

Top Conservationist Puts Ag Plans First

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makes no charge to farmers - or anyone else - for its technical assistance. The SCS workload had been steady and fairly predictable over the years. Some farmers recognized their erosion problems and wanted them solved. Some recognized the problems but didn't care. Some didn't recognize the problems.

It is against SCS policy to tell landowners what to do with their properties. Traditionally, the vast majority of the people who got technical assistance were the people who walked in the door and asked for it. In the past few years, as a result of pressure from DER - state - regulations, a lot more people have been -

walking through SCS - federal - doors.

But a farmer who goes to an SCS office for conservation assistance will probably first talk to a person whose salary is paid at least partly by a county government. That person is the local Conservation District executive assistant. The executive assistant reports to the Conservation District board of directors. These directors are nominated by groups within each county, they are appointed by the county commissioners in each county, and they are empowered by the state to administer DER's erosion and sedimentation regulations. That very often means telling the federal



State Conservationist Benny Martin is responsible for all Soil Conservation Service operations in Pennsylvania. He feels that SCS people should spend most of their time on farm, rather than urban conservation planning.

SCS people how to spend their time.

So, a farmer who needs conservation assistance confronts not one but three levels of government - county, state and federal. Fortunately, the system works out fairly well on a local level. Individual problems do get taken care of. Unfortunately, state and federal policies don't always coincide. When DER set their July 1, 1977 deadline for farm conservation, they had no way of insuring that farmers would get the technical assistance they needed to meet the deadline. DER likewise had no way of insuring financial aid for farmers who would be compelled to install expensive erosion control measures to meet legal requirements.

At the same time that farmers were under legal mandates to stop erosion, builders and municipalities were likewise being compelled to control erosion from their earth moving projects. The only qualified source of help for builders, municipalities and farmers alike is SCS. But, while DER was tightening the screws on sedimentation, SCS budgets and personnel were being cut back.

In the hopes of untangling

some of the threads of this winding bureaucratic tale, Lancaster Farming called on Benny Martin. Martin has been in Pennsylvania since February of 1970. He was deputy state conservationist until May of 1972, when he assumed his present post. Prior to that, the University of Idaho graduate worked for SCS in his home state of Idaho.

We asked Martin how he thought SCS people should spend most of their time, and as we've noted, he thinks farmers should get most of the help from SCS planners. But no matter how Martin feels, he can't simply tell his people how to spend their time. His people must abide by the priorities established by local Conservation District directors.

"SCS is an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture," Martin said. "It is our job to provide technical assistance to conservation districts and to cooperators of conservation districts. Before we can offer any technical assistance to any landowner, that landowner must first sign a cooperative agreement with the Conservation District. Municipalities and groups, as well as individual landowners such as farmers can become cooperators."

"You see," he went on, "It's not our job to enforce state or federal laws. We assist landowners. We advise them. We don't say, 'You've got to do this or go to jail.' We do say, 'Here are several alternative methods for solving your erosion problems.'"

How does this work with farmers, we asked?

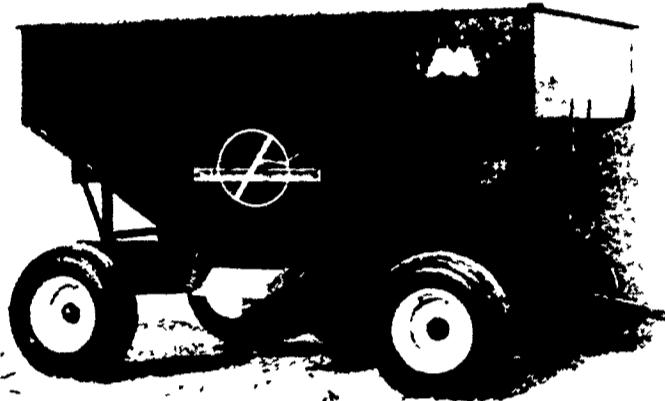
"When SCS people develop a plan for a farm, we work with the farmer to find out what he wants to do with his land. Our recommendations depend on slope, soil type, average rainfall and a number of other factors. But

one of the biggest things we take into account is the individual farmer's cropping scheme. If the farmer wants to grow continuous corn, we might recommend terraces. If he follows a less intensive program, we might recommend contour strips and waterways.

"The practices a farmer might need to control erosion are really dependent on the way he farms. And the way he farms is really his own choice."

Can't a farmer draw up his own plan, we asked.

"DER has said that no [Continued on Page 21]



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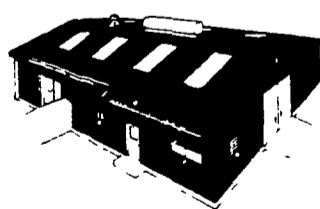
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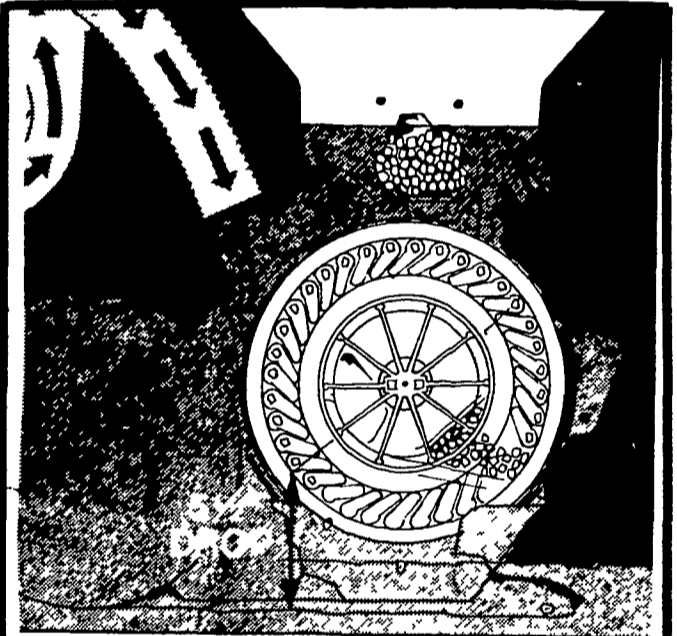
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