

STORIES of New Jersey

For many years the State Experiment Station and the Agricultural Extension Service, working through its county agricultural agents, have studied the problems of erosion and have suggested suitable conservation methods on the farms of this State. In the last ten years, however, soil erosion increased so much in scope and severity that the advisory work of the county agents could no longer cope with the problem. Both the United States Government and the State of New Jersey met this demand intelligently.

When, by act of Congress, the Soil Conservation Service was set up in 1935 as a permanent bureau of the Department of Agriculture, demonstration projects were established throughout the country. Conservation workers enlisted the services of Army engineers, the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Forest and Indian Services, agricultural colleges and experiment stations and many other Federal and State agencies. In New Jersey three demonstration areas, which can offer aid against erosion to more than one-fourth of the State, were created with headquarters at Flemington, Freehold and Moorestown. Each project is connected with a Civilian Conservation Corps unit which furnishes labor.

On 611 farms in these areas for which statistics are available, work is progressing rapidly; 1,505 acres are terraced, 10,074 acres are cultivated on the contour, on an additional 7,571 acres strip cropping has been applied, 3,376 acres have been retired to pasture and woodland and more than 2,130,842 trees and shrubs have been planted. The work represents a real advance, accomplished in four years and in the face of great difficulties.

When surveys showed that 105,000 out of 114,000 acres of cultivated land in Hunterdon County needed erosion control, the Soil Conservation Service decided to establish the first conservation project there, in the Raritan-Neshanic watershed. The area is representative of 1,000,000 acres of land in this State and of 5,000,000 acres in Pennsylvania, Delaware and Virginia. The other two projects in Monmouth, Burlington and Camden Counties are dealing with problems of the soil of the Atlantic Coastal Plain. The work of these areas is supplemented by the experimental stations at Beemerville and Marlboro. The latter is the only soil conservation station on the entire Coastal Plain of the Atlantic seaboard.

The State Soil Conservation Committee was organized in an effort to extend the work of the Federal Soil Conservation Service to all the farmers of the State. The Committee has developed plans which have these distinct features; the research program at Marlboro, a series of demonstrations to familiarize the farmer with conservation methods and a service giving farmers information about specific phases of erosion and soil conservation. But the chief function of the Committee is the organization and operation of soil conservation districts when a group of farmers petitions for such a district. Three have already been established: one in Morris, Warren and Sussex Counties, another in Monmouth County and a third in Camden and Burlington Counties. Farmers in Gloucester County have recently filed a petition for the establishment of a soil conservation district covering the entire county.

These agencies of the government are in the position of technical advisers who must depend on the cooperation of the farmer and the community. The farmer's security depends upon effective control of soil erosion. In turn, the community must support the State conservation program, for it also has a definite stake--ultimately a far more important one than the individual farmer--in the soil of New Jersey.