

# Perspective



## Plenty to Eat

CHARLES E. KELLOGG, *Assistant Administrator for Soil Survey, USDA*

**T**HE PROSPECTS for food production within our own country are good. The problem is mainly one of efficient sustained use in balance with our needs. Around 610 million acres of land in the United States have been developed for crops and improved pasture. Of this, some 475 million are used for crops and rotation pasture. Around 48 million acres used for crops are poorly suited to them. Farmers are actually using for crops only about 385 million acres of soil that are really suited to crops according to our present knowledge. On the other hand, we have about 100 million acres now used for nonrotation pastures and another 100 million acres now used for woods that are suitable to crops. By careful planning and shifting of land use we could return all the land poorly or indifferently suited to crops to either woods or pasture and still have nearly 600 million acres for crops and rotation pastures if needed.

We have enough for as long as I can see in the future. We are losing acres and damaging acres unnecessarily, and these losses cause unnecessary readjustments and great and unnecessary losses in efficiency, but we have an abundant supply of total acres.

Now, let us look for a moment at production per acre. Here, too, we are in a strong position. Production has been going up for several years at a little better than 1.5% each year, which is about the rate of increase of our population. This rate of increase has been coming during a relatively favorable economic period for farmers. Then, too, we had some backlog of scientific results that farmers had not applied during prior depression years.

A continuing problem is to manage the big harvests of good years without damaging our agricultural plant and our soil resources. I should like to emphasize a few facts about our agriculture that are basic to this supply problem and the other major problem of soil and water conservation.

1. Abundant agricultural production is so important to our continued existence as a free nation that we cannot run the risk of even temporary food shortages. We cannot even run the risk of allowing our agricultural plant—our farms and ranches—to deteriorate.

2. Even more important are the unstable prices of agricultural products collectively and the extremely unstable prices of many individual items. When the income of an individual farmer suddenly declines, he often cannot maintain the soil conservation practices he already has, let alone develop them further.

3. Agriculture is rapidly becoming more and more "industrialized." And the way toward improved efficiency for the benefit of both farmers and city people lies along the road of increased mechanization. Thus, in addition to the vicissitudes of weather, the modern farmer is subject even more than other groups to the vicissitudes of the price system.

4. Despite abundant resources and great wealth in this country, we have great poverty and apparent lack of opportunity in rural places. Although an enormous problem, it is not primarily an agricultural problem, since the opportunities for these people to contribute substantially to the economy are by no means in agriculture alone.

With adequate incentives for adjusting farming systems to the long-time conservation basis and with the technical assistance for helping farmers to adjust soil use and practices on their individual farms, our farm people can become even more prosperous, and all our people can be assured of abundant supplies of farm products for a still lower percentage of their incomes.

*(Excerpts from an address before the agricultural luncheon, 42nd annual meeting, Chamber of Commerce of the U. S., April 27 1954)*