Plans Approved to Enlarge Kansas WPA Drought Program.

Leading in the response of drought states to the water conservation program launched by the Works Progress Administration, Kansas WPA officials today announced plans for enlarged operations intended to serve as an example to the nation.

One hundred thirty dams and pasture ponds have been started to date in Kansas and sites for more than 200 have been surveyed, Evan Griffith, State Works Progress Administrator, reported to Administrator Harry L. Hopkins, but this, he added, is only the beginning of our program.

With the cooperation of other Federal agencies, local officials and authorities on scientific problems involved, we are working out a comprehensive answer to our agricultural and economic as well as relief problems.

The answer will include a coordinated effort to re-sod some of the land, returning it to pasture; utilization of improved farming methods such as use of the dam lister developed in Kansas; more general crop rotation; terracing and gully control; extension of the pasture pond and reservoir program; larger storage reservoirs on small streams and a few large control dams on the main rivers.
"Such improvements should provide the maximum defense against both floods and drought in the future, promote soil conservation and if extended to other tributary areas, greatly simplify the flood control problem in the lower Mississippi Valley."

"Surveys have convinced us that it would be perilous to delay such a program and we have found the thousands of farmers impoverished by drought, as well as the governmental agencies, eager to undertake the job."

More than 5,000 Kansas farmers, all victims of the most severe in a series of droughts and crop failures, are now employed by W.P.A. chiefly on this program.

From agricultural authorities came warning that the same processes of erosion that have devastated once fertile lands of China are operative in Kansas and the Great Plains States today.

"Reports show that climatic conditions and soil analysis in the once productive area of China that has now lost all its top soil were almost identical with those of Kansas today," said A. B. Nuss, Director of Operations and Employment for the State Works Progress Administration.

"If nothing were done to halt this waste, a vast area would be lost to erosion, beyond any possible chance of bringing it back into production, within the span of this generation. In fact, several thousand acres in eastern Kansas already have reached the stage where they are unprofitable to be farmed. Water erosion is taking about one inch of top soil about every 10 years. In western Kansas wind erosion accelerates this loss to such an extent that one inch may be removed in five years. Nature required 2,000 years to build an inch of top soil. Once it is lost, the subsoil quickly wastes away."

L. C. Aicher, Superintendent of the Kansas State Agricultural College's Experimental station at Hays, Kans., who developed an inexpensive attachment for listers with which farmers can build dams between the furrow ridges and conserve
both soil and moisture, praised the Kansas conservation plan and stressed the need for a long range program in which all agencies would cooperate.

Numerous experiments are under way at the Hays station which has the largest acreage under cultivation of any experimental farm in the country, testing various methods of erosion control and water conservation.

F. G. Ackerman, Superintendent of soil erosion investigations at this station for the Soil Conservation Service, emphasized the value of the conservation work in eliminating the necessity of relief work in the future and the need for a long range, comprehensive program. He urged that a single watershed on which a variety of conditions might be treated be used for complete tests of various methods at the start of the operations.

W. O. Hilton, directing the geological study and surveys preliminary to selection of dam sites, said the pasture pond dams in Kansas would impound a minimum of 15 acre feet of water, or 4,890,000 gallons, and a majority of them will store 20 to 30 acre feet. Each of these pounds, if only half full, would have enough water to provide for 31,500 cows for one day or 350 head of cattle for 90 days without replenishment. The larger ranches, with herds of 2,000 to 3,000 cattle, he added have their own water supply though some of them may need supplemental water from the public reservoirs that are being built throughout the state.

The total acre feet of water storage now being created in the state makes it the largest in Kansas history, though the number of dams is smaller than in 1934. Careful surveying, engineering and inspection work has been a feature of the Works Progress Administration program, to avoid the mistakes of the hasty and largely futile work done by the state following the 1934 drought.