Never Again...
From Dust Bowl to Drought

Name,

State Conservationist
“Since the achievement of our independence, he is the greatest patriot who stops the most gullies.”

Patrick Henry (1736–1799)
Attorney, planter, and politician remembered for “Give me Liberty, or Give me Death” speech
In 1930, the U.S. faced a growing national problem.

- Land in the Great Plains was over planted, over-plowed, & over-grazed.
- Destructive farming techniques paired with persistent drought was a recipe for disaster.
- The Dust Bowl was the worst manmade ecological disaster in our history.
Hugh Hammond Bennett declares erosion a “national menace”.

- Bennett called for transformational changes and for creation of on-the-ground solutions.
- The first Erosion Reconnaissance Survey, a formal study of soil erosion, was launched.
Then and Now...
“Out of the long list of nature's gifts to man, none is perhaps so utterly essential to human life as soil.”
Gullies Told The Story
CCC Camps Got The Job Done
Congress created a new agency: USDA’s Soil Conservation Service

Purpose: To take care of the nation’s soil

Research – Education – Technical Assistance

SCS works alongside & assists farmers

Conservation & Sustainable agriculture concepts were born
Education is Key
The task of teaching, researching, and learning new ways of farming began; they will never end.
The nation engaged in new research & science

SCS offered field visits, farm tests, field days & workshops for landowners and operators

Farmers were taught, re-trained in ag methods

The industry adopted a new perspective on productivity AND soil protection

SCS & farmers designed and built innovative conservation practices on the land
Soil erosion, runoff, and gullies were no longer tolerated as acceptable on cropland.
New Concepts

- Contour Farming
- Grassed Waterways
- Terraces
- Drop Structures
- Strip Cropping
- Conservation Compliance
When Dust Bowl drought conditions broke, landowners & SCS began to restore the land.

New partners & partnerships were formed.

Soil & Water Conservation Districts became key to solving local problems.

Farmers & conservation partners rebuilt the land, the soil, American agriculture.
77 years later, SCS = NRCS

- Stewardship & conservation principles expand
- Sustainable farming operations thrive
- Ag techniques balance profitability & ecologic responsibility
- Technological advances continue on all ag fronts
- Science-based solutions offer continual new options, ideas, & improvements
National Resources Inventory (NRI) research confirms reduction in soil erosion

Productivity increases & conservation goals achieved simultaneously

Real savings for ag producers—time, fuel, soil loss, capital costs

Other resource issues emerge:
  - Water quality
  - Flooding concerns
  - Wildlife habitat
  - Drought
So much we CANNOT control; but so much we can learn to manage better.
December 19, 2012, Dust Storm in Western Texas

Source: www.srh.noaa.gov, courtesy of Chris Manno
Drought Facts…

U.S. Drought Monitor
August 21, 2012
Valid 7 a.m. EDT

The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. See accompanying text summary for forecast statements.

http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/

Released Thursday, August 23, 2012
Author: Michael Brewer/Liz Love-Brotak, NOAA/NESDIS/NCDC
Areas Under Moderate to Extreme Drought Over Time

Is drought really a new problem?

Note: Precipitation measured in June of each year.

Farmers view conservation programs as critical to dealing with drought conditions.

Source: Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research Public Opinion Strategies, September 6, 2012
NRCS Promotes Soil Health to Improve Water Quality, Combat Drought, Mitigate Flooding, and Improve Productivity

Neighboring farms in Ohio, very different responses to the 2012 drought.

Farm that uses conventional practices, such as tilling the soil.

Farm that has used no-till for four decades.
2011, 2012 modern drought images
2011/2012 Droughts

- Not comparable to 1930’s Dust Bowl
- Intensity, length similar to U.S. 1950’s drought
- Impact & result on land? Yields?
- No comparison.

What lessened the impact of recent droughts?
What Changed?

- Better predictions & preparation
- New & more durable seed/genetic traits
- More use of irrigation options
- More diverse, sustainable farming systems
- Healthy soil characteristics
- Regular use of stewardship tactics
- Wise use & management of ag land & natural resources
Conservation Systems

- They work! Short and long term
- Effects are cumulative, compounded
- Serve as an investment in the future
- Sustainable for growing population
- Voluntary, incentive-based
- Becoming market-driven
In Closing

Although SCS’ founding mission was created during the horrific Dust Bowl Days, it is still alive and relevant today.

“There was, still is, and always will be a need to study, learn, and instruct landowners in how to best protect our precious natural resources.”

—Ivan Dozier, IL STC 2012
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