

# Conservation programs reach turning point

NEWARK, Del. — Soil and water conservation programs are in transition today. Federal funding adequate to support former levels of agricultural conservation has been steadily cut back. What's left is being directed toward a narrower range of needs.

At issue are two questions. Who benefits from conservation practices? And who should pay for them? "Once you've answered the first question, which is seldom easy, the second pretty well takes care of itself," says University of Delaware extension specialist in community and resource economics, Gerald F. Vaughn.

Conservation practices in one area often impact other locations, sometimes miles away. "For example, besides increasing soil productivity, improved farmland drainage often benefits adjacent highways and nearby towns," Vaughn says. "Government decision-makers are anxious to

spend limited public conservation funds in ways which buy the most conservation possible, that is, ways in which public benefits clearly and substantially exceed public costs."

Since their creation in the 1940s, Delaware conservation districts have helped build an agricultural land resource base that is the envy of other states, the specialist says. Moreover, rapid population and economic growth now have urbanized large areas throughout the state, creating additional urgent conservation needs.

"We know the problems and we know most of the solutions. But we are less certain of who will fund these future conservation programs," Vaughn says. As he sees it, the task is to find new ways to help finance essential farmland conservation practices while at the same time offering expanded and innovative services to Delaware urban areas.

State and local governments are the most likely sources of money to replace lost federal funds. However, they may never wholly make up for federal cutbacks. Instead, government at all levels may insist that landowners assume a larger part of the cost of those conservation practices lacking substantial public benefits.

State and local government support of district conservation programs increased nationwide from \$13 million to \$169 million between 1957 and 1982. A growing number of states now pay for district technical aid and resource information, and also supplement federal cost-sharing to help farmers adopt conservation practices. Some states even provide cost-sharing in urban areas where federal programs don't cover conservation efforts.

"In urban states such as Delaware, districts that don't respond suitably to urban con-

servation needs probably can't expect broad public support," Vaughn says. "This doesn't mean that districts in these states should stop working on farmland and shift totally to urban work. It's more a matter of achieving a new balance between rural and urban efforts."

The economics of agriculture and other land use changes continually, sometimes sharply, he says. Benefits and costs of conservation practices thus are subject to considerable change. He says it's essential to conduct comprehensive and continuing economic impact studies of conservation practices on a representative sample of Delaware lands. "These studies are needed to provide better benefit-cost information and to help fine-tune our conservation planning," he explains.

Future accomplishments in the areas of soil and water con-

servation may come even harder than those in the past, the specialist says. "More technical know-how, construction funds, skill in working with people, cooperation among concerned groups or individuals, and care for the total environment surely will be required—both for new projects and maintenance of those completed. Yet I'm confident that if we apply the same dedicated effort that has characterized Delaware districts since the 1940s, conservation programs and services of value to the people of the state can be funded and will succeed."

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## Peanut restrictions

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Under Secretary of Agriculture Daniel Amstutz has said the U.S. Department of Agriculture will retain restrictions on the export of contract additional peanut products to Canada and Mexico. USDA had requested comments on the issue on May 18.

The restriction had been in effect since 1978 and had become an issue due to the substantial price differential between the U.S. and world market prices for peanuts, Amstutz said.

"This rule was implemented to protect against the possibility of contract additional peanuts being processed into products in the United States, exported to Canada or Mexico, and then imported back into the United States in competition with quota peanuts for a share in the domestic market," he said.

"Through the 1978-1981 crop years, prices for contract additional peanuts were near the quota loans rates and it was not economical to export, process and import the products back into the domestic U.S. market."

However, Amstutz said, recent legislation and weak world market prices, among other factors, have made it profitable to reimport into the United States peanut products made from contract additional peanuts that were purchased at prices lower than statutory minimum U.S. domestic edible prices.

"It is desirable that we minimize the potential cost to the government of the peanut program," Amstutz said, "and USDA has determined that Canada and Mexico shall continue to be ineligible countries for the purpose of exporting contract additional peanuts in the form of products other than seed products. The issue will be reviewed again next year for the 1985 crop."

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