It may be bordering on heresy for a soil survey type to be raising some questions about the widespread predictions of urban sprawl eating up prime cropland, but it appears some of these dire forecasts need a careful review. One example of such a prediction was a report from a Minnesota Department of Agriculture analyst this fall who stated that urban areas are eating up Minnesota's farmland at the rate of 50,000 to 75,000 acres a year. He said further "If the depletion of this valuable resource is to continue unchecked, our state's agricultural productive capacity will be in serious trouble not too far down the road."

There is no question that the land use situation is a dynamic one and that some of the changes taking place are not in the best interests of society in the future. But I think we are dealing with a very basic and complex aspect of our economy and environment and an analysis of the problem deserves our best efforts before we charge off at a gallop trying to solve an inadequately defined problem.

For example, the figure of 50,000 to 75,000 acres going to urban land is surprising in view of the figures which the Soil Conservation Service reported this summer regarding land use changes in the seven county Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. Land use statistics were supplied through the Soil and Water Conservation Needs Inventory special up-date revision as part of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area Level B Study. These figures show that the "urban and built up" category had increased by 88,000 acres in the 8 year period since 1967. This averages 11,000 acres per year, so if the state total of 50,000 to 75,000 acres of urban land increase is accurate, up to 61,000 acres of this shift must be occurring outstate some place. It seems more likely that the 75,000 acre figure is too high since about half of the population of the state and most of the urban population is in the Twin Cities area.