

Remarks by Carroll J. Hobson, Chairman Hardin Soil Conservation District at the Area Conservationist Meeting, Des Moines, Iowa, Wednesday, March 3, 1971.

DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING
A
DISTRICT ANNUAL PLAN OF WORK

Good Afternoon Gentlemen:

It's my priveledge to have an opportunity to tell you about our district plans; how we develop them an how we implement them.

In order to develop good programs in a district or in any other unit of government, it is necessary to understand the fundamental structure of those units of government which you need, and with which you wish to work.

The lack of a basic or fundamental knowledge of governmental structure is one of today's most pressing problems both in and out of government service. Harmony and efficiency can never be produced by people without this fundamental knowledge. Those with only a smattering of understanding may be even more dangerous, they sometimes try but with mixed results.

In Federalist form of government like ours there are only two disciplines one the strong federal, and the other the several states with certain unalienable rights granted to them. Any other unit or branch of government is a delegation of the authority of one or the other of these two principal governmental forms, and is never a combination of both. The soil conservation districts and all our state agencies, departments and commissions are a fragmentation of the state's powers.

People are prone to overlook valuable governmental machinery that has been created to do a specific job, once the enabling legislation with it's attendant publicity has passed, as a result a useful authority is often wasted. Why ? I think we all tend to read, digest and at least partially understand at the time of the beginning but fail to review, revise, relearn and reexercise.

In the case of soil conservation district the memorandum of understanding between the district and the USDA requires certain reports, as an example, we must make an annual report. We must also make an annual work plan. I suspect that if these reports were not mandatory, they might get neglected in some districts. I do know that some of the reports do not do credit to the reporting district's talent.

We have now established the two disciplines of government, federal and state and the difficulties of getting our people to understand and use benevolent legislation and the authorities created for their own good and their use. As a commissioner I represent a form of the state government while most of you men represent the federal, Mr. Greiner, and Mr. Higgins excepted of course.

I want to talk about commissioners now. A point in fact is that any time a commissioner gives his time to the district it is gratis. We must never forget that this man must first make a living, pay his bills, and look after his family. The time he devotes to the district comes after his profession has been satisfied. This is largely true of the district conservationist and the area conservationist as well. He too will be successful in his drive for accomplishment only if he is willing to allot time beyond the normal working day. Just to make the required reports and run the office are not enough to supply the incentive, training and leadership that will be needed if we are to really succeed in this immense undertaking. In our district we strain for good cooperation not only with the commissioners and the staff but with anyone involved whether he or she is just a plain citizen or a resource person. We regularly ask for constructive criticism from the staff and from the other commissioners. We have been pleasantly amazed at what another view sometimes adds to the total work perspective. We are firmly convinced that any program developed in any district is no stronger than the weakest person in either of the two units of government involved.

In the development of annual or long range work plan it is very necessary to assess the weaknesses and the strengths of the people who must carry out the district programs. When a new commissioner is elected we have to reevaluate a part or all of the program set up. Since we elect every two years here in Iowa reassessment becomes necessary then, not only because commissioners may change, but because the objectives of a district will change substantially in a two year period. The same principle applies when a district conservationist or an area conservationist is moved to a new location. Readaptation to take advantage of any strengths or talents the new man may have seems not only logical but the practical approach to a changed situation.

At this point I'd like to take up the actual formulation of work plans and programs. We think the long range plan is a solid foundation for annual planning. You must know where you are running before you run. Where you expect to be five years from now has a lot of bearing on where you commence. The annual work plan is a natural portion of the long range plan. The annual work plan includes the objectives and goals for the coming year. It's far too late to make an annual plan when the report needs to be filed. There are actually about four phases to discuss concerning work plans and programs.

Phase I. Formulation.

- A. First of all you must have the spirit or desire to do your best, and ideally this spirit would run throughout the staff and commissioners, its what the army calls "Espirit de Corps."
- B. Develope a program you can handle with realistic objectives and goals.
- C. You must know your people, their strong points and their weaknesses, then pick the proper person to do the job.
- D. It's a must to know about how much work can be done by the commissioners in any given unit of time.

- E. In every case the good program is the balanced one, develop a realistic schedule for accomplishment, and follow it.
- F. Time your programs and work to look best to the public, plan so as to coincide with state and national efforts.
- G. Avoid bad weather when possible, outside education programs are an example, they must be done late in the spring or early in the fall. The amount of resource people available because of season is of prime importance.

Phase II. Operation.

- A. After having picked the right commissioner for the job, work for a constant balance of time and availability.
- B. Keep the burden equal, even if it means taking the second best man for the job. He will probably fool you anyway.
- C. It is very necessary to assign enough work to keep the interest of the commissioners, tackling one objective at a time.
- D. Using our system, one commissioner speaks for the district and carries the responsibility for that program from one monthly meeting to the next, when a three minute report is made at the regular meeting, where new policy may or may not be set.
- F. A commissioner carrying his program responsibility from one month to the next is not only interested, but is also reluctant to pick at the fine details of the program someone else is struggling with. Further he realizes he will be called upon to report, and be scrutinized along with his fellows.
- G. Resource people must be used if at all possible. You may be able to get a specialist, in a field where you have none available on your own team. Seek a chairman of resource people with great care, one staff person and one commissioner is assigned the job in our district. Resource people give you a limitless base of strength in the district, thus you have support, you can get no other way. Resource people also give an opportunity for greater utilization of your

Commissioners, he may handle four programs instead of one or two at the same time. The commissioner's foot work is done for him by the resource people, leaving his time for the general management.

- G. Generally speaking the resource chairman will have helpers and it should be made clear at the first regular meeting of the commissioners with the resource chairman, that these people are the responsibility of the resource chairman along with the amount of budget if any, and other guidelines the commissioners may feel pertinent.
- H. One month before a new program starts it must appear on the agenda of that regular meeting under items of new business, at that time all commissioners will set up the broad guidelines and make a framework in which the staff person and commissioner will work. In essence the commissioners as a group establish policy and budget, for that objective. With the policy established, one commissioner can not only speak for the district, but can innovate within that framework.
- I. The check on this system is of course the three minute report. This results in a complete check and balance for each and all programs and provides a monthly review. In our three minute reports we try very hard to stick to the proper timing, obviously within reasonable limits. We think that the commissioner and the staff people will do a much better job if they are required to condense their reports, it requires thought and review of the facts ahead of time. If at a monthly meeting the policy seems wrong or a program miscarries we tactfully attempt to bend the program to new ends, no man is told he is wrong and backed down, up to this point he has spoken for the district. The three minute report is entered into the minutes almost intact along with all pertinent discussion and or new directions and guidelines. All interested parties receive a copy of the minutes to bring them up to date, this gives the re-

source person a chance to make contact if there is a mistake or a misunderstanding. The commissioner has a record of what is taking place in the district at all times. Each commissioner in our district has a loose leaf binder in which all minutes, financial reports, agendas or any other pertinent data are kept, the commissioner takes this with him when he wants to do soil conservation work, I have mine with me today. The original three minute report along with any other information about a program goes into a case file on the subject.

Phase V.

I would be derelict in my duty if I didn't say something about decorum in regular meeting. We start promptly at 8:00 P.M. and finish as near to 10:30 as possible. We dress properly for our meetings, both commissioners and staff. We operate on the assumption that if we don't care how we look, other people will not care either. We use name cards at the table, I have a sample with me, and all visitors are furnished with one. Guests are introduced and made as comfortable as possible. We do compliment our people whenever the occasion arises and single out any special mention of individual achievement. It has been the responsibility of the chairman of commissioners in our district to keep the meetings to the point, efficient and on time.

Up to this point very little has been said about how the staff is tied into the annual work plans and various programs. The reason for this is, number one, these people are generally left at the disposal of the district conservationist, while the clerk is state employed and does some direct work for the commissioners she is needed more and is directed in her daily tasks more often by the district conservationist. In our office she is an integral part of the overall scheme. She must be a pleasant receptionist above all, since she meets many people that the commissioners never see. Her work maybe seen anywhere in the state and could be seen

in Washington D.C. She is neat, clean, a lady at all times and brings a feminine balance to the whole office along with the ability to type, file, mimeograph, and improvise a million and one things.

Our District Conservationist holds regular staff meeting, asks for suggestions from his technician, the state aid and the clerk. He assigns a staff person to every program the district takes part in, naturally he assigns on the basis of "ability to handle," experience, sometimes for training reasons, and sometimes simply because of need, since other personnel will not go around. The commissioners are very proud of the abilities of our staff and their desire to "get the job done" I don't think any reasonable conservation job they would not tackle with gusto provided the opportunity and need existed. I'm proud to say that the teamwork in our district is extraordinary, it is one of our finest assets, if not the finest. The dependability of our people, staff and commissioners alike is without question. Teamwork at all levels of command both federal and state will not only bring us the environmental rewards our country needs in the coming years, but will bring great individual satisfaction to every man or woman who gives it their best. I feel personally, that I have been privileged to do something for conservation, while developing many lasting friendships, both near and far. I'm not representing to you people that our work is perfect, far from it, I present this work as something we are doing, and our ideas about it. We constantly try to improve, and we invite ways and means to do just that. I thank you.

Things Every District Conservationist Should Know About His Commissioners (What every Area Conservationist's should know about his district Conservationist too)

1. Religious denomination and practices of his commissioners.
2. Know the politics of every commissioner.
3. Know the capabilities of all the commissioners.
4. Know if they drink or not.
5. Be a good judge of their abilities.
6. Know their hobbies.
7. Know how they are generally regarded by the public.
8. Do they have integrity. (Do they have a reputation for meaning what they say and backing it up.)
9. Know their nationality or ethnics origins.
10. Know their families and relatives.
11. Know their school district.
12. Know their voting precinct.
13. Understand their business operations and how they are regarded by the community.
14. Know their close personal friendships.

What Every Commissioner Should Know About His District Conservationist

1. Know his family and his wife's family.
2. Know his close friends.
3. Know his experience.
4. Know what he majored in during his college years.
5. Know his and his wife's religious preference.
6. Know his hobbies.
7. Know if he has military service.
8. Know what his relationship is with his Area Conservationist.
9. Know if he drinks or not.
10. Know if he can improvise under pressure.