

# SCSA calls for nat'l commitment to soil and water conservation

ANKENY, IO. — A renewed, national commitment to soil and water conservation programs is a must, according to Robert C. Baum, president of the Soil Conservation Society of America.

Baum made the declaration in a formal response to the revised draft of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's 1981 RCA Program Report and Environmental Impact Statement. That report, released by Secretary of Agriculture John Block on Oct. 28, 1981, lays out USDA's preferred program for soil and water conservation as required by the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act of 1977.

In his statement to Block on behalf of the Society, Baum pointed out that the RCA process at the state and local levels provided a timely challenge and a limited but valuable financial incentive for the nation's conservative districts and state conservation agencies to review the status of soil and water resources.

"The conservation district and state summaries (in the RCA process) indicate that a new vironmental commitment is necessary nationally," Baum said. "This commitment requires continuing leadership on the part of USDA in soil and water conservation, with increased funding to help maintain and where necessary restore the productive capacity of our soil and water resources."

"While it appears that with continued encouragement there will be increased funding from the state and local levels for conservation programs," Baum said, "we stress that this support should be offered at the state and local levels with the intention that it supplement USDA's leadership and contributions. In no way should it serve as a substitute for a reduced federal effort."

"We believe that it is imperative that USDA continue to offer an adequate base level of national leadership in soil and water conservation," Baum said. "We are concerned that the preferred

program, with reductions in the base toward targeting, block grants, and other areas, would result in inadequate technical and financial assistance in areas outside of targeted areas and in states where the block grant matching funds were not available, for whatever reasons."

Other points in Baum's statement include:

—Opposition to the proposal for new local and state conservation coordinating boards.

"New boards are not needed. There presently exists a local administrative system that has proven successful for many years," Baum emphasized.

—Opposition to the proposed block grants to states if the funding for those grants is to be taken from existing programs.

"We emphasize that exciting programs are not now adequately supported. New funding must be made available if this effort (block grants) is to be successful. Additional reductions will severely limit the present, valuable national soil and water conservation effort," Baum commented.

—Targeting of conservation programs to areas of critical concern is supported only if new funding is available.

"National targeting should not be limited to the few preferred program objectives. State priorities should also be considered in some instances," Baum stressed.

—Funding for conservation programs needs to be increased.

"We again reiterate that we must have a greater federal commitment for the conservation of our basic natural resources. The current federal expenditure of less than \$5 per American per year on USDA's soil and water conservation programs is inadequate. The expenditure of \$1. for conservation programs out of each \$700 expended by the federal government is shortsighted and will result in increased food costs in the future," Baum said.

In his statement, Baum also called for greater coordination

among USDA agencies, the use of tax incentives as a means of encouraging conservation farming, and expanded research and educational programs.

Baum suggested to Secretary Block that USDA's credibility was on the line in the RCA process.

"The priority objectives set forth in the preferred program do not fairly represent the objectives identified by the public in its earlier review of RCA documents. If the program submitted to Congress following this review does not more adequately reflect the public feedback, then USDA's responsiveness to public concerns will be seriously questioned," Baum said.

Baum concluded his statement by saying that the RCA process has great possibilities if major changes are made in the preferred program by USDA before it is submitted to Congress or, if not, by Congress itself. The two most needed changes, Baum said, are a

national conservation commitment and a new, higher level of funding.

"It is unfortunate," he said, "that the political process has resulted in the preparation of a program that is limited to a predetermined budget level.

USDA should have presented the status of our nation's soil and water resources, recommendations on how to solve these

problems, and the results of these solutions requested by Congress. This was the purpose of the resource studies and the state and local priorities prepared under the RCA process. Congress could then determine the level of national effort that would be supported by their constituents and that is necessary to protect the productivity of our soil and water resources."

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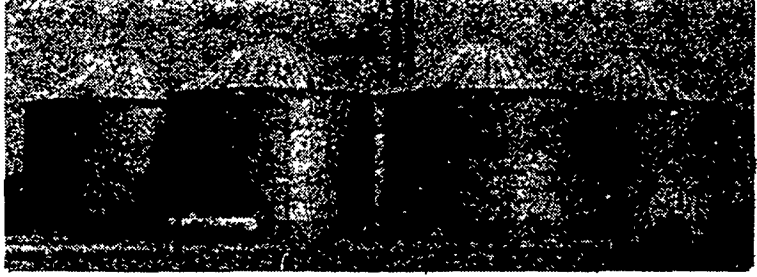





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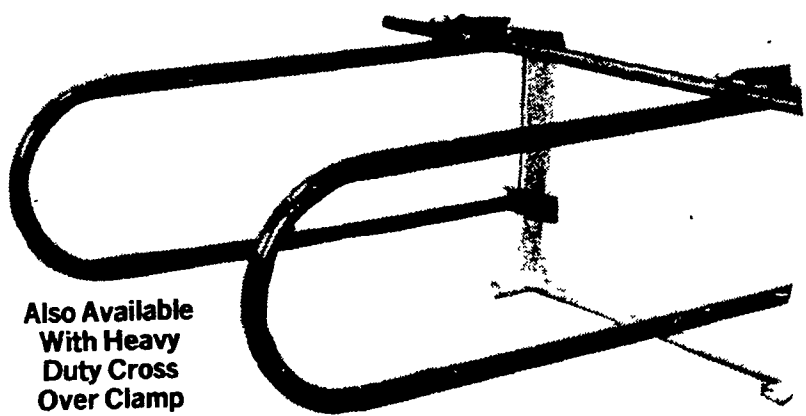
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