

Tree windbreaks encouraged

Specific steps to encourage the preservation and improvement of tree windbreaks in Nebraska and other Great Plains states are recommended to the U.S. Department of Agriculture in a Government Accounting Office (GAO) report released here Thursday.

The GAO report prepared for submission to the Congress was presented to the Great Plains Agricultural Council Forestry Committee in session here by Larry Brink, Regional Forester, Soil Conservation Service (SCS), Lincoln.

The report warned that "unless actions are taken to encourage farmers to renovate and preserve existing windbreaks rather than remove them, an important resource which has taken many years to develop could be lost and adjacent croplands could erode and become less productive."

Report alters interest
Noting that the report is aimed at altering the Congress "to a developing problem of national interest," GAO-compiled information on 16 counties in Nebraska, Kansas and Oklahoma showed that although removals in the counties do not now represent a serious problem, "removal rates in some counties warrant concern."

Most field windbreaks are being removed to make more land available for production or to install and use irrigation systems, especially the center pivot type.

Normal deterioration of trees and poorly maintained windbreaks, many of which were planted in the 1930's and early '40's, are also indirectly encouraging farmers to remove windbreaks which have become unsightly and ineffective, the report conceded.

31-page report
The 31-page report by the comptroller general said there are no Federal or state programs specifically designed to discourage windbreak removals and no program to assist farmers on a wide scale to renovate old field windbreaks.

The GAO recommendations to Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz are to:

-Survey, especially the the Great Plains states, the extent of windbreak removals and the renovation needed to preserve existing windbreaks.

-Encourage counties to carry out a cost-sharing windbreak renovation program, -Initiate an educational program supporting efforts to preserve and renovate existing windbreaks.

County renovation
The report said ASCS officials believe a cost-sharing

windbreak renovation program could be implemented on a county-by-county basis under guidelines released in April for the 1975 Agricultural Conservation Program.

The cost-sharing renovation program would need to be coupled with an educational program spearheaded by the Cooperative Extension Service, emphasizing the benefits farmers receive from windbreaks and the dangers of soil erosion if removals continue.

These efforts, GAO said, would not only discourage destruction of windbreaks, but also make more land available for food production through constructive renovation, and increase the longevity and effectiveness of existing windbreaks.

Four counties analyzed
The GAO analysis included Holt, Madison, Merrick and Seward counties in Nebraska, covering differing time frames.

The report showed 165 windbreaks removed in Holt County from 1967-74, or 7.8 per cent of the total of more than 2,100. Of the entire study, Seward County showed the highest rate of removal, with 13 per cent of its field windbreaks removed during the five-year period ending in 1970.

The report said no statistical data was available on more recent removals, but quoted farmers as saying removals were continuing because of emphasis on increased production. "Should windbreaks continue to be removed in Seward County at the 1965-70 rate, this resource will be virtually destroyed over the next several decades," the report warned.

Madison County had 1,240 windbreaks standing, 41 removed, or 3.3 per cent during the period, 1970-74. Merrick County had 20 of a total of 560 removed, or 3.6 per cent during the period, 1969-73.

Statistics show 221 acres
Statistics carried in the report showed 221 acres of field windbreaks planted in

1970 in Nebraska, compared to 198 acres in 1974. For farm-feedlot windbreaks, comparable figures were 4,754 acres and 2,300 acres.

The report warned that not only are field windbreaks being removed, but emphasis on tree planting to prevent wind erosion appears to be decreasing. "USDA officials in Nebraska said that other conservation practices to prevent wind erosion are being emphasized because farmers are reluctant to give up productive land for trees."

Some farmers consider older windbreaks a nuisance because of the land they occupy and the sapping of moisture next to cropland by certain tree species. They believe that high land values and prices of commodities raised on the land offset any benefits received from the windbreaks.

Linked shelterbelts
The report linked the importance of trees, especially field windbreaks (often called shelterbelts), to the continuing problem of wind erosion in the Great Plains States.

It quoted SCS statistics indicating that 3.8 million acres in 10 Great Plains states were damaged by wind erosion from November, 1973 to May, 1974. And, it continued, during severe drought periods, such as in the summer of 1974, windbreaks could be the only source of protection against wind erosion.

Some conservationists believe windbreaks are no longer needed to prevent wind erosion or that the need has decreased because other conservation practices, such as strip cropping, crop rotation, stubble mulching and emergency tillage have been introduced. However, USDA officials say these practices depend on adequate moisture, correct tillage operations and proper land management, leaving good windbreaks the only permanent protection during drought stress when most other conservation practices become less effective.

'Cheap energy needed'

"Energy is the life blood of our society and industry, we need a lot of it and we need it cheaply. That will have to change," said Dr. Burrell L. Wood, assistant for educational programs in the Office of Public Affairs of the Energy Research and Development Administration (ERDA) in Washington, D.C.

Dr. Wood, former Editor of Chemistry magazine for Science Service in Washington, D.C., gave the keynote address to the Great Plains Agricultural Council Forestry Committee here last Tuesday.

ERDA is a government agency which bring together major energy research and development programs and is charged with finding ways to increase the supply and conservation of available energy.

Dr. Wood said his primary responsibility is to educate the

average citizen relative to the energy situation, and called his talk in Lincoln "a report to taxpayers." To bolster the educational program to citizens, ERDA is allocated nine million dollars for public affairs efforts.

Dr. Wood said ERDA is using college personnel to rove the U.S. showing slide presentations to lay groups, in a program called "Citizens' Workshop." Dr. Dean Metz, Wayne State College professor, is responsible for outreach in Nebraska, South and North Dakota.

In his presentation, the ERDA administrator noted that primitive man used 2,000 kilocalories in the form of food and other expendable energy, while modern man uses 26,000 kilocalories.

Energy requirements by the 2,000 are closely tied to population projections, Dr.

Wood said, with the amount of energy required per person depending on whether population increases at a low, high or medium rate.

He identified four types of problems which are encountered when working with energy-economics, government or political considerations, technology and effects on environment.

At the conclusion of the keynote address, Dr. Robert Bohanan, past president of the Great Plains Agricultural Council and currently Director of the Cooperative Extension Service at Kansas State University, proposed a meeting with the director or ERDA, to explore the use of the Cooperative Extension Service to facilitate the information flow to people regarding the nationwide energy program, problems and possible solutions.

Conference topic—hunger

About 75 participants from eight states will take part in the Great Plains Assembly on World Population Growth and Hunger, to be held Thursday through Saturday at the Nebraska Center.

The assembly is sponsored by UN-L in cooperation with the American Assembly of Columbia University and the National Commission for Observance of World Population Year.

Featured speaker during the three-day conference will be Dr. Clifford Hardin, former NU Chancellor and former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture who is now vice chairman of the board for the Ralston Purina Co. His talk will be given at a dinner to be held at 7 p.m.


Friday in the Lincoln Hilton Hotel.

Participants in the conference will meet in several small discussion groups to discuss alternative policies for population control and increasing food production. At a general session on Saturday morning, a statement of conclusions and policy recommendations will be formulated by the participants for distribution to news media, appropriate public officials and interested citizens.

Participants from Lincoln include Paul Amen, president of the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce; Roger Sandman, deputy director of the Nebraska Department of

director of the Nebraska Technical Assistance Agency; Mrs. Elaine Hammer, president of the League of Women Voters; Richard E. Lonsdale, chairman of the Geography Department at NU; Wallace C. Peterson, chairman of the UN-L Economics Department; Lloyd Ambrosius, professor of history at UN-L; Ms. Suzanne S. Brown, program advisor for the Nebraska Union; John Klinker, president of the Nebraska Farm Bureau Federation.

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