"WESTWARD the course of empire takes its way' with ruined lands behind." I cannot on this occasion resist repeating this often-quoted paraphrase of an age-old line, just as it was uttered so trenchantly many years ago by that pioneer Corn Belt proponent of the theory of planning a permanent agriculture, Hopkins of Illinois. To him more than to any other single individual we can trace the beginnings of the theories and practices of soil conservation as designed to fit Corn Belt conditions.

For some years we waged an uphill battle to bring about any general recognition of the fact that "soils will wear out". It took time even to win a hearing for such a "bear story" with many Corn Belt farmers. They were still farming rich Corn Belt land and growing good crops and they simply refused to get excited about methods of soil management and the depletion of soil fertility. They were making good profits. Why worry?

But some progress was made and a few farmers here and there who were more receptive to new ideas were induced to try out the things the "college professors" were suggesting. They did this probably with their fingers crossed, and to their surprise the treatments were found to be worth while. Such tests often served as demonstrations and these, along with experiment station publications giving the results of experimental work, and much extension activity, gradually led to some interest in the land and its management.

About this time it began to be apparent to many farmers that their soils were becoming depleted in fertility. They found that their crop yields were declining. They noted that it had become increasingly difficult to grow clover and was often quite impossible. They were also painfully aware that their incomes were decreasing, and while they were inclined to attribute this to politics or to the party in power, they were forced to admit that it was partly due to lower crop yields per acre on their lands. They were obliged in many cases to plow up more land to plant to corn in order that they might grow enough to supply feed for their livestock. This often meant that the washing away of the soil became progressively greater and greater.

So the depletion in fertility and the erosion losses on individual farms soon reached a point where farmers were becoming alarmed over the situation. The thought began to take shape in our minds that the problem was becoming too serious to be handled by the individual farmer and that state or national action would be needed if we were to avoid a condition of bankrupt farmers on bankrupt land—a bankrupt agriculture.

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