

Cecil Watts Heads Conservation District

Plans for setting up a Soil Conservation district to develop the agricultural resources of Curry county, were close to the hearing stage this week. The State Soil Conservation committee announced approval of the petition favoring the farmer-action program.

The petition, which included the names of some sixty landowners, is the first step, under Oregon law, in the process of organizing a county-wide Soil Conservation district similar to those formed in 36 other farming areas in the state.

Next, will be the scheduling of a public hearing by the state committee to give interested landowners an opportunity to voice their opinion for or against the measure. In event the hearing is considered favorable by the committee, a date for a referendum vote will be set. Two-thirds of the votes cast must be "yes" to insure a district's passage.

Actual date of the hearings on the Curry County Soil Conservation district proposal has not yet been announced by the state committee. However, farmer-leaders of the district organization committee, believe the hearing will be announced either late this month or early December.

The proposed district has received support from the Sixes, Ophir, Chetco and Pomona Granges, and from leading farmers of the county. The district organization committee, headed by Cecil Watt of Brookings, includes: Clarence H. Brooks, Langlois, secretary; Raymond Capps, Sixes; Charley Fox, Langlois; Joe Nilson, Langlois; Otis Bowman, Gold Beach, and John Donaldson, Francis W. Brown and Donald O. De Haven, Denmark.

Considerable interest in formation of a soil conservation district to improve, safeguard and develop the farmlands of Curry county has been indicated by farmers in many sections, since organization plans were launched a year ago, according to Cecil Watt, a leader in the district movement.

In addition to numerous educational meetings, held to acquaint farmers with district activities, several farmers have visited functioning soil conservation districts to see the district plan in action. Supporters of the district proposal expressed themselves as "very pleased" over the backing and the general favorable acceptance which the plan has received.

Under Oregon law, soil conservation districts are a regular part of state government and operate along democratic lines. Each district is governed by a board of five farmer-supervisors; three of which are voted in by landowners at the time of the referendum, and two are named by the governor. Supervisors serve in a voluntary capacity, and administer the affairs of the district without

pay. In general, districts are formed to provide farmers with needed engineering and scientific aid in the wide field of soil and water conservation. For example, farmers with wet lands, low-producing pastures, or poorly planned irrigation systems can obtain technical help. Farmers can also obtain through their soil conservation district, the kind of technical and engineering help they need to tackle tough land problems.

Cecil Watt puts it this way, "Many of us have long since come to the conclusion that we can't drain wet lands, run an irrigation system, or step up the productivity of a pasture, simply by 'guess and by golly' methods. We just don't have the 'know how' to work out many of our land problems; and, as long as farmers in other agricultural areas are getting a 'helping hand' we figure it would be good for us, too."

According to Cecil Watt, Curry county farmers could get through a Soil Conservation district, trained help from such agencies as the U. S. Soil Conservation Service,

county and state extension services, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and county and state departments.

"Another thing, we farmers like about districts, is that there's no law or authority to force us into doing any more conservation work than we choose. Of course, most farmers in our county want to do all they can to improve their lands, but it's on a self-help, farm-action basis.

"We've been doing a lot of thinking about our land problems the past year. We believe the agricultural output and prosperity of our farmers would be greatly stepped up if we farmed the conservation way."

In submitting its petition to the State Conservation committee, the district organization committee listed the following major problems:

Streambank stabilization along Sixes River, Floras Creek, Elk River, Chetco River, Lower Rogue River, Pistol River, Winchuck, and other minor streams. Improvement of sprinkler and surface-type irrigation systems. Pasture im-

provement, clearing and leveling of rough land for better irrigation and drainage. Setting up of a program of crop rotations for pasture and specialty crops. Eradication of brush, weeds and undesirable shrubs. Farm woodland management and reforestation. Erosion control through improvement in methods of handling timber on slopes. Contour tillage to control erosion on sloping coastal lands. Stabilization of sand dunes, soil management through use of fertilizer, soil amendments and diking.

Should farmers succeed in their

plan to organize the Curry County Soil Conservation district, a heavy call for technical help in drainage of wet lands is expected. Technical assistance is needed, members of the organization committee point out, in draining some 25,000 acres of water-laden land in the north portion of the county, along with drainage of additional farmlands over the county. Assistance also is expected to be needed in the control of tide water and construction and maintenance of diking systems.

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