

Remarks by Carroll J. Hobson, Chairman Hardin County SCD,
Member of the State Soil Conservation Committee, made at the
Governor's Rural Policy Council Meeting in Eldora, Iowa, November 30, 1971

Governor Ray, Members of the Council and Ladies and Gentlemen:

Soil Conservation and farming are the two subjects that get most of my time and energy. They are the subjects I want to discuss here today. In my estimation, farming and soil conservation are so closely related as to be inseparable. It follows then that we must deal with them both if we expect to identify and solve the problems at hand.

Hardin County is a reasonably prosperous county, we raise a lot of hogs and we feed quite a few cattle. The 1971 corn and soybean crops are estimated to be 18,000,000 bushels of corn and 3,000,000 bushels of soybeans respectively. You can see at the outset that we are oriented to a corn, soybean, livestock economy. Our soil is fertile and we give a good account of ourselves in the corn yield contest as compared with other counties in the state. We in Hardin County are blessed with a fine Soil Conservation Staff, a good office, strong Soil Conservation District Commissioners, a good reputation, and a broad acceptance by the people. These facts have been true generally speaking since the soil district was formed 26 years ago. At the present time 42% of our county is, in a manner of speaking, taken care of, from the conservation standpoint. This "provided for" land includes all that man made conservation measures have taken care of, plus pasture, woodland, and land so flat as to not have soil losses of mention. The remaining 58% that needs conservation work, ranges in soil losses from 4 tons per acre per year to an extreme of 30 tons per acre per year. We have three watersheds in progress, the Pine Lake Watershed, around our lakes, which has made remarkable progress, in the other two Union and Honeycomb, progress is much slower.

You may ask, what is holding you people up if you have a good organization, popular acceptance and productive land to work with? There are only a few reasons why progress in conservation is slow in our county. The first

and worst problem is the dollar cost of permanent soil conservation measurers. These construction costs can be severe or moderate depending on what the land needs, the cropping sequence, cropping practices, length and percent of slope, and the type of soil being taken care of. As you can well imagine the least valuable and the least "able to pay." land will likely require the most money spent, to save and repair it. Conservation construction costs, which would include terraces with the necessary tile system, can range from \$120 per acre to \$170 per acre. These figures are based on present day cost estimates in this county. This system would allow intense row crop farming.

The U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee estimated that in 1970 the average farmer in the United States had a disposable income of \$2,633 per capita, I recognize that an Iowa farmer would have more income since we have fertile soil and a better opportunity than many. However if we doubled this figure you can see at the outset that the farmer cannot buy very many terraces with his disposable income. Families always come first, so do educations, taxes, and a host of other living costs. We have some people who could afford to put on the conservation work but who won't. I think the new Conservancy District Law passed by the legislature last year will take care of that type of problem.

In my State Soil Conservation Committee work I have discovered that when 80% cost sharing is available the demand for terraces and other conservation work is so great that the work cannot be processed fast enough by the existing agencies and completed with the available contractors. This I think proves beyond a doubt that farmers are not against conservation work and that they do recognize its value not only for themselves but for the oncoming generations.

We have available in Hardin County only what cost sharing the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Services can allow us which is approximately 50% on a limited number of terraces and structures, because their

budget is limited, and shrinking every year. We have also had some help within the Pine Lake Watershed from the State Conservation Commission, which we are very grateful for. This help has to be limited to the watershed around the state owned lakes however, and understandably so.

A Land Use Policy is being studied and is under consideration for the State of Iowa at this time. I feel confident a land use policy will not only be helpful to Agriculture and Industry but will compliment the Conservancy District Law. Hopefully some of our steepest slopes would go into grass in the future. I think the repeal of the personal tax on cows was a step in the right direction and did help conservation in a general way, as well as providing more income for our state.

A sad fact of life is that with low farm prices, and low or no profit margins, our farmers are driven to heavier cropping. Marginal land is often planted to row crops. In times of financial stress farmers look for cash crops. Soybeans are such a crop. The soybean produces well in Iowa, it does however tend to loosen the soil particles and cause more erosion than corn for instance. Farmers also expand their operations in bad times if they can, in order to spread fixed expense over a larger volume. Volume farming often means less attention to details, less contour planning, and consequently less conservation if the conservation takes either more time or money. Fewer hands to do the work, and less profit means tighter work schedules. It means larger machines, and more fall plowing practice that exposes the soil to more water and wind erosion. Some say we are slipping backwards with soil conservation. I question this opinion.

What do I recommend ?

1. First of all we must have a healthier farm economy.
2. We must develop a fair, and reasonable cost sharing plan that all of us can afford.
3. I recommend a broader understanding of rural conservation problems by the urban people, and a greater understanding of urban problems

by the rural people. This job cannot be done by either alone, it must be done together.

4. I recommend stepped up educational programs in our schools and colleges that require serious study of all conservation and ecology problems.

5. I would recommend more area conservation development projects. (These projects could develop larger areas that would include several counties and towns with similar needs.)

The job ahead is difficult. Failure is unthinkable. Clear air, clear water and good soils are necessities of life, with the help of good leadership and dedication to cause and duty, I'm certain we can and will attain these goals.

Thank you.