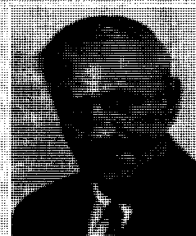




# THE OBSERVATION POST

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## The Agricultural Conservation Program

THE Agricultural Conservation Program of the Department of Agriculture was initiated in 1936 as one of several essential but practical means of conserving the nation's soil and water resources under a free enterprise economy. From the funds appropriated for the Agricultural Conservation Program, the USDA has assisted farmers in carrying out many essential conservation practices on their individual farms. This assistance has presumably been for conservation over and above what might be carried out on the farmer's own initiative and with his own resources.

During the past few years, the average annual payments to farmers participating in the Agricultural Conservation Program have been about \$230 million. Farmers have much more than matched this amount—about two to one—by their own funds and labor. A summary of conservation practices and the money expended therefore for program year 1952 are shown below.

It is no secret that many people have looked with disfavor on the appropriation of such large sums for Agricultural Conservation Program. This feeling is recorded in Congressional hearings.

The reported antagonism to the program may have stemmed either from the way it was managed or from doubts regarding derived benefits. Perhaps the most frequent criticism of ACP is that it makes payments for recurring or maintenance applications of phosphatic fertilizer and lime after they have become a regular part of farm operation, and thus assumes part of the farmers' annual operating expenses. Many people consider this unjustified, particularly in times of supported prices, relatively high incomes, and the demonstrated returns from such practices.

The American Farm Bureau Federation, in its 1953 booklet on agricultural policies, states "the encouragement of wise farming practices through education and demonstration is a sound public investment." However, it considers that "appropriated funds for the Agricultural Conservation Program should be allocated on the basis of conservation needs. Payments for practices which have become a normal and accepted part of

farming operations of the area in which a farm is located should be discontinued."

Based on studies of the technological aspects of the conservation program, there is reason to believe that the long-range implications of an Agricultural Conservation Program operating in a scientific environment may be more important than the record of past achievements. Here are four points that merit consideration.

1. It is generally recognized that a sound Agricultural Conservation Program can contribute significantly to the improvement and maintenance of the productive capacity of the farms of this country and thus help assure that there will be plenty of food and fiber now and in the future. In the Agricultural Conservation Program the door is open to all farmers, but no farmer is required to participate.

2. From the viewpoint of maintaining a technologically advanced agricultural economy, the Agricultural Conservation Program has an incontrovertible educational value. In many regions of the world millions of people are confronted with an inadequate diet as well as periodic famines. In these lands, an Agricultural Conservation Program could alleviate much hunger and misery and perhaps kindle the flame that would light the way to a brighter existence. Help, inspiration, and education are mighty forces for self-improvement. The

history of our dust bowl is a reminder that conservation was not an inherited characteristic of our prairie farmers.

3. Our Government spends large sums on research to conserve and improve the richness and tilth of our soils. Many branches of science participate in these investigations. By integrating the Agricultural Conservation Program with the research and extension agencies, it becomes practical to implement research and demonstration activities. It could permit soil scientists in government, universities, and industry a greater opportunity to test theories, implement proved practices, and study results of scientifically conducted conservation practices.

4. From the viewpoint of industry, there appears to be one other advantage to a well-managed Agricultural Conservation Program. It should lead to greater markets for farm machinery and agricultural chemicals. Once a farmer is educated to appreciate the advantages of technological farming, it is reasonable to expect that he will continue to be a customer for fertilizers, pesticide dusts and sprays, herbicides, and the numerous other chemicals, pumps, and gadgets that contribute to efficient farming.

A properly integrated and well administered Agricultural Conservation Program can serve as a practical means of extending and implementing research. It can encourage better methods of controlling erosion and noxious weeds. It can help preserve our most priceless heritage, the productivity of our lands.

### Summary of Conservation Practices

(Expenditures Fiscal Year 1952)

Practice	Expenditure (Million Dollars)	Portion of Total %
Soil improvement—inorganic materials: Liming, phosphates, potash, minor elements for conserving uses	104	42
Soil improvement—organic materials: Green manure and cover crops, increased acreage of grasses and legumes, etc.	42	14
Mechanical erosion control practices: Terraces, contour farming, stripcropping, sod waterways, dams, other erosion control	29	12
Drainage practices	9	4
Irrigation practices	9	4
Forestry practices (excluding \$477,000 assistance under the Naval Stores Conservation Program)	1	*
Pasture and range practices (excluding minerals)	45	18
Miscellaneous: Clearing land to establish legumes or grasses, controlling perennial weeds, etc.	7	3
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>100</b>

\* Less than 0.5%.