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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE
Washington 25, D. C.

December 20, 1955

To: All Personnel, Soil Conservation Service

From: D. A. Williams, Administrator

Subject: Working Relationships with Soil Conservation Districts

In September, at our annual conference of State and Territorial Conservationists, a committee of State Conservationists and representatives of the National Association of Soil Conservation Districts gave particular study to ways of continually improving working relationships between the Soil Conservation Service and Soil Conservation Districts.

The committee prepared a report that was reviewed by the full conference of State and Territorial Conservationists and has since been reviewed by the Board of Directors of the National Association of Soil Conservation Districts and has their concurrence. The report is currently being used by State and Territorial Conservationists as a guide in discharging their day-by-day administrative responsibilities. We understand it is also being used by officers of the NASCD in efforts to further strengthen the district operations throughout the country.

The committee recommended that every Service employee should have an opportunity to study major points reviewed in our discussions. The purpose of this memorandum is to review such points for you. Basic Service working relationships with Soil Conservation Districts are set forth in memorandums of understanding with individual districts and in Administrator's Memorandum SCS-71.

Soil Conservation Districts, as local units of government managed by the farmers and ranchers themselves, are a highly effective device through which the people and their government can team up to get the conservation job done without the Federal Government becoming the dominating member of the team.

More and more people are beginning to recognize the fundamental role of Soil Conservation Districts in the soil and water conservation movement. During the last year, recommendations were made for the Federal Government to take legislative and administrative action to encourage the States to complete the organization of all agricultural land in the country into Soil Conservation Districts. In addition, administrative action by all levels of government was urged to make it possible for more farmers and ranchers to actively cooperate in District programs.

Strong emphasis was given to the idea that the structure of Soil Conservation Districts as distinct, local units of government must be preserved unimpaired and that State and Federal Government assistance should provide fully for meeting the needs of farmers and ranchers in local Soil Conservation Districts.

Such recognition of the key role of Soil Conservation Districts in our national soil and water conservation program is viewed as one of the outstanding developments of the last year.

Since the Service's primary function in conservation operations is to provide technical assistance to farmers and ranchers through Soil Conservation Districts, the effectiveness of our work depends directly on our working relationships with Districts and their leaders. Our continuing goal is to have outstanding working relationships with all Districts and their associations.

The major responsibility for carrying out a sound, vigorous program of soil and water conservation rests with the people who own and operate the land. A nationwide program, however urgent its need, cannot have force in our democracy unless it is accepted as the individual responsibility of these people. It is our duty as public servants to encourage and aid these farmers and ranchers to plan and apply soil and water conservation measures, but to do for them only those things that need to be done in the public interest that local people cannot do for themselves. We have learned from experience that the success of the Soil Conservation movement depends upon the exercising of local responsibility and leadership by Soil Conservation District officials.

Our new authority for watershed protection and flood prevention work is founded on these principles of local responsibility and leadership. It provides a means for bringing the water element into balance with the soil element in our already going program. It is an implementing tool to our going program, rather than a separate program or some new magic substitute for this going program. It offers new opportunities to work on difficult problems that can be solved only through group action. This new approach to watershed work simply offers an opportunity where it is needed to work out major water management problems in Soil Conservation Districts.

It is highly important that the Soil Conservation District mechanism be used to take advantage of the newly authorized approach to the watershed phase of soil and water conservation work.

Teamwork is essential if our efforts are to be most effective. To have teamwork it is necessary that there be full understanding and full cooperation between the Soil Conservation Service and Soil Conservation Districts. I urge every Service employee to strive constantly to improve this partnership operation.

Opportunities for doing so are most apparent to those of you who are directly engaged in assistance to districts. For those of you whose assistance is indirect, I suggest that you also keep yourself fully informed on District programs, principles, and activities, and that you make full use of every opportunity to help strengthen the District movement. I want to urge each of you to re-read a copy of a basic and supplemental memorandum of understanding used with Soil Conservation Districts.

L. Williams

All Washington and Field Offices