

# Conservationists Hold Line Against Valley Erosion

## Winter Losses Termed Slight To Moderate

(Editor's note: Herb Boddy of the U.S. Soil Conservation Service in Portland writes the column on what is happening to the soil of the Willamette valley.)

The affect of one of the Willamette Valley's worst winter runoff periods, brought slight to moderate soil losses to sloping agricultural lands in Marion county, the Portland regional headquarters of the U.S. Soil Conservation Service reported this week.

The U.S. Soil Conservation Service's survey team estimated that more than a million tons of topsoil was washed from the uplands of the valley so far this year. Marion county's soil losses were set at 111,000 tons eroded off some 17,300 acres of fall seeded grain and fallowed fields.

Soil conservationists described erosion in the Waldo Hills, north of Stayton, and in the steeply sloping farming areas south of Salem, "severe," where losses of as much as 30 tons per acre occurred. But, they explained, large acreages of grass grown for seed in the Waldo Hills provided substantial protection against soil losses on most farms.

**Facts Not All Bad**  
Erosion facts, uncovered by the survey team, were not all bad. There were many "bright spots" where "conservation practices" had held the line against erosive forces. A good example was the Vernon Jette farm, near Shaw, where contour strip cropping, coupled with a long time rotation of sod crops and short-lived grain, hay and seed crops, gave protection to sloping lands.

Sloping agricultural lands of the Willamette valley lost more than a million tons of fertile topsoil, while individual farm erosion losses ranged from one to 100 tons per acre, during one of the worst winter runoff periods on record. The huge soil erosion damage figure which topped the million-ton mark affected approximately 97,000 acres. It occurred mainly on fallow fields, fall-seeded grainlands, hillside row crop farms and on some upland orchard acreage in watershed areas throughout the valley, the survey conducted by the Portland headquarters of the U. S. Soil Conservation Service shows.

**Need Clearly Shown**  
Not generally tabbed as an "erosion danger area" by Portland and valley residents, the gullies, rills, and eroded farmlands, now visible on many farms in Multnomah, Clackamas, Washington, Yamhill, Marion, Benton and Polk counties clearly illustrate the need for immediate erosion-combating measures, service officials point out.

Ronnie Elmes, district conservationist stationed at Eugene, who with Bill Hill, state soil scientist of Corvallis, and Elliott Flaxman of the regional staff, made the inventory of soil erosion damage, said the high soil tonnage mark brought into sharper focus the need for wider use of conservation farming practices.

"We have long known that soil losses from winter run-off were mounting in the Willamette valley watershed," Elmes explained. "But, not in many years have erosion landmarks stood out so prominently. The hundreds of erosion marks, which can now be viewed in hillside areas and lands sloping back from the valley floor, have made farmers and conservationists, alike, more conscious of the problem."

**Weather Piles Up Perils**  
Beginning in December when rainfall averaged 3 inches above normal throughout the valley, a combination of weather factors, including high winds, melting snows and thaws teamed up to produce a strong erosion force. Soaking of farmlands by the heavy rains of February 9, 10, 17 and 18, and melting of partly frozen soils, caused most of the erosion and flood damage during the winter. In parts of Benton and Clackamas counties, a blanket of snow protected fields from run-off during February's heavy rains.

Most erosion landmarks visible today on Willamette hill lands are of the rill type, or small gullies, though in at least a few instances fields were rutted to a depth of six feet.

Soil conservationists reported that not more than 20 per cent of eroded soil was deposited in watershed areas, the bulk of lost soil having been carried out to sea by tributary streams.

Erosion surveyors were able to reach most of the highland farming communities rimming the valley. Equipped with tape and soil auger, they measured the depth and width of erosion rills, and calculated



Eroded strawberry field, cultivated up-and-down slope, eight miles southeast of Silverton in Marion county. Soil conservation service erosion surveyors set the soil loss at 25 tons per acre on the field.

ed the amount of soil lost per acre on a cross-section of farms.

**Cover Crops Valuable**

In many upland areas they found erosion-free farms, adjoining severely damaged row crop and fall-seeded grainlands. Good cover crops were firmly holding soil on some of the steepest watershed lands. Other soil conservation practices, which were observed to be effectively controlling erosion, were mulching—leaving a trashy cover of straw and crop residues on the surface—contour terraces; grassed waterways to drain runoff; and strip-cropping.

In the southern portion of the Willamette valley, erosion and other problems of the land are being carefully worked out with soil conservation service technicians and through the farmer-voted Santiam, and Linn-Lane soil conservation districts.

Not much more than a year old, these farmer-managed districts are beginning to lay a ground-work of conservation practices as the first step toward safe and full use of the lands. Complete soil and water conservation practices, including erosion control measures, are integral parts of the long-range objective of such districts.

**"Snowance" Pointed Out**

That soil erosion is insurance against erosion is illustrated in the contour terraces, designed by soil conservation service technicians as a demonstration project near Rex, in Yamhill county, 10 years ago. On orchard lands with greater than 40 per cent slope these terraces carried away runoff safely and prevented gullying of downhill fields. Where soil protection was lacking, the erosion forces that washed a million tons of soil from upland farms played no favorites. It gullied clean-tilled row crop lands planted down slope. Orchards with good grass cover crops were practically unmarked. But, nut orchards, without a protective cover or those having poor water disposal systems, lost heavy tonnages of soil.

Other hard-hit areas were lands seeded to small grain, and grass or grain, too late for fall growth to provide protection for soils during the severe winter. About 85 per cent of fall seeded land had been tilled up and down-slopes.

**Row Crop Land Suffers**  
Heaviest losers from the winter runoff were row crop growers, who suffered the highest soil damage on a per acre basis. First in terms of soil tonnage losses were farmers growing small grains, and fall-seeded grasses along the slopes of the Willamette watershed. More than 780,000 tons of soil were lost on such lands.

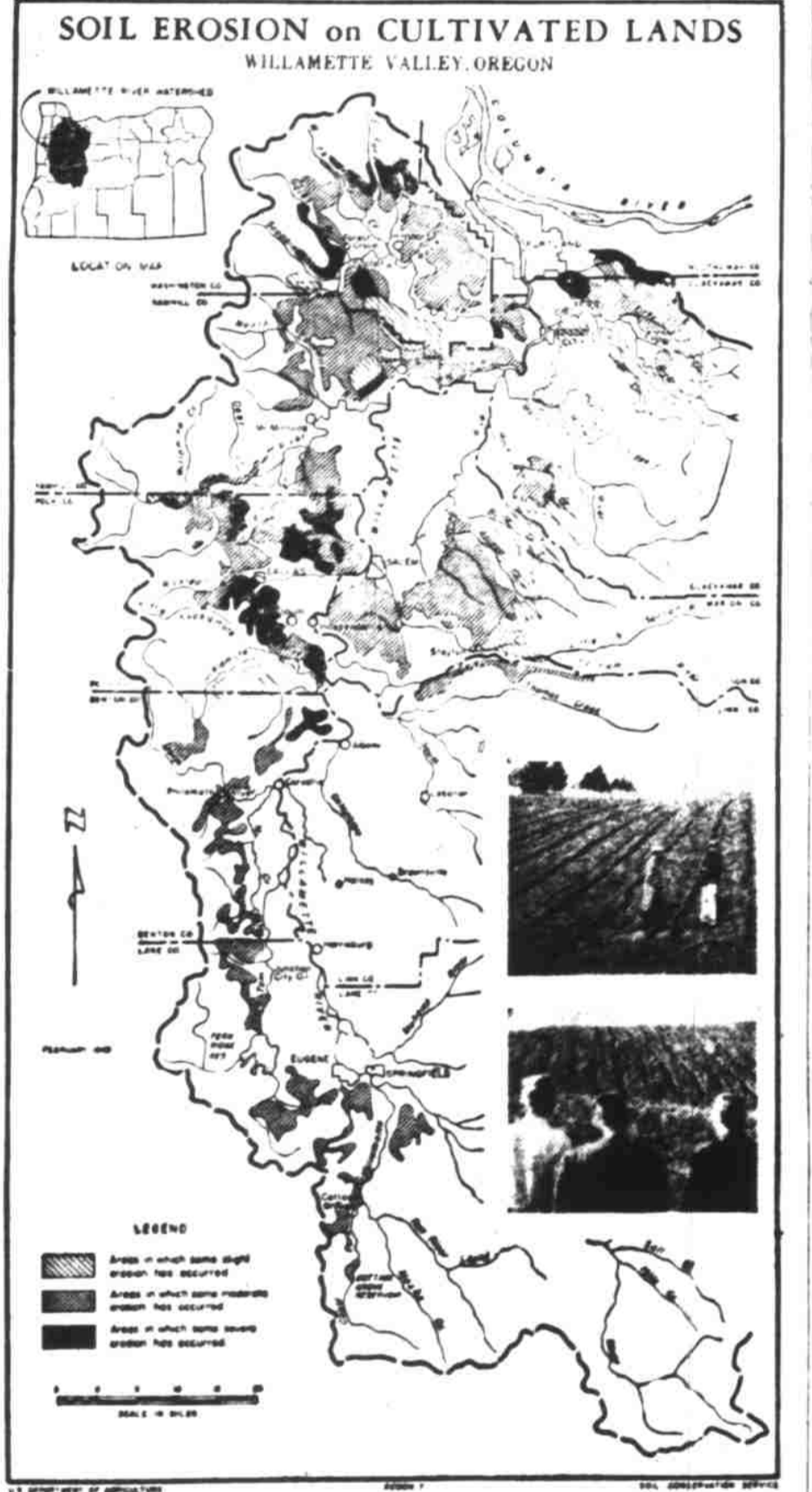
Older stands of grass, well anchored in soils, suffered only minor erosion damage, while widespread erosion of small grain fields was observed in Washington, Polk, Benton and Multnomah counties. Summing up the damaging affects of erosion on the valley's upland agriculture, Elmes said the land damage survey revealed two important land facts. (1) Crops can be grown on sloping lands with the right combination of soil conservation practices. (2) Some eroding, steeply sloping grain lands should be put in pasture to provide a permanent cover for soils. In short, there is a greater need for using the valley's sloping lands for the purpose for which they are best suited. Soil conservationists call this, "farming according to the capability of the land."

**Neighborhood Club Entertained at Swegle**

**SWEGLE**—Mrs. Ray Bernardy entertained the Neighborhood club at her home Friday afternoon. A dessert luncheon was served. Honored guest for a birthday handkerchief shower was Mrs. Henry Preim. Guests this week of Mr. and Mrs. George Brown are her sister, Mrs. Charles Redding of Portland, and his mother, Mrs. Ella Brown of Cutler City.



Elliott Flaxman, soil conservationist, and William Hill, state soil scientist, of the erosion survey team, measure soil losses on a fall-seeded wheat field a mile north of Shaw in Marion county.



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**OLD ART**—A hand-blown cathode ray tube is placed in the oven during processing for a television set, at Bethpage, N. Y.

## Labish Center Group Elects

**LABISH CENTER**—The Community club Friday night elected Max Bibby as president for the coming year. Other new officers are vice president, Arlo Pugh, and secretary, Mrs. Fred McClaughry. The committee to take charge of the last day of school no-host dinner is Mrs. Don Metheny, Mrs. Ernest Werner and Mrs. Ruben Boehm.

The Sunday school Easter program will be combined with the regular Sunday school services Sunday, with a worship service following at 11 a.m. The choir will present a service in the evening.

Harvey Aker returned Sunday from Silverton hospital, where he had been receiving treatment for a week.

## \$4,000 Damage Settlement Made In Death of Twins

The mother of twin girls killed in a train-auto accident at Gervais last July accepted a \$4,000 claim settlement, according to records filed in Marion county probate court Wednesday.

Joan and Joyce Rentz, eight-year old daughters of Mrs. Marie Rentz of Gervais were killed instantly on the night of July 28 when the car in which they were riding was struck by a Southern Pacific passenger train in Gervais.

Robert V. Pilcher, 40, Gervais route 1, driver of the car, also was killed. There were no witnesses to the crash but state police said that Pilcher apparently drove into the path of the train.

The Southern Pacific paid \$750 on each child and the estate of Pilcher, \$1,250 each.

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