

# 1952 ANNUAL REPORT

Poweshiek County Soil  
Conservation District

Brooklyn, Iowa



The Commissioners of the Poweshiek County Soil Conservation District present a report of activities and progress in soil conservation for the year 1952 to farmers and all cooperating groups and others in county and state interested in saving soil, water and proper land use, and the outlook for 1953.

## THE DISTRICT GOVERNING BODY

|                                      |              |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| Elmer Dunnick, Montezuma, Iowa ..... | Chairman     |
| Howard Sears, Malcom, Iowa .....     | Commissioner |
| J. Basil Brush, Brooklyn, Iowa ..... | Commissioner |

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#### FOREWARD

We, the Poweshiek County Soil Conservation District, have finished the seventh year of activity, which along with the work of the six preceding years makes a nice picture, with conservation practices showing up in all parts of the county.

It is a great pleasure to see the large number of farm ponds that have been built as recreation centers as well as those built to provide a water supply for livestock. The contoured fields with their grassed waterways also show that we are doing a job for the future, while we are getting larger crops for ourselves.

The combining of the agencies has made a big difference in our work. We hope that in the coming years we can have a better plan for the work and be able to get done nearer on schedule. With the fine understanding between the agencies we feel that we will succeed in our task.

Our District Staff has as Work Unit Conservationist, Morton James; S. C. S. Conservation Aid, Archie Casebolt; and State Conservation Aid, Raymond DePauw. Lyall Mitchell of Oskaloosa has been our District Conservationist. Extension Director, Stanley Stover has given aid in educational work as well as served as secretary, to the District Commissioners. Commissioners are: Elmer Dunnick, Basil Brush, and Howard Sears.

#### EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Soil Conservation is being recognized more and more each year by Poweshiek County farmers. One of the most important phases of the Extension's program is soil conservation and its related fields. The Extension Service has been responsible for the educational work of the district. The whole soil conservation program is a cooperative enterprise between the Extension, Soil Conservation District, Soil Conservation Service and the PMA.

Organization work within the county has been directed toward the group plan. Through group organization, more farms can be reached with less effort than in the organization of individual farm plans. When interest is indicated in an area to develop a group, an interest meeting is called and the program is explained by the agency representative. If interest is high enough for forming a group, plans are laid and a leader elected. Priority for work is then made by the District Commissioners and farm plans are then finally developed with help of the Soil Conservation Service.

Improved varieties, better management practices, insect and weed control, pasture and forage utilization, and proper use of commercial fertilizers are all aids towards a more sound soil con-

servation program. The Extension Service through cooperation with the Soil District has endeavored to direct their program along these lines. Soil conserved is of no value if weeds, insects, lack of fertilizer, or poor, unadapted varieties are used upon it. A cooperative program of educational subject matter plus applied practices are necessary if we are to progress.

Throughout the year weekly news stories were edited, many of which pertained to soil conservation or its related fields.

A forage field day was held during the year on the utilization of grasses by grass silage. All machinery dealers were contacted and 6 choppers were in operation during the day. The silage was placed in a trench with the use of a minimum of equipment and labor. Approximately 500 farmers observed the operation on the Maurice Boatman farm in Jackson township. With the increase in soil conservation and the use of more and more grasses on the farm, it was felt this was an answer to how to best utilize these grasses.

One fertilizer plot was harvested in the fall of 1952 which showed exceptional results. In a field of comparable soil type and past management, a 27 bushel increase was obtained by the plowed-down application of 400 lbs. of 12-12-12 in the spring. Another plot on the application of side-dressed nitrogen failed to show results but upon checking back into past management, the check strip had been a hog pasture for some years.

## PROGRESS IN DEVELOPMENT OF CONSERVATION PLANS

In 1952, 15 farmers were given help in developing basic conservation farm plans totaling 3,026 acres. In addition, initial agreements have been signed and 9 advanced plans are in the hands of cooperators.

This sharp reduction in basic farm plans has been due to heavy A. C. P. load placed upon the District Staff by Secretary Brannan's Memorandum 1278. Supervision and especially inspection and certifications of the permanent practices on over 1,101 farms has left little time for basic farm conservation planning. It was hoped at the beginning of the year that P. M. A. Committee men and program men could take care of supervision and inspection of the less technical permanent practices such as contouring, waterways, and most up-draw tiling. It soon was apparent for a number of reasons that the job would not be done this way. Therefore beginning in July, use was made of 5% provisions of the A. C. P. to hire help to check contouring. By the middle of September most of the contouring had been checked. Approximately a dozen farms remained to be checked plus considerable spot checking. Employment of these inspectors has worked out very satisfactory except that more efficient and accurate checking could have been done in June.

Inspection of waterways and up-draw tiling has trailed to the very end of the year with questionable accuracy and completeness. A much better system is needed. Certification of other practices supervised by the Staff has been no problem.

Development of basic farm plans has not kept pace with interest. There remains 92 farmers waiting for basic farm plans plus initial agreements. Some of these signatures have been on application almost 3 years.

#### **FOLLOW-UP**

Follow-up of older farm plans has continued this year at a reduced rate. During the year 91 follow calls have been made and 6 conservation plans revised.

### **FIELD OPERATIONS**

#### **WEATHER**

Nineteen fifty-two can be remembered as a great year for crop production. The corn crop was the greatest on record, the hay crop good, and the oat crop only fair. Amount and spacing of rains throughout the growing season was almost ideal even though September and October were the driest on record.

The season began with an early spring, perhaps a little on the dry side. This permitted farmers to get crops planted in season and also allowed time for shaping waterways, constructing terraces and diversions. Due to unusually favorable weather and progress of crops, all operations through the season were ahead of schedule. Normally this would have allowed considerable conservation work in the fall, but hard dry ground prevented earth work except with heavy equipment.

Seeding started well in the spring and did well during the summer, but some fear was expressed that the unusually long dry spell in the fall would cause winter killing. The abundant rain occurring just before freeze-up should prevent such loss.

Rains which would cause severe soil losses over the county occurred less frequently than average during 1952.

#### **PROMISING CROPS**

Birdsfoot trefoil and Ladino clover continue to hold promise as legume crops for the county. The domestic type or Empire strain of birdsfoot appears to be some superior to that of Italian origin. No new seed-increase plantings were sponsored by the District in 1952. Ladino clover is increasing in popularity although some winter killing has been reported. Birdsfoot trefoil is being used for the poorer rolling permanent pasture land while Ladino clover is recommended for hay mixtures and for better pasture land.

Another forage crop on trial in the county is alta fescue. This grass seems to offer the greatest promise for frequently trampled portion of pastures and for waterways. It is reasonably drouth resistant, has a good root system, but tends to become unpalatable if allowed to grow too tall.

### MULTIFLORA ROSE PLANTINGS

Multiflora rose is a hardy, easily grown shrub, 6 to 8 feet high which is being used in parts of the United States as living fences and cover for wild life. It is not definitely known how far north it is adapted and for the past four years it has been on a trial basis in Poweshiek County. So far, about the only indication of any winter injury is the freezing back of tips for a few inches—no killing of plants has occurred.

For the first time a multiflora rose fence on the Lauren Wright farm, in Jackson township was used to turn livestock along a cornfield. Even though the planting was only two years old it did a very satisfactory job. Rose plantings are not expected to be large enough to serve as fences until at least three years old. As to their efficiency in attracting wild life, there can be no doubt—numerous song birds have been observed nesting in rose hedge rows.

During 1952 approximately 28,000 roses were planted on the farms of District cooperators. All but 1500 of these were obtained from the S. C. S. Nurseries. An unestimated number were also planted by non-district cooperators. These plants were purchased from the State Conservation Commission or from private nurseries.

### TREE AND WILDLIFE PLANTING

Approximately 5,000 red pine were secured from the S. C. S. Nursery for planting in the county. This program should be enlarged because there are numerous areas which will produce greater returns in trees than in any other crop. Although an adapted evergreen is probably the best available tree for this purpose there is still a need for better trees which are rapid growing and commercially profitable. Several hardwood trees such as cottonwood, elm and ash are adapted but do not have much commercial value.

Wildlife packets furnished by the S. C. S. Nursery were distributed to all cooperators with new ponds. Such packets contain evergreens and shrubs intended for planting around farm ponds, along fences, and in odd areas. Most packets have been used around farm ponds.

### SEED PRODUCTION

Production of adapted southern strain brome grass (Lincoln and Fischer) is generally adequate for demand. Volume is influenced greatly by prospective price.

It is the hope of the District that the seed-increase plantings of birdsfoot trefoil of previous years will develop into local sources of supply.

### GRASS WATERWAYS

It is an established fact that good grass waterways are the first and most essential soil conservation practices on a farm. Contouring, strip cropping, terraces, and diversions are dependent upon good waterways for effective operation.

Due to a favorable spring, more waterways were established in the spring than in the fall. Dry weather in the fall was a serious handicap.

Reed canary grass is considered one of the best waterway grasses, however, due to its high seed cost and uncertain seeding habits its use is limited. Partial solution to such objections may be the establishment of canary grass from sod pieces. One of the most successful methods of establishing "sod banks" ( $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  acre sod patch) is to summer fallow from early July to mid-August, followed by the immediate seeding of reed canary. This method has succeeded consistently in the county.

### STRIP CROPPING

Strip cropping in some form is being used on about half of the farms planned. Most slopes are too short to lay out more than two or three strips after an area that should be retired is taken out.

Farmers having strip cropping are pleased and convinced of the value of the practice.

### TERRACES AND DIVERSIONS

Diversions are more popular with farmers than terraces, although terraces give superior erosion control. No pretense is made to farm over diversions which is one of the usual objections to terraces. Diversions offer the best possibility of shortening slopes, enabling rotations and contour farming to do a good job. Their popularity has been growing consistently.

Due to favorable weather several farmers were able to build diversions in the spring with plows. This was not possible in the fall because of hard dry soil. Fall construction was with heavy equipment and bull-dozers.

All terracing was done in the spring with farm tractors and plows.

### PONDS

The construction of 16 farm ponds was supervised by the District Staff. Ten of these were on farms of District Cooperators. None were stocked because the Federal Fish and Wildlife Service was unable to deliver fingerlings.

Older ponds are providing satisfactory fishing with 2 pound bass and over from some of the older ones. Water supply is an important reason for building most farm ponds. During the prolonged fall dry spell, several such ponds come into good use when shallow wells failed.

## USE OF FUNDS PROVIDED BY THE STATE OF IOWA

Funds appropriated by the State of Iowa have been used to good advantage. A total of \$2500.09 was allotted to the District under the II A budget. This has been used to hire one full time technician. However, since \$2500.00 is not enough to cover salary and mileage expenses for a full year, the employee was shifted for a time to funds provided by A. C. P. 5% authorization. This will need to be done again in 1953 if State allocations are not increased.

Money allocated to the District under the I-A budget for Commissioners expenses, stationery, and other incidentals amounts to \$500.00 per year. If not used the first year of the biennium it is carried over to the next year. Since expenses were light in 1952, a considerable part was unexpended and carried over. The carry-over will come in handy in connection with the biennial election banquet to be held in 1953.

## PROBLEMS AND OUTLOOK

We can look back on 1952 as an unusual year for farming. It produced the largest corn crop in history, a good hay crop, and a fair oat crop. Not only were crops large, but the quality of the corn crop in particular was excellent and weather permitted harvest of all crops with very small loss.

The good weather enabled most farmers to keep farm operation ahead of schedule during the year. In fact from mid-August until November the weather was almost too good—or perhaps too dry. Fall crops were handicapped, construction of terraces and diversions with plows was practically impossible and there was slight chance of getting seedlings established in newly shaped waterways. For awhile it appeared that grass seedings would be in serious danger of going into winter without moisture. But fortunately, a generous 3-5 inch rain occurred November 16 after 75 days of drouth.

The need of soil conservation continues greater than ever. It is evident that prospect of war and the rapidly increasing population will continue to provide an ever enlarging demand for food. High production must continue. No borrowing from reserves must be permitted. Soil fertility must be maintained and agriculture must operate on a permanent basis as far as possible as soon as possible. Soil fertility cannot be maintained as long as the waste of soil erosion is allowed.

Some of the problems confronting farmers in the new year in connection with conservation are: higher costs and perhaps somewhat lower prices. The supply of farm machinery seems to have caught up with demand but the prices are high. Due to the military draft there is still a shortage of farm help, which will

reduce the amount of conservation work done. Grass seeds and commercial fertilizers are in good supply with the exception of nitrogen which is somewhat limited.

The Staff of the District has operated one full year under Agriculture Secretary's Memorandum 1278. The following changes in District operations have resulted: a greater number of farmers have been given a little technical assistance—especially with individual practices; much more time has been spent in surveying, supervising and inspecting tile; a great amount of time (approximately 3 man-months) has been required to inspect and certify permanent practices under A. C. P; there has been a greater expenditure of labor on records and reports; and there has been a sharp reduction in the number of farmers assisted in developing basic conservation plans. As to the advantage of the new "three stage planning" (initial, advanced, basic) the procedure has hardly been used enough to evaluate. In this county there has never been a lack of interest, and the District has always had a backlog of applicants waiting for basic conservation plans. It is doubtful therefore if any advantage will be gained as would be true in some counties.

It is hoped that as the organization and procedures are perfected and help added, the Staff of the District can spend it's time more effectively in the work of soil conservation.

