

SCS Chief Praises 'Sodbuster' Legislation

HARRISBURG — A national leader predicted that the conservation titles of the 1985 Farm Bill will bring the greatest advances in controlling the country's soil erosion threat. Wilson Scaling, chief of the USDA Soil Conservation Service, told county conservation district directors attending the annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation District Directors that this was the best piece of conservation legislation "to come down the pike since the thirties."

Scaling was referring to the portions of the law which require

farmers cropping highly erodible land to have a conservation plan by 1990 and the plan installed by 1995 if they wanted to take advantage of other USDA programs such as crop subsidies, crop insurance and disaster loans.

However, in view of budget reductions, Scaling said that other conservation programs such as mine reclamation, flood prevention and rural development would face some cutbacks. "We will not abandon our commitment to your priorities, but the farm bill will have to come first, reported Scaling.

He explained that nationwide there are about two million farmers with highly erodible cropland of which one million farmers have their land protected by soil conservation practices applied in the last 50 years. "This means that we are asking SCS and conservation districts to do what took them 50 years in the next eight years," added Scaling.

Conservation district directors were complimented on their efforts in improving water quality, mainly in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Pennsylvania's pioneering efforts in controlling

nitrate levels in surface and ground water was noted. "USDA and SCS will be increasing their efforts in water quality improvement of stream and ground water in rural areas," Scaling told the group.

Water quality improvement as well as safety and health hazards elimination are achieved through the Rural Abandoned Mine Program (RAMP). Scaling noted this state's leadership in this national effort to remove the blights of past coal mining. Scaling predicted that the federal government would start the new fiscal year on a continuing

resolution which would maintain funding for RAMP, Resource Conservation and Development and Watersheds at about the same level as the past year.

"If Congress passes a budget, it appears a reduction in watershed and river basin of about \$23 million and an increase in soil conservation programs of about \$11 million," stated Scaling.

The Pennsylvania Association of Conservation District Directors, Inc. met earlier this month in Johnstown with about 300 county conservation district officials and other conservation leaders attending.

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