

DISTRICT SOIL CONSERVATION AWARD MEETINGS

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One of the rank modern injustices committed by a man of means is the failure to properly plan the handling and disposition of his estate upon his death. For most men, it requires so little time to work out an estate plan that neglect of this important duty amounts to blind stupidity. Years are spent in accumulating wealth for reasons of security for himself and his family, only to be largely wasted as far as the family is concerned, because the creator of that fortune will not consult an attorney or a trust officer in his bank to lay out provisions for the administration and the passing on of this property and the drafting of those provisions into a suitable will.

Equally as stupid is the modern family who struggles for a lifetime to accumulate additional farm land and then permits its erosion and waste, due to neglect and poor management practices, when he could so easily consult his Soil Conservation Technician or members of the Soil Conservation District Committee for sound farm planning.

Even though the waste and misuse of farm lands have been common throughout the United States, Georgia ranks among the highest which have suffered more damage to the land. A trip across the state impresses even a casual observer with the fact that we have not been good stewards of our greatest physical endowment. Soil erosion has been allowed to rob us of thousands of acres, and in some sections fertility has been so depleted that entire farms have been abandoned.

Today there are thousands of acres of soil in Georgia that need thousands of tons of legume-grass plowed into it to make it mellow and hold water. The soil that is covered with grass and full of grass roots will not wash or blow away. Grass eaten by good livestock is a safety valve for farm surpluses and can help to answer the surplus farm crops problem that may be ahead.

We believe that the solution to many of our farm problems can be summed up in one word -- GRASS. By grass we mean clovers, lespedeza, fescue, kudzu, and all legume-grass mixtures. Some sort of a grass mixture will grow in every section of Georgia every season of the year.



No one thing over which farmers have control would do the agriculture of this state more good than to put into practice crop rotations that would keep half the cultivated land covered with a rank growth of legume-grass mixtures; or, in other words, to have all the cultivated land covered with grass half the time. To accomplish this would mean a change from the soil robbing practices that have made much land and many farmers poor, to a soil enrichment program that would have benefits almost without end. When this program is in full operation, half the land will produce as much raw crops as all of it did before.

Such a program could be established on half the farms right away. It might take some time to work it out on others. It would never work on tenant farms so long as they are rented on a year-to-year basis that practically compels the tenant to take from the land all the cash crop he can before the next moving date. Such a tenant system must change to fit a grass program.

In Georgia in 1945 some 54% of the farm operators were tenants. Because of the drift of rural workers to industrial jobs, and an improvement in the ownership status, although the proportion of farms operated by tenants is still much higher than the average in the South, it is at the lowest point in fifty years. The trend is wholesome, but the tenure question is one a long way from being solved. There is nothing wrong with the idea of tenancy and there should be no stigma attached with the tenancy status. The problem as far as soil conservation goes is not in abolishing tenancy; it is in ridding the system of the drawbacks associated with it. More tenant arrangements operating to the advantage of both land owners and tenants are needed. Agreements which work on an equitable basis for the use of farm land by non-owner operators.

On farms that today are considered well managed the cultivated land is not in legumes usually more than one year in three and much of it not even one year in four. Furthermore there are thousands of cultivated fields that haven't produced a luxuriant growth of legumes in the past ten years. In many areas the acreage and yields of legumes have decreased alarmingly and acre yields of other crops have fallen off correspondingly.

Bare land cotton, corn, peanut, and tobacco farming has made a virtual No Man's Land of acre after acre of good Georgia farmland, much of it now gullied and raw almost beyond redemption.

This is a new day with farming in Georgia, though. Our young men are staying on the farm. In the 1920's our good farmers were educating their sons so they wouldn't have to come back to the farm. There was no future in farming. There isn't any future in farming today with old practices and outdated methods. With modern tools and crops and practices our fields become greener and broader. The dreams of old men and the visions of young men are at work.

It is heartening that we have the United States Soil Conservation Service and other agencies coming to the rescue of the land, promoting legumes, grass, and soil-saving methods. If these programs were met half-way by all farmers it would make of this state almost a Garden of Eden in comparison with the farm desolation too often seen today. There are many good farmers with legumes and grass who have rich soil that is growing richer. These farmers with profitable incomes are business men and there are none better in the world.

In presenting the Robert Strickland Agricultural Memorial Award in 1948 to Mr. George Bazemore and the First National Bank of Waycross, Mr. John A. Sibley, Chairman of the Board of the Trust Company of Georgia said: "A bank in a very real sense is trustee of the economic progress of the community that it serves.

Many banks and bankers accept that trust and strive in every safe and wise way to meet it. This trust not only involves the security and safekeeping of the money already made but also it involves the use of that money in the development of new wealth. Unless new wealth is constantly created, the values already existing will deteriorate and vanish. Here, today your banks are trying to discharge their responsibility as a trustee of the progress of your community.

In Georgia we have an important job to do and a great responsibility. Some have



questioned the sincerity of the interest banks have in the welfare of Georgia agriculture.

We are an agricultural state. Our chief asset is our land. Georgia has the largest land area of any state east of the Mississippi river. Our most important business is that of farming. In Georgia some 225,000 farms are operated, two-thirds of our population live in rural communities. One-third of our population gets a livelihood directly from the soil, whereas only 20% of the nation as a whole is dependent directly upon the soil for a living. This fact emphasizes the relative importance of agriculture to the prosperity of the state.

Georgia's per capita farm income is only about one-half the national average. The national per capita farm income is estimated at \$1220 whereas the per capita farm income in Georgia is estimated at \$594 for the year 1947. So you see what it would mean to the banks, the merchants, the business and professional men, to the schools and to all the services of the state if the per capita farm income of this state should reach the national average.

Georgia's agriculture faces serious problems: First, is the problem of eroded and worn out lands. Of thirty-seven million acres, twenty-two million acres have suffered sheet erosion. Over fourteen million acres have lost from one-fourth to three-fourths inches of the top soil and from over six million acres from three-fourths to all the top soil is gone.

Our per capita farm income can be increased through a system of conservation farming, which enriches our lands and increases their productivity by the protection and establishment of forests, the development of pastures, the planting of cover crops, and the production of livestock. <sup>57</sup> x 55

While the problems of soil conservation are of particular interest to the business man and the general public alike, it is also clear that the person most affected is the farmer. He lives upon the land and draws his substance from it. The major responsibility of maintaining the priceless heritage of the land devolves upon the farmer. If

*Land, like people, differs one piece from another.  
Like people, too, land does the best job of production  
when it is devoted to those tasks for which it is  
best suited.*

he is to merit the interest and support of the business man in meeting his problems, he must be aggressive in his own behalf.

Now for the "what to do" part. The Soil Conservation Service has found the solution to complete conservation in the words "to use each acre of land in accordance with its individual capabilities as endowed by nature -- and treat each acre in accordance with its individual needs for conservation." Christ in the parable of the Sower, recognized a variation in the productive power of different kinds of land. He pointed out that some of the seed fell by the wayside, other portions on stony places or among thorns, and only a part fell on good ground. Even all of the good land ~~did~~ not produce equally; some produced thirty, some sixty, and some a hundred fold.

Now, let's consider the needs of Georgia's land. More than 90% of the farm land needs some type of conservation treatment to protect it against erosion, maintain its fertility and productivity and to permit its permanent use.

It is not my purpose to talk largely about the various needs of soil conservation. You, perhaps, know far better than I what your soil needs. It is refreshing to be able to refer to those of you who have attained some degree of success in using your land according to its individual capabilities as endowed by nature.

We know a rich and fertile soil means an income for our farm people which will raise their standard of living and which will create additional buying power. When Georgia farmers are prosperous, Georgia is prosperous. Fertile soil means prosperous farms, and prosperous farms mean a prosperous state. So, the matter of depletion and loss of soil is something for the farmer and the business man to be concerned about.

It is not far fetched to consider we may eventually have more people in this nation than our land can feed. With our population increasing and the fertility of our soil decreasing, we could find ourselves in another generation approaching the poverty and hunger of Japan, China, and many European countries. The sure way to safeguard our situation is to safeguard our soil.



From two decades of experience experts have learned the most effective ways and means for stopping erosion and for building up the land. This information is available to all, and a farmer can learn to practice some sort of conservation even if his only cultivating equipment is a mule and a few implements. Conservation and sound management of farms will pay increased returns just as surely as neglect and misuse of the land bring ~~de~~ increased returns.

Too many businessmen and farmers alike are still following potentially fatal errors:

1. We are recognizing that a soil erosion problem exists.
2. We are not realizing that the soils which produce the food and fibre necessary to maintain life and support business are steadily being washed "down the river."
3. We do not understand how the loss of productive soil contributed to the downfall of great nations in the past.
4. We do not recognize our own personal responsibility in soil conservation. If we did, we would participate wholeheartedly in the effort now being put forth by an increasing number to preserve our soil on which rests the American economy, now the only hope of the civilized world.

To quote William Jennings Bryan:

"The great cities rest upon our broad and fertile prairies. Burn down our cities and leave our farms and our cities will spring up again as if by magic -- but destroy our farms and grass will grow in every city in the country."

In carrying the gospel of soil conservation, you find many "Doubting Thomases". Carry the gospel just the same, though, for problems of land do not stop at farm, county or soil conservation district borders and affect us all, regardless of faith, race, creed or political affiliations, irrespective of whether we be bankers, business men, professional men or farmers. Your soil conservation district has the finest basic coordinated program in agricultural history. I can not too strongly urge your full participation, in <sup>advancing</sup> ~~advancing~~ yourself of the service.

Your soil conservation district is doing an excellent job. But we must not permit ourselves to be satisfied with the progress made. True, we have come a long way, but the major part of the tremendous task lies ahead. You can help with this task by

continuing your strict program of soil conservation and by convincing your neighbors that

they need soil conservation on their farms, too.

Today we are somewhat disappointed at the average production of lint cotton per acre in the state. With better seed, better fertilization, better control for boll-weevils, and improved methods available, Georgia is still producing only about 187# lint cotton to the acre -- the lowest in the Southeast -- 30% less than the next nearest state, Alabama. As a profitable operation, cotton production should average a bale of cotton on an acre of land.

Cotton is still the South's number one money crop, but fewer people will be needed to grow cotton, because of mechanization and reduced acreage. This fact need not discourage us. The rural South can have just as great prosperity from 1950 to 1960 as it has had in 1940 to 1950. It will only require more vision and more intelligent planning. The livestock industry blends perfectly with an overall well balanced soil conservation program. Therein lies an excellent opportunity for Georgia farmers.

The most challenging phase of agriculture in Georgia today blends perfectly with a sound program of soil conservation -- that of grazing and feed crops. Then follows the livestock business. Here most of us get things switched. Feeding livestock is just a means of marketing your production of feed profitably. You cannot develop a sound livestock business unless you are able to produce feed at a profit. Georgia's opportunity in this field is unexcelled in the United States.

The Good Lord endowed Georgia with all the natural advantages to make it the outstanding livestock producing state of the nation. We have discovered and bred grasses and legumes suitable to our soil and climate. We can produce pastures and feed crops convertible into pounds of livestock at a cost comparable to any other area of the nation. Year round grazing is no longer a dream.

I appeal to you to broaden your thinking to accept the challenge facing us. We stand in the midst of vast undeveloped resources -- economic possibilities as yet largely untouched. We have the climate, the sunshine, the rainfall, the soil, and the people, the bountiful blessings of Almighty God, and -- for the first time in history -- a



substantial amount of credit and liquid wealth, all beaconing us to a future unlimited for ourselves and for the generations that come after us.

The opportunity, the responsibility, and the challenge are ours. May we all become as worthy of so great an inheritance as those honored guests today. I commend each of them. They richly deserve the honor. And to the thousands of farmers who have not yet caught the gleam, I can only apply the words of the Master "Go thou, and do likewise."