

Among Friends Of The Soil

(Editor's note: This is No. 4 in a series of articles dealing with our farm-managed soil conservation district. In the 3rd installment we took the reader with Farmer A and the Soil Conservation Service technician while they examined one part of the farm. The technician explained the necessity of treating all parts of the farm or none, in line with the basic policy of the district. Farmer A readily agreed to go over the rest of the place and see if they could agree on a plan of action. The technician has joined the farmer by appointment and has, since his last visit, received enlarged copies of the part of the aerial photograph which shows this particular farm and all the soils information.)

Farmer A. "Which way shall we start?"

Technician. "Let's start at the barn here if that suits you. In our opinion there can be grown on places not well suited to the usual crops some extra feed. I notice you have on the north side of the barn a lane extending down to a branchhead. How much pasture do you have?"

Farmer A. "There are about two acres of open land, and the cows get some pickings from about ten acres of branch swamp. I don't keep but a couple of cows, just enough for milk and butter for our own use. I'd like to have a few more, but they are expensive to feed."

Technician. "Why not enclose from this edge of the barn out to the road in a fence, seed it to a pasture mixture, lime and fertilize it, to have a connecting link, from the barn to the swamp? As it is I notice a pretty bad gully is washing down the lane where the cows walk to and from the swamp. Then clean off the swamp, using the trees—most of them seem to be black gum—for tobacco flue wood, and seed grass and clover on more of the swamp."

Farmer A. "But the swamp is ten acres into pasture and, say,

too wet to grow good grass. Water stands on it half the time. You can't get labor to do ditching now and it would cost too much. Say, what do you think about dynamiting a ditch through there?"

Technician. "The soils man says that the soil in this swamp will be all right for dynamite and I can see that you have lots of water. That is mighty important since dynamite leaves the banks loose and they have a tendency to fill in. If you have enough water to sweep them out occasionally the ditch will stay open. Too many farmers have thrown money away by blowing a ditch where the soils were wrong and they have not used enough dynamite to blow a good ditch. You could blow a ditch big enough to drain that space for about 15 cents a running foot, including dynamite and the labor to place the charge. You are correct in saying it would have to be drained before the right kind of pasture sod would do well on it."

Farmer A. "What else would be necessary? If I could put that

a couple like you said to connect with the barn, I would have enough to keep just about the number of cows I would like to have."

Technician. "I would suggest it be cleared first, blow the ditch, and then fix it well for seeding, disking in two tons of limestone and about 600 lbs. of superphosphate. But before you do this, check with your County Agent for his recommendation. The Experiment Station tries out amounts and kinds of fertilizer generally needed and passes their findings along to the County Agent and to us. We would, I think, make the same recommendations for any given place and purpose. Sometimes we collect soil samples and send them in to the Soil Testing Laboratory in Raleigh for specific needs for some certain place."

Farmer A. "Put that down on your notes. We'll fix the pasture. Now, here's a field over on this side that makes good grade tobacco, and I have been growing tobacco there for several years."

(Editor's note: Next week's installment on the conservation way of growing tobacco should be the best yet. Don't forget to look for it.)

As the two men walked towards the field where the stubs of old tobacco stalks stood like soldiers on parade—shoulder to shoulder in perfect alignment from one side of the field to the other—each was silently busy making an appraisal, each of the other.

The Farmer was thinking: "This man talks sense so far. I just hope he will stick to common sense ideas. I think I'll try to keep an open mind about these things and at least find out all I can about them."

The technician's thoughts ran like this: "Here is an open minded farmer who is quick to catch on. He's got brains and can use them. He is badly in need of some changes, and I sure hope he will be convinced of how much quick benefit it would be to him, to say nothing of the people who will have to depend on this same land in the future."

They reached the tobacco field.

Technician. "Do you notice any washing here?"

Farmer A. "No, I haven't noticed any, but I can see the same sort of places in these row middles as you showed me over next to the road. I guess there is a little loss, but not much."

Technician. "At the erosion experiment station near Raleigh they have run some tests on row grades in growing tobacco. It was found that for every 1 per cent increase in grade over six inches to the hundred feet there was a loss of five tons of

soil per acre per year. That is, up to thirty inches, and nobody would want rows that steep. There has been developed, mainly for tobacco, what is called the string method of laying off rows so that continuous drainage in one direction is insured. This prevents both ponding of water in low places and quick run-off from the high places. All the field gets more or less the same amount of water. Plants in low places are kept from getting too coarse or drowning, and the plants in the high spots get enough moisture to mature a full crop."

Farmer A. "Well, I have seen that happen. But how about the tobacco truck when we're priming? Looks like it would break down a lot of tobacco trying to follow a crooked row, and besides, how would you manage when it came to short rows that end up in the middle? I think I can see an advantage over next to the road in growing cotton, peanuts or corn to have the rows run with a terrace, but not with tobacco."

Technician. "All the short rows, using the string method, empty either into the terrace channel or at the edge of the field. Why not let the truck come on out to the end along the wide terrace channel? When you lay by tobacco there is a depression in the middles and a ridge along the rows. The truck will naturally follow the row channel and it works all right. I don't believe I have heard anyone complain about breaking down tobacco because the rows are run this way instead of straight."

Farmer A. "Who would lay off that kind of row? I wouldn't know how, and besides, there would have to be terraces built and this land looks too flat for a terrace. I don't like them much anyway. They are in the way, especially when the land is being broken or you want to use machinery for anything."

Technician. "The terrace would be broad and reasonably flat on a slope as mild as this, so machinery can get over it all right. As for breaking, sloping land should be broken on the contour—or following the terrace lines, anyway."

Farmer A. "I'll have to think some more about this terrace and row business for tobacco. What's next in your mind?"

(Editor's note: Next week we will listen in as the Soil Conservation Service technician and

farmer talk about conservation cropping systems. Don't miss this visit next week with your conservationist and local farmer.)

Veterans Administration prior approval.

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Q. Does the age of World War I and World War II veterans affect the amount of compensation or pension paid to them?

A. Compensation is not affected but pension for nonservice-connected permanent, total disability is increased upon reaching age 65.

Q. I have completed my job-training course and find that I still have entitlement time left under the educational provisions of the G-I Bill. Will I be permitted to go to another school for the remainder of my entitlement?

A. If you have entitlement time left, you may use the remainder either for job training or for educational training with

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2. More Teachers: "We must lighten the teacher's pupil load . . . A reduction in the pupil load can be accomplished only through the employment of more teachers. This will cost money but it will be money well spent".

3. State School Building Aid: "Some of the surplus now on hand in the State treasury should be used in aiding less fortunate communities, particularly rural areas, to provide adequate school buildings".

4. School Health: "We should have in North Carolina a school health program that will insure to every child in every section, however disadvantaged, a fair chance at a healthy start in life".

5. Additional Progress: "A State School Commission, composed of intelligent and public-spirited citizens, is now making a thorough survey of our state school system, of our educational needs and of our ability to meet them. Its recommendations will have my sympathetic consideration".