

STORIES of New Jersey

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SOIL CONSERVATION IN NEW JERSEY

Three billion tons of the soil of the United States are being washed or blown away each year. In 1934 Mr. H.H. Bennett, head of the Federal Soil Conservation Service, estimated that at least half of the 610,000,000 acres of arable land in the country had been seriously endangered by soil erosion; and an area 20 times greater than the State of New Jersey had been ruined almost beyond hope of reclamation. Unless this staggering loss can be checked, it may be impossible for the Nation to maintain the agricultural program which is the foundation of its economic life. The very energy employed to develop the resources of this rich land may, unless it is intelligently directed, be sowing the seeds of ultimate impoverishment.

Jersey farmers have not, as yet, experienced the hopeless despair of mid-western farmers who watched their land carried away from under their feet by violent dust storms. Deep gullies, such as those in the Carolinas and Georgia which have swallowed thousands upon thousands of acres of valuable land, are still rare in New Jersey. Yet more than half of the 1,914,000 acres of New Jersey farm land are seriously eroded.

Every farmer must depend on the fertile layer of topsoil which is the product of weathering forces and decaying organic matter. This organic material, containing invisible plant and animal life, grows, multiplies, decays and acts like a ferment in the soil. It transforms the carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, iron and other chemicals into soluble plant food. This life-giving substance is concentrated almost entirely in the few inches of topsoil and varies greatly in amount from the heavy prairie soils to the light soils of the Coastal Plain, extending from New Jersey to Florida. By using certain types of natural fertilizers organic matter can be replaced within a few years, but Nature requires hundreds of years to grind the hard rock of the earth and form a single inch of soft, easily worked topsoil.

WASTING THE SOIL

In vast areas of the Midwest the original topsoil measured from 16 to 20 inches or more in depth, whereas in this State it was seldom more than seven or eight inches. Therefore, a four-inch loss of topsoil in New Jersey works a greater hardship on the farmer than would an eight-inch loss in the deeper soils



"We've hauled back the sand, but the fertile soil is all down in the creek"