Methods of Getting the Job Done on Soil Testing

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THE testing of soils to encourage and guide farmers in a sound soil improvement program has been a major project in soil extension in Illinois since F. C. Bauer first organized the soil testing project more than 20 years ago. This project was designed to teach farmers to test and map their fields systematically for lime needs through community soil testing meetings. Farmers were given directions for collecting samples from 40-acre fields and were invited to bring these samples to local testing meetings where they tested their own soil and made acidity maps under the direction of the farm adviser. The testing of soils in this project proved to be a very effective method of teaching the principles of soil fertility and of getting intelligent action. The testing of several million acres of farmland over a period of years played an important part in the rapid increase in the use of limestone. Later, when the phosphorus test was developed by R. H. Bray, this test was also included in the project.

However, as the many emergency programs and extension activities began piling up on the farm advisers, they found less and less time to carry on soil testing as an organized project.

The desire to get a much larger acreage tested and to make the potassium test available to a large number of farmers made it necessary to work out some other plan for testing. For several years we attempted to take care of the potassium testing through a University Soil Testing Laboratory, but the first laboratory was inadequately equipped, staffed, and financed, and the plan did not work out satisfactorily.

The possibilities of a county laboratory had been demonstrated several years ago when three two-county laboratories were set up under the Works Progress Administration Research Project. During the year that this project was in operation 200,000 acres were tested and mapped for acidity, phosphorus, and potassium. The first two counties to employ a man to test soils were Christian and Grundy. However, F. H. Shuman, farm adviser of Whiteside County, was the first to set up a well-equipped laboratory and make soil testing a major project. This laboratory started testing in August, 1944, and since that time has tested over 50,000 acres for more than 1,000 farmers. Sixty-two other counties established laboratories during 1945 and 1946.

ORGANIZATION OF COUNTY LABORATORY

The county laboratories have been set up by the farm adviser with the farm bureau underwriting the costs. These laboratories are located in the farm bureau building where the farm adviser also

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