Professionalism & State Societies

REGISTRATION AND ORGANIZATION OF SOIL SURVEYORS

Bob Johnson, Florida State Soil Scientist, organized and led the discussion on professional registration and related topics during an evening session of the Soil Science Society of America meetings in Knoxville, Tennessee, August 27, 1975. He was assisted by Louie Buller, Ed Ciolkosz, Ted Miller, and Jerry Simonson, soil scientists from each of the four geographic areas of the cooperative Soil Survey, who summarized progress in their areas.

Many of the approximately 175 participants enthusiastically discussed the questions of how broadly the profession of soil science should be defined in registration legislation. On one hand, some argued that it should be confined to those who make and interpret soil surveys (soil classifiers) because their work can be accurately defined, whereas the work of other soil scientists can not be defined specifically and it would therefore be difficult to define the credentials of individuals for the profession. Several states have legislation with this more specific definition of the profession.

On the other hand, some argued that many problems require expertise other than that of soil classifiers to be solved, and these professions should also be included in the registration law. For example, the public needs to be protected from unscrupulous technicians who misuse percolation tests to judge the suitability of soils for septic tank drainage fields. Experience in Maine favors a more inclusive definition of the profession (See R. C. Glenn. 1975. Registration of soil scientists in Maine. Soil Survey Horizons 16(3): 5-8.)

Those who worked with state legislatures that considered registration bills gave these pointers for others seeking legislation:

1. Explain how the law will benefit the public. Legislators will not be sympathetic if it appears to them that the bill benefits only soil scientists.
2. Work through state organizations of soil scientists. Legislators will want to know who is promoting the proposed bill, and why.
3. Make sure you have the interest and desire of the professional group. It won’t do any good to get the bill passed if no one takes advantage of it.
4. Get help from your friends. Soil Conservation Districts, organizations of assessors, sanitarians, and others can be a great help.
5. Work with closely related groups. If engineers, land surveyors, geologists, and other groups know just what kind of expertise is