



Conservation History



How it All Began



*“When our soils are gone, we too must go,
unless we shall find some way to feed on raw
rock or its equivalent.”*

*Geologist T.C. Chamberlin in an address to the
nation’s governors in 1908*

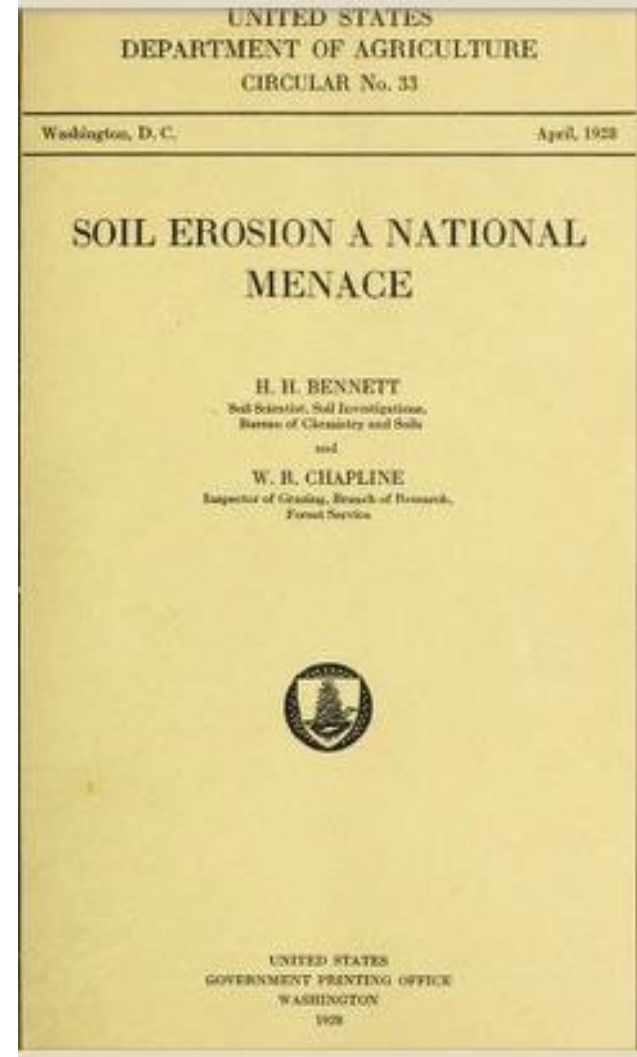
*(In 1899 Chamberlin proposed the possibility that changes in climate could result from changes in the
concentration of atmospheric carbon dioxide.)*



“Soil Erosion, A National Menace”

Published in April 1928, it is considered one of the first national reports on soil erosion in the United States.

- *Hugh Hammond Bennett is considered the godfather of soil conservation and helped establish the Soil Erosion Service within the Department of the Interior.*
- *He later became the first chief of the federal Soil Conservation Service, today's National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).*



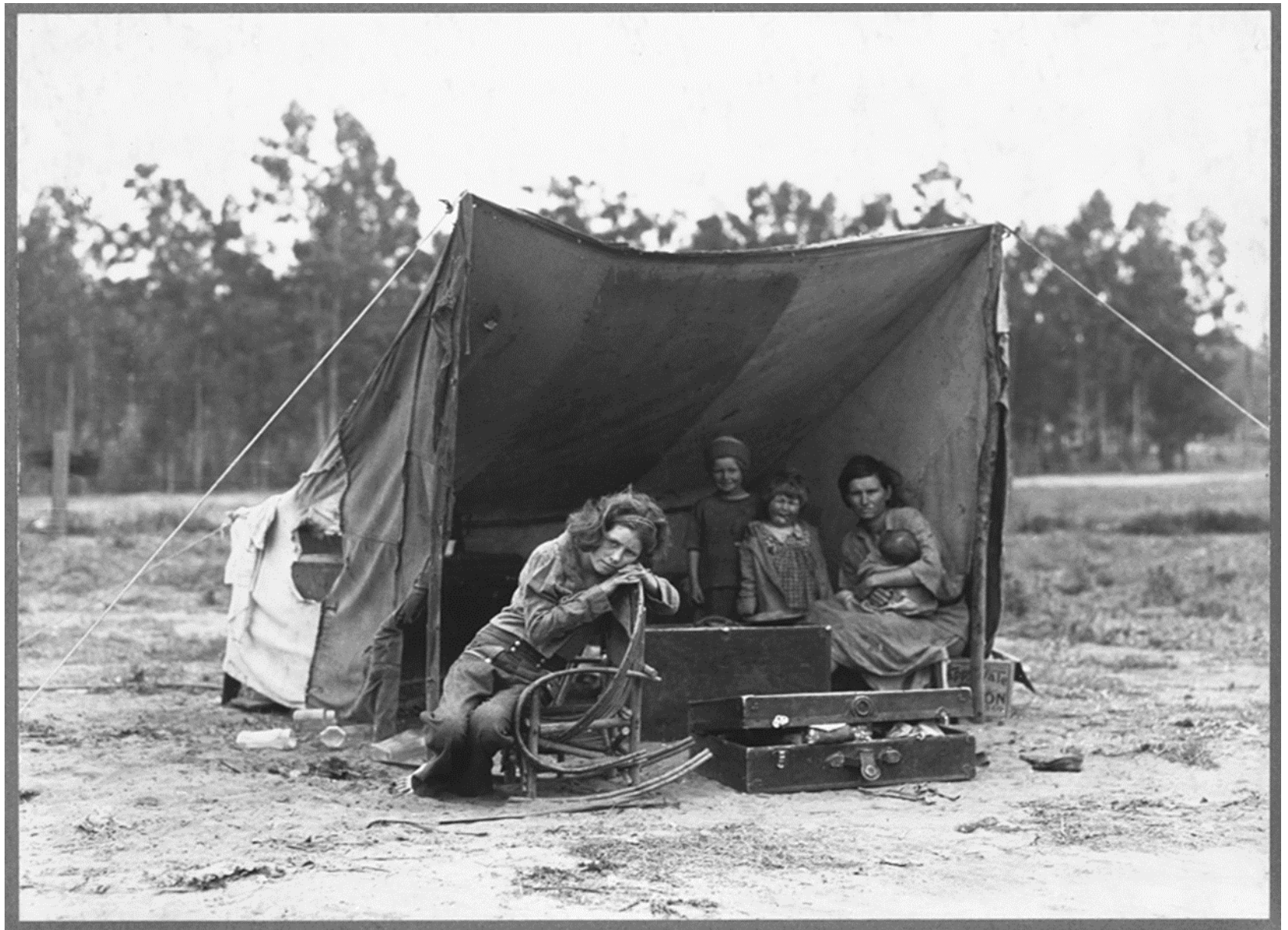
“There are national associations for the preservation of wild flowers and for the preservation and propagation of wild life but none for the preservation of the soil. Conservation of this most fundamental and important of all resources is seldom seriously considered by any one not directly or indirectly associated with the ownership or management of a farm, and it is too infrequently considered even by the farmers themselves.”

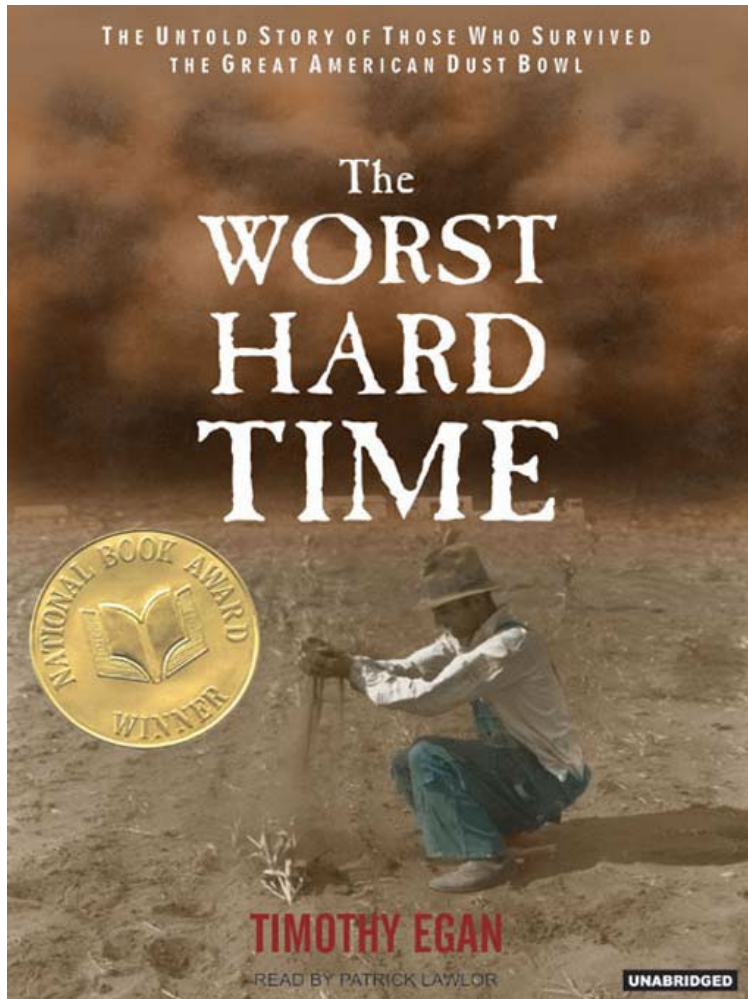
H. H. Bennett and W. R. Chapline. *Soil Erosion A National Menace*. U.S. Department of Agriculture Circular No. 33., Washington, DC, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1928.











“That was Black Sunday, April 14, 1935, day of the worst duster of them all. The storm carried twice as much dirt as was dug out of the earth to create the Panama Canal. The canal took seven years to dig; the storm lasted a single afternoon. More than 300,000 tons of Great Plains topsoil was airborne that day.”

“The Worst Hard Time” by Timothy Egan





Dust clouds carried dirt from the central U.S. to Washington, D.C., where they became props to advance the call for conservation.



Origins of Conservation

- In response to the Dust Bowl, Congress passed The Soil Conservation Act on *April 27, 1935*, to address the *“wastage of soil and moisture resources on farm, grazing and forest lands.”*
- In February 1937, the Roosevelt administration developed a template for states to pass to ensure continuity in locally led conservation efforts and for the formation of conservation districts.
- The Standard States District Act was sent to Governors for consideration.



*“A Nation that
destroys its
soils destroys
itself...”*

*Franklin Roosevelt in a letter to the
nation's governors on the Uniform
Soil Conservation Law, Feb. 26,
1937*



Origins of Conservation

- States were required to pass the legislation to take advantage of federal dollars from the then-Soil Conservation Service.
- The federal template encouraged local input through the creation of local soil conservation boards.
- States modified the federal template, but FDR's underlying goal of local involvement and a similar conservation mission throughout the nation remained intact.



WV and Conservation

- The WV Legislature passed the federal template in 1939 and created the State Soil Conservation Committee.
- Conservation District Law: Chapter 19-21A.
- Created the State Soil Conservation Committee.
- The law called for local referendums to create conservation districts.
- Between 1940-1947 voters created WV's 14 conservation districts.



To Vote On Soil Conservation Districts Feb. 2-3

Farmers in 17 West Virginia counties will vote on the creation of seven proposed soil conservation districts on Saturday, February 2 and 3, 1934, six districts voting on the third, with one West Fork, voting on February 2. The referenda were ordered by the recently created state soil conservation committee, plans for the proposed soil conservation districts being based on existing erosion conditions and the imperative need to stop further soil and water losses.

Conditions in the proposed districts were reported to the state committee following a series of public hearings held in each of the 17 counties. Boundaries of the proposed soil conservation districts were determined not only by county lines but by major watershed data, topography of the land, and the types of agriculture practiced in each. The proposed districts and their suggested designations are: Northern Panhandle—Hancock, Brooke, Ohio, and Marshall counties; Little Kanawha—Roane, Wirt, Calhoun, Ritchie, and Gilmer counties; Eastern Panhandle—Morgan and Berkeley counties; Greenbrier Valley—Greenbrier and Monroe counties; Great Bend—Jackson county; Tygart Valley—Randolph county; and West Fork—Lewis and Harrison counties.

Here is a description as to what a soil conservation district is intended to do. The organization of a soil conservation district enables farmers to control soil erosion co-operatively to an extent the individual is unable to do alone. Such control programs would be at the initiative of the co-operating farmers themselves, and would be carried out in a way to suit local conditions and requirements. There are many reasons, say the experts, why thorough erosion control is not a one-man job. Scattering attempts at erosion control cannot be equal the results of a community-wide program supported by popular demand and promoted by local leadership that has been elected for this special purpose.

Farmers in soil conservation districts will be provided with free technical help, including engineers and other field workers. These men will examine farms only on request of the owners, and will plan with the individual farmer what improvements are needed and how to carry them out. Machinery necessary to construct diversion ditches, terraces, and other structures may be loaned to a district. In addition, the district also makes it possible for farmers to purchase equipment co-operatively, if needed.

In some instances, Civilian Conservation Corps camps will be made available to a district. When camps have been established, the enrollees will work on farms doing only that type of work which the farmer is least able to do.

The state soil conservation committee in ordering the general referendum, has approved a number of polling places in each county, locations of which will be advertised in local county newspapers. These voting places were first suggested by county farmer committees. Voting will take place from 9 a. m. to 3 p. m. on February 3.

There are certain characteristic differences between lambs and mutton which the housewife can train herself to recognize, say the livestock experts. The first is the color of the lean, which is pink in lamb and a sort of a brick red in mutton. The bones are softer and smaller in lamb and the "break joint" if the forelegs with its four well-defined ridges is an unfailing test that the meat is lamb.

First Proposed Soil Conservation Districts In State



PROPOSED SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS IN WEST VIRGINIA

Seven proposed soil conservation districts would take in 17 West Virginia counties and involve acreage lying in the northern, eastern, western, southern and central parts of the state. The suggested districts shown on the map above in black, include the Northern Panhandle, with four counties (No. 1); the Little Kanawha (No. 2) with five counties; the Eastern Panhandle (No. 3) with two counties;

the Greenbrier Valley (No. 4) which takes in Greenbrier and Monroe counties; the Great Bend (No. 5) which takes in Jackson county; the Tygart Valley (No. 6) which is Randolph county; and the West Fork (No. 7) which is composed of Harrison and Lewis counties. Photo at the top shows an example of contour strip cropping on a Marshall county farm.

Large Farm Area In Outlined Zones

More than four and one-quarter million acres of land are embraced in the seven proposed soil conservation districts in which information referenda are to be held February 2 and 3. This is approximately one-fourth of the entire agricultural area of the state and supports more than 29,000 farms.

The Little Kanawha soil conservation district, as proposed, would include five counties and a total of 995,487 acres in farms. The proposed Greenbrier Valley district is next in farming area, with 580,271 acres in farms. Other farm acreages in the proposed soil conservation districts include: West Fork—467,989 acres; Northern Panhandle—297,855 acres; Tygart Valley—289,581 acres; Great Bend—269,480 acres; and Eastern Panhandle—239,212 acres.

Damage which has resulted in the state as a result of soil erosion was surveyed in 1933 by the federal soil conservation service. According to the report issued, less than 10 percent of the total area is little

At A Glance

What is the object of the referendum?—Creation of soil conservation districts, to affect only those who desire to co-operate in programs for same.

When?—Referenda on creation of soil conservation districts will be held February 2 and 3, 1934, except in the proposed West Fork district, where the vote will be February 2.

Who Can Vote?—Any person 21 years of age or over, firm or corporation holding title to three or more acres of land lying within the boundary of a district. Where title is held by two or more persons jointly, each person having such a joint interest is eligible to vote, provided the equity of each amounts to three acres or more.

Where To Vote?—Locations of voting places will be published in local county newspapers; and in the February issue of the Market Bulletin.

affected by erosion; 64 percent of the land has lost between 25 and 75 percent of the original top soil.

United Effort On Soil Plans Needed

The erosion situation in West Virginia presents a problem which requires co-operative effort on the part of landowners to solve. So says a soil conservation expert who goes on to describe conditions faced by farmers in this state, and the solution which he points out is open to them.

When farmers apply lime and fertilizer to steep pasture land, the rains may wash them away, says the expert. Fields, too steep for cropping, when plowed readily wash away, taking all plant food elements and the lime and fertilizer which the farmer may have applied. When woods are slashed and no effort is made to leave small trees for future stands, erosion becomes active and vast areas are destroyed. Such conditions result in reduced crop yields, floods, and destruction of land. Poor soils make poor people, says the expert.

But here is the hope which the expert holds out. Farms which have lost 50 percent or more of the top soil can be reclaimed, if proper practices are followed over a period of years. Here is how a soil conservation program is set up. Under the district plan, which is the object of referenda in seven proposed districts February 3, the farmer, once a district has been set up, would request the supervisors of his district for a plan which would fit conditions on his individual farm. Upon receipt of the request, a base map, showing soil, erosion, slope, and land-use would be made. This is an inventory of the farmer's land resources. An experienced soil technician would discuss with the farmer the type of program that would be necessary to make the best use of the land, and at the same time stop soil erosion and the runoff of water. If the plan sounds practical to the farmer, the technician, with the farmer's help, would proceed to set up the program. Nothing would go into the plan unless acceptable to the farmer.

The expert says that good land-use is fundamental in a conservation program. All land having a slope of 25 percent or under, is considered as crop land; land from 25 to 40 percent is placed in the pasture classification. All land over 40 percent is considered suitable only for woodland. Land which stays in crop land, if sloping, would be laid off in contour strips of varying widths, depending on slope and erosion conditions.

That would also be alternated. That is, a grass strip would appear between cultivated strips. In case there is a long sloping field laid off in strips, and water concentrates from a field above, a diversion ditch might be constructed to catch the water and slowly lead it off into a natural drainage area. In addition to strip-cropping and engineering structures, good crop rotation and cultural practices would be outlined. These would be in line with the individual farmer's interests and crop program.

Where there are good stands of timber on a farm, farmers would be provided with woodland management programs, thereby making the woods produce a crop. Wildlife is also a part of such programs.

Soil conservation programs demonstrated in these areas and on individual farms include adequate protection against erosion; conservation of water; crop rotation and cultural practices; engineering features; wildlife conservation measures; and other conservation developments.

Watness: "This is the fifth cup, sir. You certainly must like coffee."

Diner: "Yes, I do, or I wouldn't be drinking all this water to get a little."

Farmers Invited To View Exhibits

West Virginia farmers interested in soil conservation but not familiar with its practical application to the business of agriculture, have an opportunity to see how modern soil conservation programs work.

At 10 key points in the state there are extensive demonstration areas where work has been directed by the soil conservation service, and visitors are welcome at all of these points. Soil conservation areas are located at Spencer, Elizabeth, Ripley, Milton, Moundsville, Union, Lewisburg, Elkins, Nutter Fort, and Hedgesville. In addition, individual demonstration farms are scattered throughout 15 or more counties, outside the larger organized areas.

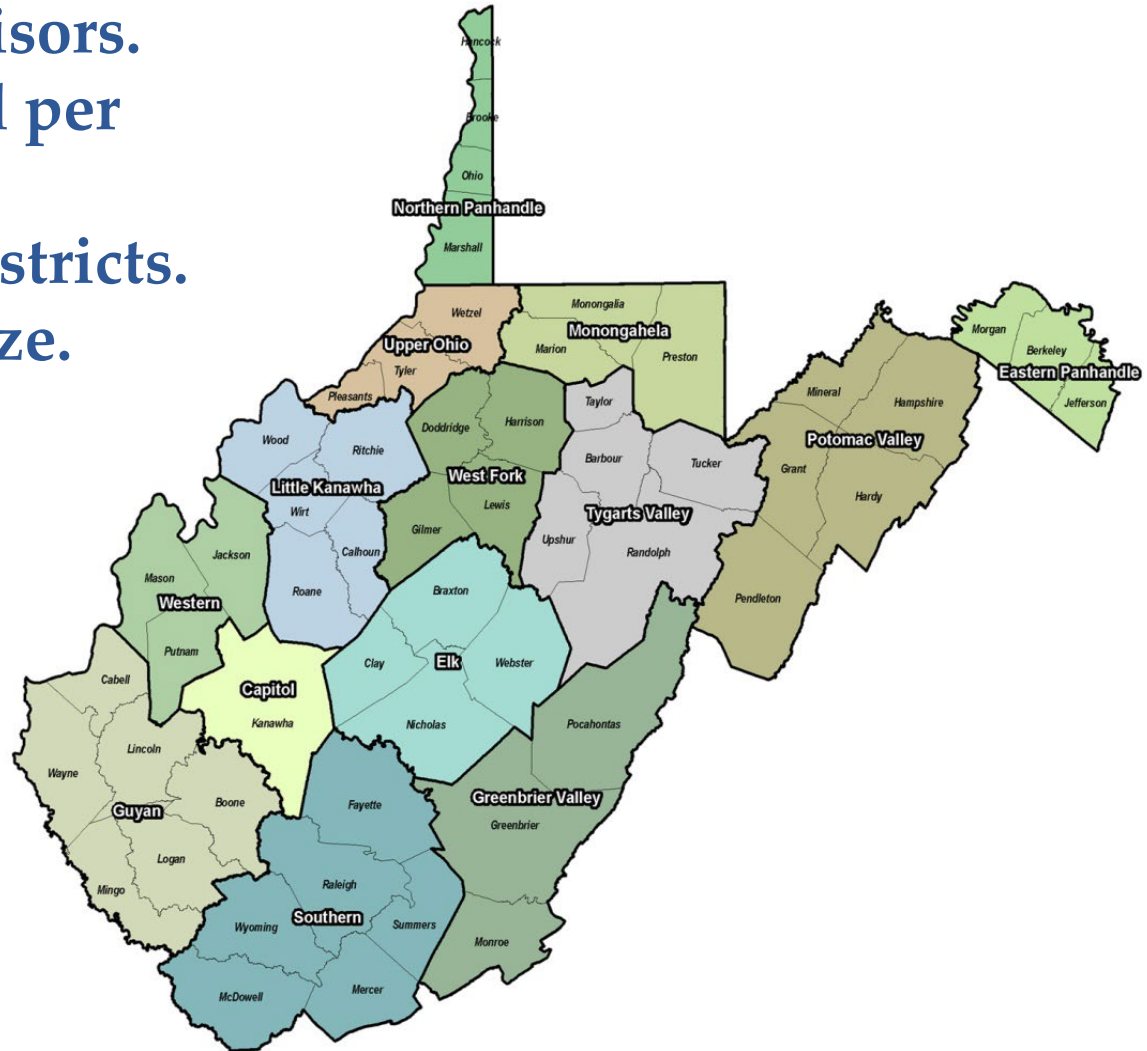
In all, 1500 farmers are cooperating in demonstration programs throughout the state.

Twenty-six percent of the area has lost over 75 percent of its top soil. In addition, 39,000 acres have been totally destroyed for further cultivation.



WV Conservation Districts

- 114 Elected Supervisors.
- Generally, 2 elected per county.
- 14 Conservation Districts.
- 1 to 6 counties in size.



WV Conservation Law

- Chapter 19 = Agriculture.
- Chapter 19-21A = Conservation Districts.
- §19-21A-4 = State Conservation Committee.
- §19-21A-4(F)(e) = WV Conservation Agency.
- §19-21A-8 = Powers and duties of conservation districts and supervisors.



Conservation Today

- The Brown Creek Soil and Water Conservation District was the nation's first conservation district when it was formed on Aug. 4, 1937.
- Today there are about 3,000 districts in the 50 states plus the District of Columbia, and the U.S. territories of American Samoa, the Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.
- District size and responsibility varies by state.
- District operation/program funding varies from ability to impose taxes to being dependent on state and federal funding.
- Supervisors are appointed and/or elected, or a combination of both.





Questions?

