

# Farmers involvement is needed to avoid unworkable conservation laws

"We farmers must broaden our thinking and involvement in agricultural conservation and pollution abatement issues, or this movement will run right over us." That was the message Stewart Smith, Associate Administrator of the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) had for more than 200 Oregon farm leaders attending the statewide ASCS conference in Bend October 11-12.

Attending the conference from Morrow County were Kenneth Nelson, county committee man, his wife Julie, and Judy Buchke, county executive director. Harold Kerr, county extension agent, also attended.

In his remarks to the ASCS, Extension Service, and other agricultural specialists from Oregon's 36 counties, Smith, a former Maine potato grower, urged farmers to get involved in the whole conservation planning and decision-making process. "We must provide as much assistance, information, and alternatives to the proper authorities at local levels as we possibly can," he said. "If we don't, you can be sure someone else will, and the consequences could be rather severe."

Smith referred specifically to the agency's Agricultural Conservation Program (ACP), which provides federal cost-sharing assistance to producers who voluntarily perform selected conservation practices on their land. ACP, he said "is in a great deal of trouble."

Full funding, at \$190 million, for the 40-year-old conservation program was approved for 1979 only on the provision that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) take a hard look at ACP to see where it fits into overall conservation needs. Congress has also directed USDA to evaluate its entire agricultural conservation effort and to recommend changes and new directions in its programs.

"A great number of people—in and out of the Congress," Smith said, "view conservation in a very broad and general sense—not merely in terms of holding soil on the fields, as we have with ACP. Others view some of our ACP practices as primarily production-oriented, and not designed primarily for conservation."

"The problem is one of perception—what is agricultural conservation if not to protect land for production for future generations? But if we want to keep ACP and hold our own in this conservation movement, we must redirect our thinking."

"We must broaden our conservation effort," the associate administrator continued, "and make it more comprehensive, not only to clear ourselves of whatever charges are made that we farmers see conservation problems too narrowly, but to take the lead in getting at solutions for some very critical national conservation problems."

Smith strongly encouraged ASCS committeemen, who administer ACP financial assistance to the farmers in their states and counties, to direct more funds into water pollution abatement projects under the provisions of Section 208 of the Water Pollution Control Act of 1972. That section of the "Clean Water" law calls for identification and solution of nonpoint source water pollution problems, a category that includes most agricultural pollution, such as sedimentation and runoff of soil and agricultural chemicals into streams and rivers.

"The growing national concern with rural water pollution and the farmers' natural concern with holding soil on the land are really 'two sides of the same issue,'" Smith noted. ACP practices designed to prevent soil from eroding downstream can also achieve the goals of the clean water effort.

Smith pointed out that

ASCS, through its ACP program, offered the only federal cost-sharing assistance now available to farmers for agricultural conservation and pollution control. It is also the only federal agency whose programs are actually administered and operated by farm-

ers, he said. Also speaking on the conservation issue was William Young, director of Oregon's Department of Environmental Quality. Young reviewed the recommendations of the Department's agricultural subcommittee on Section 208

plans, which included a proposal that a 5-year voluntary 208 program be established prior to mandatory water cleanup measures. He told the farm audience that he appreciated agriculture's concerns over mandatory agricultural pollution standards,

but noted that the state agency faced considerable pressure to put a mandatory water cleanup program in effect.

A highlight of the conference was a panel discussion featuring three county committeemen moderated by

State committee chairman, Martin H. Buchanan, of Milton-Freewater. Dennis Gilson, Lake County, Merton Sahnov, Washington County, and Stanley Timmerman, Umatilla County, discussed county committee responsibilities as they relate to the operation of

the county ASC office, how committees should cooperate with other agencies, and how local farm program decisions are made to adapt federal farm programs to local conditions.

Other speakers at the statewide conference included

Jerome Sitter, director of ASCS's Emergency and Indemnity Payments Division in Washington, D.C., who noted that under USDA's new emergency livestock feed program, county ASC committees can

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