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The Des Moines County Soil Conservation District was organized under the state laws of Iowa in 1946. During most of the intervening period the staff has consisted of a work unit conservationist and a conservation aid. There have been brief periods in which extra help was employed but it is estimated that this would not exceed one man year. In addition the district has had available for its use part-time help from technicians in the field of soils and engineering estimated as about one-third of a man per year.

One of the major activities of the soil conservation district is to assist farmers in the development of conservation farm plans. The total to date is 262 covering 45590 acres. Progress was somewhat slow during the early years, however, interest has developed among farmers and it would not be difficult to add 50-60 new plans each year if sufficient technical assistance was available.

The conservation measures used in this district cover a wide variety of practices. The technicians have assisted farmers in contouring approximately 2000-3000 acres each year. As the farmers learn the technique they carry on this practice without too much reference to the district.

The terracing program has moved along at a relatively slow pace largely because it was necessary to develop good terrace outlets before going ahead with the construction of the terraces themselves. The total terraces built to date is approximately 50 miles.

Strip cropping is not a major practice in this area, however, there are 300-400 acres that are protected by this practice.

Pasture renovation has been an important activity and the district has been instrumental in stimulating a great many farmers to tear up old bluegrass pastures and seed them to improved grasses and legumes. Many farmers have gone ahead on their own initiative so that we do not have a good estimate of the amount of pasture renovation each year, however, it is probably in excess of 300 acres annually.

The number of farm ponds and erosion control structures has been increasing year by year and it is estimated that during 1952 the district will have assisted 30 or more farmers in properly installing these units.

One of the biggest changes in this area during the past five years has been in the type of grass and legume seeding. A few years ago it was difficult to get farmers to use brome grass. Now they sow it as a matter of course and in addition are using ladino, birdsfoot trefoil, alsike and a wide variety of grasses and legumes. Much of this interest is traced to the work of the technicians who assist the Des Moines County Soil Conservation District.

Another phase of the work which has shown a marked improvement has been the establishment of good grassed waterways. Gullies are being plowed in, reshaped, fertilized, mulched and seeded. In many areas the trend of more and larger gullies has been reversed.

The district has given considerable help to the drainage districts in the area in the form of engineering recommendations, surveys and staking of open ditches.

In addition to the practices mentioned technicians have assisted farmers all over the county with rotations, fertilizer recommendations, drainage problems and practically all phases of agricultural activity that are related to conservation.

Although a great deal has been accomplished it is only a small part of what needs to be done. The ground work has been laid for a rapid advancement in nearly all phases of the conservation work. Farmers are showing increased interest and a great many of them are ready to go ahead. However, there is one thing that seems to be lacking and that is the know-how on the part of a great many of them as to just how to proceed. Many of the practices are new to them. They need guidance in the first steps of getting the practices applied. This calls for increased technical assistance so they can get started right and so that the practice will be applied in a manner that will insure its effectiveness. Ways and means need to be found for increasing the help available to farmers and for organizing the work so that the staff can work efficiently and at the same time give assistance to a maximum number of farmers who need help.

It is difficult to anticipate the increase of farmer interest in conservation. Based on past activity it is estimated that in 1953 it would be possible to extend the program to include:

- a. Help 60 farmers to develop basic conservation farm plans.
- b. Get contouring on 4,000 acres of cropland.
- c. Build 12 miles of terraces.
- d. Establish grassed water courses or terrace outlets on 300 active gullies.
- e. Renovate 600 acres of old bluegrass pasture.
- f. Built 20 farm ponds for livestock water.
- g. Construct 10 concrete toe wall structures.
- h. Construct 10 concrete weir notch dams.
- i. Build 10 earth dams for erosion control.
- j. Excavate 3 miles of open drainage ditch.
- k. Assist in proper installation of 50,000 feet of drain tile.

During the past 18 months a technical staff have been directed to furnish technical supervision to the conservation program administered by FMA. This has been a time consuming job and has resulted in a decrease

in the amount of time that could be spent in the development of conservation farm plans. The results have not all been bad. The technical staff have had opportunity to work with a great many additional farmers and have made some contacts that will be helpful in the future development of conservation farm plans. All of us need to recognize the dual responsibilities of the technicians and find ways by which additional help can be employed, adequately trained and supervised to insure an increase of conservation out on the land.

In the past there has been a tendency to attack the problem in a piece meal manner. This has its merits and its objections. Out on the farm the operator must do the necessary things one at a time. However, each farmer needs to have a basic plans and needs to understand how each thing he does fits into the total program for his farm. In this way he does the most essential things first.

The conservation program should be one of the major activities in Des Moines County. Soil is our basic resource and it must be maintained. Sufficient evidence is now available to indicate that sound conservation is profitable. Farmers need to understand and recognize that the conservation way of farming will maintain their resource and at the same time increase their income.