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# NEWS from U.S. Senator Bob Dole

(R.—Kans.) New Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510 (202) 225-6521

## STATEMENT BY SENATOR BOB DOLE

on

### SOIL CONSERVATION

BEFORE THE

### SUBCOMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

### MARKETING, AND STABILIZATION OF PRICES

JUNE 27, 1974

Mr. Chairman, I commend you for your prompt response to the needs of conservation programs in scheduling these hearings. I can assure you, from the contacts and mail I have received from my constituents in Kansas, that soil conservation is of very great concern in my state.

We are receiving testimony from several Kansas witnesses today. This indicates the large amount of concern among farmers in the state. I think it is entirely appropriate that conservation measures should be of great concern in the nation's number one wheat producing state and one of the major agricultural areas in the world.

The importance of conservation measures to Kansas farmers is the reason behind my ongoing interest in conservation programs ever since my election to Congress 13 years ago. It is also the reason for my introducing last year S. 1902, a bill to reinstitute permanent soil and water conservation practices. The essence of that bill, I am proud to say, was included in the Agriculture and Consumer Protection Act of 1973.

So the farmers in Kansas and I are vitally interested in the topic of these hearings today, particularly concerning the availability of SCS technicians for the implementation of conservation programs and the level of funding for these programs. I think it is beneficial to hear from the Department of Agriculture about intentions for future conservation efforts and also from those who carry out and benefit from conservation programs. Testimony today, as to what practices are useful and necessary will help shape future programs. We will be particularly attentive to suggestions about what improvements should be made.

### AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES: NUMBER ONE ISSUE

Those of us in the Senate Nutrition Committee heard many witnesses testify last week at National Nutrition Policy hearings that food, and not oil, should be the issue of greatest concern in the world. This is also an issue that we have heard frequently here in the Agriculture Committee, with many experts doubting the ability of the world's population to feed itself.

In many parts of the world, including Asia and Africa, we are witnessing the likelihood of starvation for many thousands and even millions of people. As the world's most bountiful and reliable food producing area, the United States is bound to play a key role in this situation. When conditions have come to a question between starvation and survival, we can see that, without a doubt, food should be the number one issue in the world. Agriculture and the capacity to produce food should have an equal priority.

### CONSERVATION KEY TO FUTURE FOOD PRODUCTION

Although the question of adequate supplies may not be seen clearly enough at this point, it is clear that the question will probably become increasingly urgent in the years to come. The only hope we have of meeting the food needs of the future is by preserving our food production capacity -- by soil and water conservation.

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Given the present population trend, one thing we can be fairly certain of in coming decades is a growing number of people in the world. Even in the ideal situation of zero population growth, it seems unlikely that the world population will decline substantially.

Two trends in food consumption are likely to aggravate the food supply situation even more than it is today. First, a growing world population will require more food. Second, as more and more nations in the world become developed, the food consumption per capita is likely to rise as it has in this country.

The food consumption pattern of developed societies has shown an increasing preference for beef and other livestock products which require even larger crops of feed grains. Expanded feed grain and livestock production, beyond a doubt, will place an even greater strain on the productive capacity of Kansas farmers and farmers throughout the Nation.

So the need for conservation should be clear. In order to meet the projected food needs of the future, the productive capacity of U.S. Agriculture must be preserved. Preservation of our ability to produce can only be accomplished through sound soil and water conservation programs.

Food has been identified as the number one issue in the world and for the future. Conservation, as the key to meeting the food needs of the future, must also be of number one priority.

#### RECENT EXPERIENCES INDICATIVE

The expansion of agricultural acreage during this past year in response to increased demand, should be a useful experience for designing conservation programs of the future. We have seen that, in response to sharply increased world demand for American grains, set aside acreage was abolished and farmers were urged to plant "fence to fence".

Farmers in Kansas and other states responded to that encouragement and to the sharply increased prices for wheat and feed grain.

Not long after the sharp expansion of acres under production, we saw a report by the Department of Agriculture forecasting that the new crop land might be especially erosion prone. More recently, we have seen reports by the Department of nearly four times as many acres damaged by erosion in the Great Plains Area this year over last year.

This experience is extremely relevant to our future agricultural conservation programs. With the prospect of greatly increased world food needs in the future, we will undoubtedly face the need for even greater expansion in agriculture in the coming years.

Mr. Chairman, it would be extremely foolish and even suicidal to face the need for future agricultural expansion without a well planned and well organized program to conserve our soil and agricultural resources. Obviously, if every expansion, as we have seen in the past year, is accompanied by an increase of four times the amount of erosion, then American farmers will not long be able to meet the food production requirements placed on them.

#### SCS ASSISTANCE IS VITAL

In the USDA News Release concerning erosion in new croplands on February 14, 1974, SCS Administrator Kenneth Grant stated, "Local conservation districts and USDA technical people are going to have to redouble efforts to help farmers and ranchers to get additional cropland acres under a conservation plan and to apply measures to stop excessive soil erosion."

Yet at the same time, we have seen that the level of soil conservation technicians has been on a constant decline in recent years. It is difficult for me to understand how USDA technical people are going to provide increased assistance when they are constantly declining in number.

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It is my understanding that, in Kansas, there has been more than a 20 percent decline in the number of SCS technicians in the past seven years. Nationwide, the reduction in soil conservation service personnel is over 22 percent, according to the information I have received.

It may be that, because of more efficient organization and new techniques SCS technicians are able to provide more assistance now than previously. However, the technical assistance provided by SCS technicians is of great importance to the program. The information I have received from Kansas suggests that the level of technical assistance has not been entirely adequate. I think the Department of Agriculture should respond to this matter and explain how the increasing conservation needs of farmers can be met by fewer SCS technicians.

It has been called to my attention that the Department of Agriculture may reverse this trend. I would applaud this development. Witnesses from the Department may have further information on this today.

#### LEVEL OF FUNDING

Another key factor in conservation programs is the level of funding provided for assistance and incentives. The soil and agricultural resources are the most vital wealth we have. It is in the national interest to provide federal funds to assist farmers in constructing measures and providing assistance and incentive to farmers to build conservation measures.

It is my understanding that the budget request for conservation measures and for the water bank program this year is \$118,800,000. This compares to an appropriation for fiscal year 1974 of \$175,000,000 and an appropriation for fiscal year 1973 for \$225.5 million.

In other words, at a time when the need for conservation measures is increasing, the level of funding for these measures has been on the decline. I believe the Department of Agriculture officials here today should respond as to how conservation measures can be increased when funding is at a lower level.

Mr. Chairman, in my opinion, we should consider a letter of recommendation to the Subcommittee on Agriculture Appropriations that funding for conservation measures should be increased. I have been advised that the level of funding for conservation measures is presently under consideration by the Subcommittee and such a recommendation would be most timely.

Again, I appreciate this opportunity to testify on a matter so important as conservation. I believe the actions resulting from this meeting are bound to be beneficial and will help American farmers meet the number priority of this centry -- food.

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