Progress in Completing Conservation Farm Plans

by

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The physical problems of conservation vary greatly in different localities. Each state has its own peculiar combination of soil and climate which influence the type and extent of conservation measures required. These problems may even vary in as small a geographical area as a single soil conservation district. While these problems are very important, the success or failure of the conservation movement depends upon the attitudes and the economic situation of the cooperators in the district and upon the ability of the professional conservationist to manipulate these attitudes and resources of the best interests of both the cooperator and the conservation movement.

Several studies have been conducted to determine the obstacles to adopting conservation practices on the farm, and how to deal with these obstacles. Studies by the Missouri Agricultural Experiment Station[2] and by C. R. Hogland[3] reveal six primary obstacles to the completion of conservation practices on the farm: (1) age of the operator, (2) attitudes of neighbors, (3) reluctance to change, (4) reluctance to out-of-the-pocket costs, (5) tenant farming, and (6) desire for high current income.

The purpose of this study was to: (1) determine the obstacles to conservation practices in the Athens Conservation District, (2) determine the effect of economic situations upon the success of the conservation movement, and (3) determine the progress of the conservation movement in the Athens District.

In order to accomplish the objectives of this study interviews were made with five per cent of the cooperators in the Athens District selected at random but in proportion to the total number of cooperators within a given area of the District. A questionnaire was constructed and used as a guide during the interview in order to standardize the interviews. A total of 31 cooperators having 34 farm plans were interviewed. All interviews were conducted by the investigator.

Nineteen per cent of the cooperators had adopted essentially all of the practices listed in their original farm plans. An additional 60 per cent had made substantial progress in applying their plans. The remaining 21 per cent were just starting to adopt their plans or had abandoned them.

Lack of time was given by 40 percent of the farmers and lack of finances by 28 per cent as reasons for non-compliance or non-completion of conservation practices. Finances seemed to have the greatest bearing on the problem as lack of finances usually results in the lack of time. The majority of the farmers interviewed held other jobs in addition to farming. Other reasons given for non-completion were: suspension of farming activities, disagreement with some practices, age, and health of the farmer.

The cooperators generally agreed that the most common reason for completing practices was the fact that they were urgently needed. Some cooperators completed only those practices which would show immediate returns. Most part-time farmers completed those practices that would build up their land so that it would be in good condition when they retired from their outside jos.

A review of the completed practices showed that pasture improvement was planned in all of the basic plans and was progressing in 79 per cent of these plans. Pond construction was the most popular of the recent common practices being planned. Ponds were being planned on 26 farms with 61 per cent completed.

Other practices planned in over two-thirds of the farm plans were: wildlife area improvement, contour stripping, tree planting, waterway development, contour farming, and pond improvement. These practices reflect the typography of the Athens District and were completed on one-third of the farms for which they were planned.

The majority of the farmers were enthusiastic about their conservation plans and the assistance they were receiving from the SCS technicians. One-third of the farmers indicated they desired to plan other conservation practices in addition to the ones specified on their original plans.

Progress is difficut to measure. In conservation practices it must be based upon the number of plans completed and upon the degree of application of practices in the incomplete plans. In the studies previously cited the percentage of completion ranged from 10 to 30 per cent with 20 to 33 per cent of the farmers indicating no progress. The study of the Athens District revealed a 19 per cent completion of plans with approximately 60 per cent indicating substantial progress. A comparison of the results of this study and the ones previously cited reveals that progress in applying conservation practices is very similar. However, there are basic differences in the reasons given for not applying the planned practices. These differences may be attributed to the physical characteristics and the economic status of the area studied.

1 This is a brief summary report of an extensive University honors project conducted by Lowell V. Beaverson during his senior year as an agriculture student at Ohio University under the supervision of Dr. Burton W. DeVeau. Mr. Beaverson is a member of Delta Tau Alpha.

2 University of Missouri College of Agriculture, Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin, **Obstacles to Conservation on Midwestern Farms**, Bulletin 574 (Columbia; North Central Regional Press, 1952)

3 C. R. Hogland, **Soil Conservation in Michigan, Progress and Problems,** Department of Agriculture Economics, Michigan State College, Special Bulletin 394 (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1955)