

Maryland SCS releases inventory data

Lancaster Farming, Saturday, October 6, 1979—17

COLLEGE PARK, Md. - losing soil almost twice as fast as nature can replace it according to a recent survey by the U.S. Soil Conservation Service (SCS). Maryland's cropland is eroding at an average annual rate of 7 tons per acre on cultivated land in the state. Nationwide, cultivated cropland loses about 5.4 tons per acre per year, ranging from an average of 1 ton in some states to 49 tons in the Caribbean.

least noticeable type of soil loss—is occurring at an average annual rate of 7 tons per acre on cultivated land in the state. Nationwide, cultivated cropland loses about 5.4 tons per acre per year, ranging from an average of 1 ton in some states to 49 tons in the Caribbean.

printout don't tell you about the nearly level parts of the state where erosion is negligible or about the steep, intensely farmed areas where erosion runs up to 40 tons per acre per year and more. We'll have a better grasp on the total erosion picture after Phase 2 is complete."

The three-part study, called the National Resources Inventory, began in 1977 in response to inquiries by Congress and others as to the status of the nation's soil and water resources. Over 200,000 statistically selected points were sampled nationwide by conservation technicians; 587 in Maryland. Gerald R. Calhoun, head of SCS in Maryland, said his agency as well as local soil conservation districts will use the date to set priorities for the state's voluntary soil and water conservation program.

In addition to erosion control, the study identified areas needing treatment such as drainage, irrigation, and improvement of pasture and forest land to increase productivity. Significant, Calhoun says, is the fact that soil and water conservation treatment is needed on about 1.3 million acres of crop and pastureland; 1.4 million acres of forest land; and on over 102,000 acres of other land including urban and developing areas in Maryland.

The study also showed that almost half of the state's 1.7 million acres of cropland is considered prime, that is, the soils are highly productive with a minimum of input.

In addition to sheet and rill erosion, the first phase of the study measured land use, soil capability, small water areas, prime farmland, and conservation needs. The second phase, due out in early 1980, measures gully, streambank, roadbank and construction site erosion. The third and final phase will compute sediment delivery for major river basins and is expected to be completed in late 1980.

There are about 557,000 acres in the state not presently cultivated that have potential for being converted to cropland. Another approximately 2.6 million acres have already been built-up or are otherwise unsuitable for conversion to cropland.

"Erosion poses a triple threat," says Calhoun. "Not only does it rob the land of its productivity, it causes sedimentation and water pollution problems."

Calhoun cautions against relying too heavily on average erosion figures. "You must remember that the figures on the computer

The study also shows there are about 216,000 acres of wetlands in the state; 41,000 acres of irrigated land; 45,000 acres of strip mines, pits and quarries; 43,000 acres of floodprone cropland; 505,000 acres of floodprone rural land; and about 50,000 acres of streams and small water bodies.

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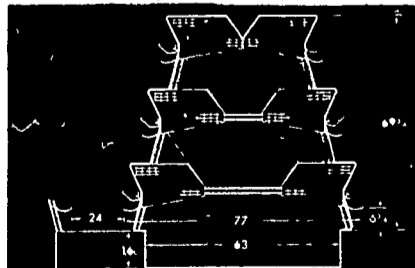


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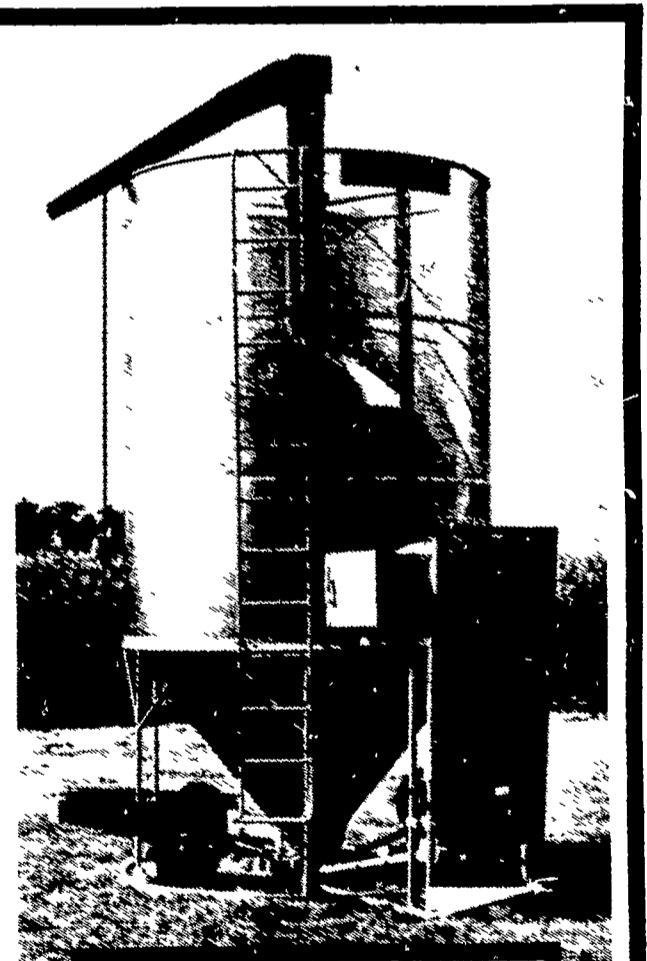
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