

DRAFT

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE IDA COUNTY SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT

District Formation

In 1944, Donald H. Dodge, Ida County Extension Director, and Lester Clapp, Extension Soil Conservationist of Iowa State College, held information meetings aimed at the eventual formation of a soil conservation district. These meetings were culminated by a hearing and a referendum late in the year. The results of the referendum and hearing were favorable and a charter was issued by the Iowa Secretary of State on February 19, 1945.

Most of the ensuing year was spent in the preparation of a Program and a Work Plan and in negotiating memoranda of understanding with the U. S. Department of Agriculture, the U. S. Soil Conservation Service and the Iowa State Extension Service. District Conservationist, Carl Fritzsche, assisted a few local cooperators with contour layout.

At an election held soon after the issuing of the charter, Henry Dall, Battle Creek, was elected to a six year term as District Commissioner, Edw. C. Perion, Ida Grove, to a four year term and J. B. Scott, Danbury, to a two year term. At the first regular meeting Dall was elected chairman and Donald H. Dodge was appointed secretary.

In March of 1946 the U. S. Soil Conservation Service opened a Work Unit office on the second floor of the Van Griethuysen building in Ida Grove. At the same time the Service appointed Kenneth H. Burnett as Work Unit Conservationist and Robert B. Hollins as Conservation Aid to assist the District in their program. Ken 23 yr 9 mo.

The Early Years

The District felt planning before application was the orderly approach to soil conservation on the land. As a result Farm Conservation Plans were prepared prior to or concurrently with the application of practices. Most of the plans included a crop rotation with row crop acreage equaling meadow acreage, supplemented by contour farming. The large meadow acreage was acceptable because horses were still a major source of farm power and hay was extensively used in cattle feeding operations.

The Farm Conservation Plan contained an agreement similar to that now in use, a land use map, a land capability map, a cropping plan showing fields and crops for the ensuing five years, and plan of conservation operations. This latter was a list of all applicable conservation practices. The agreed to items were indicated by underlining. Twenty-five of these plans were prepared during 1946.

During the first year of operations the Ida Grove Work Unit laid guide lines for contour farming on 332 acres, staked and supervised the installation of 9000 ft. of level terraces and assisted with the shaping and seeding of one-half acre of grassed waterway.

The Little Sioux Flood Control Project

In 1947 construction operations were started on this project. Districts were faced with the problem of guaranteeing perpetual maintenance of flood control works of improvement. The Ida District elected to have the benefitted

land owners make voluntary payments into a District-wide structural maintenance fund in amounts totaling two and one-half per cent of the contract cost of the structures. Dams installed on public roads were to be maintained by the public body having responsibility for the road. In addition to the maintenance payments, private land owners were to cooperate further by installing farm land practices sufficient to satisfactorily control soil erosion on the slopes above the water courses.

The first two flood control sub-watersheds in the Ida District were contracted in 1948. These were the Kirkholm and the Perion Sub-watersheds, both located north-east of Ida Grove. Structural control of the water disposal system was the principle design objective.

The East Aldrich Creek Sub-waterwhed was given a constuction priority in 1950, but construction was held up by the Korean Conflict. After the Conflict and before construction was started Soil Conservation Service policy was changed, placing more emphasis on farm land treatment and less on structural control. As a result the number of structures was reduced from nearly forty to eight, and approximately fifty miles of level cropland terraces were installed by land owners to provide additional flood water storage and to reduce the silt load of water leaving the slopes above watercourses.

Contour Farming Schools

To increase farmer acceptance of contour farming, the District decided to provide contour layout service to any interested operator. In later years as much as 5500 acres of contour guide lines were laid out annually. This lead to an acceptance of contour farming by one-third of all farms in the District at the end of ten years. At times ASCS program field men assisted in this project.

To provide farm operators with proper information on contour farming, township contour schools were held early each spring until about 1956.

Conservation Short Courses

Starting in 1949 the District conducted various forms of Conservation Short Courses, usually in conjunction with the District annual meeting. Conservation specialists from Iowa State College and other sources imparted the "why" as well as the "how" of soil conservation practices. At times attendance had to be limited so that those attending could be properly cared for. In later years attendance fell off and the short courses were discontinued.

Terrace Construction

During the early years all level terraces were constructed with a mold-board plow. Aside from the fact that there were numerous point rows, this method was fairly satisfactory as long as all row crop equipment was limited to two rows. Because of low ability to move dirt, back slopes were short and foreslopes and cut slopes were usually about twelve feet. In addition it was difficult to obtain channel cross-section so horizontal spacings were limited to seventy feet. By 1955 most of the terraces were constructed by bulldozers and slope lengths and spacing were more favorable, but there were still many point rows.

"Doodle Dams"

At the time the District was first organized, dirt contractors were building small earth dams across gullies to heal them. Where drainage areas were small these proved fairly satisfactory. However, in drainage areas over fifteen acres the dams usually cut out from gully erosion and all that was accomplished was to move the gully from here to there. There was one good feature from the standpoint of soil conservation. If the dam held for a few years it would catch enough silt to completely fill the pond. This demonstrated to the owner and his neighbors that soil erosion was taking place, a fact that many individuals were reluctant to accept.

Crop History and Corn Allotments

The old AAA and PMA and later the ASCS traditionally made corn acreage allotments on the basis of crop history. The District program used the reduction of row crop acreage as a means of erosion control. As a result District Cooperators were penalized if new cornbases were established using history after the cooperator had reduced his corn acreage to comply with the District program. Many land owners refused to reduce corn acreage because they wanted to protect their corn acreage allotment.

Plowing Contests

For many years prior to and after the formation of the District, plowing matches were an event of wide rural interest. The Pilot Rock Plowing Match, held annually in Cherokee County, was the one Ida County Farmers attended. In the late "40s" a contour plowing division was added to the contest. Later a plow-built terrace division was also added. Still later a farm face-lifting was added to the program. This entailed a complete changeover from conventional to contour farming accomplished in one day. The contests and field days regularly attracted crowds of over a thousand.

The Sioux City Permanent Agriculture Program

Starting in 1949 the Sioux City Journal-Tribune and the Sioux City Chamber of Commerce inaugurated a program to honor farmers who were practicing good soil conservation farming. Each District's entries in the contest were honored at a banquet and awards program usually held in November after the contest closed at the end of the crop year. The program created widespread interest among farmers and ranchers and did much to "beat the drums" for soil conservation.

Veteran's On The Farm Training

In 1947 the District made a special case for young veterans returning from World War II. They gave top priority to those enrolled in the course for farm planning assistance so that the veterans could initiate the plans while they were still in training. The same privilege was later granted to Korean Veterans. In addition to giving normal farm planning and layout assistance, SCS personnel also conducted some of the classroom teaching.

U. S. D. A. Memorandum No. 1278

In 1951 the U. S. Secretary of Agriculture issued Memorandum No. 1278 specifying that the Soil Conservation Service would provide technical support to the ASCS and the ASCS would in turn set aside a small part of their ACP funds to cover the cost of this support. The memorandum was in a way a "shotgun marriage", but at the same time it brought the two agencies closer together and in the end provided better service to the farmer.

Agricultural Development Councils

In 1949 Ida County Extension Director, Paul Peterson, organized an agricultural development council. It was composed of the agricultural leaders of the county and included the work unit conservationist. It strove to coordinate the educational and action programs operating in the county and to keep the leaders informed on local agricultural developments. Except for one or two dormant periods the Council has been in operation continuously.

ACP Cost Shares On Road Structures

In 1955 Orlan Ehler applied for ACP cost shares to install two erosion control dams on the road adjoining his farm. His request was not granted because the land upon which the dams were to be built was not under his control and because ACP funds could not be expended on public lands. This also despite the fact that the farmer and ACP costs at the road site would be less than the costs of an equivalent structure on the farmer's land. These structures were installed by the county and the farmer.

Later this policy was changed to permit cost shares for the added cost of erosion control features on a road structure. The county would still pay the full cost of the structure without erosion control. At present cost shares on road structures, such as drop inlets and culvert risers, is still carried out in this manner. This permits counties and private land owners to cooperate in the installation of a multi-purpose structure.