effect on crop rotations and the production of seed. A shortage of legume seed and the high price will, without doubt, have its serious effect upon the amount of seeding that will be made in 1950. This, of course, will affect the amount of intertilled crops which will be planted but that in turn will be effected by acreage allotments.

There was still too much corn grown in 1948 for the good of the soil. This, too, is reflected in the amount of surplus corn and the amount that was necessary to store or seal. At the present time, it appears that there will be about 19 per cent decrease in the amount of corn which will be controlled by allotments. This presents a real problem to the man who has been following a good crop rotation and who already has his corn acreage in line with his rotation. Unfortunately, he may have to take a considerable cut in order to comply with the benefits of the allotment program even though the actual acres he reduces will not be a larger factor in the total reduction of corn acres within the district.

In connection with corn allotment, the problem of determining actual acres in strip cropped fields does not have a ready solution. These strip cropped fields were planned with an approximate acreage but they appear not to be accurate enough for planning of acreage control. They will present a problem to the farmer as well as a problem of measuring for compliance by the PMA man. The only solution seen at the present time for the farmer, is to place his acreage sufficiently below his allotment to make sure that he does not exceed it.

Some of the other problems as listed in the 1948 and previous annual reports exist with no additional known method of solution. This includes large gullies, pasture improvement on a wider use, and insect infestation. By the latter we mean those insects such as grass hoppers and other than corn borers which were discussed earlier.

On the other side of the picture, we are glad to report that soil and water conservation is receiving ever increasing attention by various organizations and a greater number of people. The Iowa State Department of Public Instructions saw fit to devote the entire day at the teachers institute this fall on conservation, that is for elementary teachers in all schools. Various companies are assisting a great deal in urging farmers to adopt soil conservation practices. The Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company is carrying on their third annual soil conservation contest. Machinery companies include much soil conservation in their advertisements. The newspapers are very willing to cooperate on spreading the word.

A major item of encouragement in Iowa is that the state legislature voted to appropriate \$250,000 each year for a two year period for use in soil conservation districts. This is to be divided so that each district is to receive \$500 for commissioner and other expenses and the sum of \$200,000 is to be allotted on a need basis in the various districts for clerical and technical assistance. The allotments of the \$500 and a portion of the larger fund is greatly appreciated by the commissioners in this district and will be used to promote soil conservation in the best manner possible.

CONCLUSION

The commissioners appreciate the continued cooperation of all groups, including the press, schools, farm organizations, civic groups working closely together for the good of soil conservation and good land use.

The assistance of Soil Conservation Service, the Extension Service, and the PMA to the District will make possible the continued harmonious success in the work of soil conservation in Poweshiek County in 1950.

