Opportunities for Soil Scientists and Agronomists in the Soil Conservation Service

Charles E. Kellogg

The Soil Conservation Service annually recruits a considerable number of young men who have completed the work for a B.S. degree in soil science or in agronomy. In the U.S. Department of Agriculture, we distinguish between these two specialties as clearly as between any other pair of specialties in the colleges of agriculture.

The bulk of our recruitment of soil scientists is in the two beginning grades, GS-5 and GS-7 ($4,340 to $5,355 and $5,355 to $6,345). In 1959 we hired 59 men in these grades to work as soil scientists; in 1960 the figure was 30; in 1961 we recruited 71; and this year [1962] we may be adding about 75. During the same years, we hired from 21 to 33 student trainees in soil science.

(Added later: Sometime later in 1962 the salary range for GS-5 was changed to $4,565 to $6,005, and that for GS-7 to $5,540 to $7,205. The new law provides for an additional increase at the end of 1963. If B.S. graduates are in the upper one-quarter of their class they can be appointed at GS-7 rather than GS-5 on their first job.)

We also recruit for soil conservationists in the two beginning grades from among graduates of agricultural colleges. The technical requirements in any one specialty are not high. About one-half of those recruited are graduates in either soil science or agronomy. The remainder are graduates in forestry, agricultural engineering, agricultural education, and other specialties. In this category we hired 103 in 1959; 60 in 1960; and 112 in 1961. I suppose somewhere around 90 will be added in 1962. In addition, we have recruited about 75 student trainees in this field in each of the past 3 years.

A few of those recruited as soil scientists change to soil conservationist positions; and a few of those recruited as soil conservationists, who are majors in soil science, transfer to soil science work.

The salary opportunities for soil scientists and soil conservationists are roughly the same, although the proportion of positions above $10,000 a year may be slightly higher for conservationists.

We have In-Service training programs for both agronomists and special In-Service programs for the soil scientists. We also, under the Federal Training Act, make arrangements with universities for special In-Service programs for those showing good progress and promise. Those who come in with bachelor's degrees are encouraged to complete their graduate work. In some ways this can be arranged cooperatively with universities to reduce the cost and time that would otherwise be involved. We are aware that our staff does include some standing men in the field of soil science.

We have roughly 100 professional men in the Service who are highly technical work. Much of it is problem diagnosis, advising, and training. These agronomists have the opportunity of seeing that the agronomic work is properly emphasized and up-to-date in the soil and water programs of the Service. They have only a very minimum potential to complete their graduate training.

We seldom recruit directly for these positions; but those recruited as soil conservationists, after they are majored in agronomy are transferred to full-time work after demonstrating their ability as conservationists. Those having had good training in crop physiology, other basic sciences, and agronomy have the best opportunities for development as conservationists in our Service. We encourage the agronomists' potential to complete their graduate training.

We are becoming increasingly concerned about recruitment, especially of well-trained, broadly educated men who can develop rapidly. Both sciences are rapidly changing. A man's education really begins after he leaves the university. The primary job of the university is to give him tools for learning and practice. Much of his education after he leaves the university. The primary job of the university is to give him tools for learning and practice. Much of his education after he leaves the university.

We feel that university training for beginning students should be provided by the university, the Agriculture Adjustment Administration, or one of the large business firms. The university should also give an examination to agronomy B.S. graduates which will give them a license as a Soil Conservationist, Crop Scientist, or Agronomist which would give them a measure of professional status. It could be very helpful in building the image of agronomy as a science and to influence more above-average students into study of "agronomic science".

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