

Soil officials outline future conservation goals

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Two leading conservation officials, one federal and one state, today said there must be strategies or programs for dealing with soil and water conservation programs in the future.

"Only if these strategies are carefully selected and implemented can America get to where it wants to go in soil and water conservation," M. Rupert Cutler, assistant secretary of agriculture for national resources and environment, told a group of national conservation leaders meeting at the Washington Hilton Hotel.

While Cutler outlined federal plans to deal with soil and water resources over the next 50 years, a state official criticized federal agencies for administering inefficient conservation programs.

Floyd Heft, chief of the Division of Soil and Water Districts, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, said state and local conservation agencies have a greater ability to administer programs and to get conservation practices applied on the land.

Cutler released the U.S. Department of Agriculture's preliminary objectives for how much soil and water conservation America needs during the next 50 years.

The objectives, called for under provisions of the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act of 1977, are part of USDA's appraisal of

the nation's soil and water resources.

The preliminary RCA objectives deal with soil quantity and quality, water quality, and water supply and conservation.

The first of objectives, dealing with soil, would:

—Prevent erosion from causing irreversible damage on nonfederal land which currently is at the acceptable erosion level.

—Use cost-effective ways to reduce erosion on cropland where the annual soil loss rate is between the acceptable level of five tons per acre per year and 14 tons.

—Reduce erosion to the acceptable level on cropland which has a soil loss rate exceeding 14 tons per acre per year.

—Retain prime and unique farmland, such as cranberry bogs, as much as possible.

Department teams also stressed the need for improving soil tilth, organic content, infiltration capacity and the need for reducing compaction and salinity.

A second set of objectives, dealing with water quality would, Cutler said:

—Approach zero discharge of toxic pollutants as soon as possible.

—Minimize the adverse impacts of organic wastes, with specific targets in critical areas.

—Reduce pollution from nutrients and salinity by 30 percent.

—Reduce sediment pollution as needed to

protect lakes, reservoirs, harbors and fisheries and to achieve uses designated by the states.

Objectives on water supply and conservation include:

—Increasing irrigation efficiency from the current rate of 55 percent to 71 percent on farms and from 77 to 90 percent off farms in areas where water supplies are dependable over the long term.

—Stressing water conservation practices in areas where ground water is being depleted.

—Working in cooperation with the states to protect instream uses by upgrading operation and management of existing irrigation improvements.

Cutler said other objectives would:

—Reduce to zero the net loss of wetlands resulting from agricultural uses.

—Reduce total upstream flood damages by at least 16 percent, using both structural and nonstructural measures.

—Give priority to projects that prevent loss of prime agricultural lands and wetlands.

Cutler said other tentative objectives deal with fish and wildlife habitat, waste management and energy conservation and production.

"Knowing your intended direction, of course, does not get you there," the assistant secretary said.

"There must be strategies

or programs for achieving the objectives. Only if these strategies are carefully selected and implemented can America get to where it wants to go in soil and water conservation," he said.

The objectives released are the first analysis of the department's RCA appraisal, which was completed earlier this year. Next, the department will offer a series of management strategies and alternatives for implementing the objectives. These alternatives will be available in January.

Then, USDA will have a public review period for comments on those alternatives.

Heft told the delegates at the meeting, "The executive and legislative branches of our federal government have shown little potency or commitment to bring about the substantial changes needed to meet today's conservation challenges."

From a non-federal view, Heft said conservation leaders must expeditiously pursue the following major objectives:

—Remove the partisan political impact on all federal conservation professionals below the Washington level and a substantial percentage of the Washington level employees.

—Put conservation back in the hands of local people, where the accomplishments are to be attained and where local administrators are aware of the needs.

—Encourage establishment of autonomous local units of government having taxing and extensive powers and responsibilities in natural resource conservation management and regulation where necessary.

—Establishment of state agencies having similar responsibilities as the local units for delivering financial, technical, legal, and legislative program assistance.

—Establishment of a federal department having similar responsibilities as those at the state and local

level to provide federal assistance for conservation of natural resources.

—Federal grant programs to state and local governments need to be expanded and made more realistic, permitting much greater latitude for local and state decision-makers.

—Combine technical and cost-share programs for landowners, eliminating multiple agency involvement.

—Cost-share programs need to be restructured to gain local landowner acceptance, public support, and reduction of administrative overhead.

—Federal and state incentive programs need to reward landowners for good conservation practices.

—Federal agencies must direct their programs and

personnel for maximum effort at the field level.

—Education extension programs need to be directed to attract a larger percentage of landowners affected by soil and water conservation problems.

—Research activities in soil and water management must be expanded.

—More discussion is needed by all of the agricultural community on how land management controls can best be implemented at the farm level.

—Greater independence and coordination of wildlife, forestry, surface mining, public lands management, environmental programs, and other development and management programs affecting natural resources management and conservation is needed.

Hershey Center to expand rural services

UNIVERSITY PARK — The Penn State trustees have approved a proposal to request funding to expand The Milton S. Hershey Medical Center program serving rural areas and small communities.

Some \$1,260,246 in supplemental funds will be requested as part of the University's 1980-81 appropriation from the state.

"There continues to be a pressing need for better medical care in Pennsylvania, and Penn State, through the Milton Hershey Medical Center, is trying to respond to that need," Dr. John W. Oswald, president of the University, told the trustees.

"The Hershey Center is the only medical school university hospital located in a non-metropolitan area of the state. Accordingly, it has accepted special responsibilities to improve the quality and availability of health services for the over eight million Pennsylvanians who reside outside the Commonwealth's two principle metropolitan areas."

Eight rural medicine programs developed at the Hershey center, in consultation with physicians and hospital staff members from small communities, have been tested and successfully established in some rural areas. Permanent continuing funding is essential, Oswald said, if they are to reach their full potential.

He said the programs were designed to bring the staff

resources and facilities of a modern medical center to underserved areas, to train future doctors and health practitioners for service in rural areas and to provide continuing education for practicing physicians.

"Many community physicians long have practiced in relative isolation from the mainstream of modern medicine," Oswald noted.

"Opportunities have not always been available to them to participate in refresher programs to be adequately informed of recent developments in research and improved medical practices."

Equally important, he said, are programs such as Hershey's Primary Care Preceptorships, which give medical students exposure to family practice in small communities by allowing them to observe and work with local physicians. More than half of Hershey's students have participated in such preceptorships. Twenty-six percent of the preceptorships have been based in communities of fewer than 5,000 people.

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