CULTURAL METHODS OF CONTROLLING WIND EROSION

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The erosion of the soil by wind has occurred in the Central Plains states since their first settlement. When the territory was a cattle country, before general farming was practiced, wind erosion occurred around watering places, round-up grounds, and other places where the native vegetation was destroyed by trampling and the soil left in a comparatively smooth, bare condition.

As settlers broke out the native sod and placed the land under cultivation, wind erosion became more of a problem. Serious wind erosion was usually confined to isolated fields, however, and did not cause a difficult problem to more than the few individual farmers whose fields were affected. The first extensive area in Kansas to be seriously affected by wind erosion was in Thomas County. During a period of more than 3 years an area of approximately 65,000 acres northeast of Colby in Thomas County was blown disastrously. It was feared at the time that this area might become permanently a wind-blown desert of shifting dunes of silt. Drifts of soil buried fences, railroad tracks, groves of trees, and machinery, and surrounded farm buildings. Gentle breezes filled the air with dust that sifted into houses. Stronger winds moved banks of soil so that roads readily passable in the morning might be blocked by drifts of soil by evening, making travel extremely hazardous. The few rains that fell were ineffective and no crops were grown.

This condition resulted when a period of increasing agricultural prosperity during which many acres of native grass were brought under cultivation was followed by two extremely dry years, 1910 and 1911. The total precipitation for 1910 was 6.67 inches at Colby, the lowest on record. This extremely dry year was followed with only 10.55 inches of precipitation in 1911, which was at that time the third lowest on record. There was a complete crop failure both seasons. In March 1912, a heavy snow fell. When the snow melted the soil was smooth and without the usual vegetative cover. It started to blow as soon as the surface dried. It continued to blow. With more than 20 inches of precipitation at Colby in 1912 and over 21 inches in 1913 blowing continued with increasing intensity and continued to spread over an ever-widening area. It reached the maximum intensity in the spring of 1914.

That spring a branch of the Kansas Agricultural Experiment Station was established near Colby on the edge of the district that was blowing. Steps were taken immediately to study methods of controlling blowing on the Station land. The lister was used and proved effective. An organization was then effected to protect the whole

1Contribution No. 55, Director’s Office, Kansas Agricultural Experiment Station, Manhattan, Kan. Also presented before a joint meeting of the Society and Section O of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, St. Louis, Mo., December 31, 1935. Received for publication January 13, 1936.

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