Montana—Land of the Big Sky

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In the summer of 1988, several soil scientists worked as detailees in Montana. Yours Truly was one of those who volunteered for the "FSA Mission Fields." I worked in Havre, MT, the county seat of Hill County, which is on the U.S.-Canadian border. Other summer detailees at Havre included soil scientists Samuel E. (Sam) Brown, Jr., also from Bay City, TX; Ken Crader and David Fowlkes, from Augusta and Jonesboro, AR, respectively; and Joe Steiger, from Zanesville, OH. Following are my views on Montana which might be called "A Layman Looks at the Big Sky Country."

If the pages of Montana history were predestinated, there would certainly be one or more each for: Indians, explorers, fur trappers, miners, cowboys, settlers, the U.S. Cavalry, geologists, historians, artists, photographers, naturalists, and anthropologists. There might even be a page or two for soil scientists. Nor should I fail to mention tourists, mountain climbers, hikers, and bikers. (Every bicycle rider from Bangor, ME to Seattle, WA must find a challenge on pedaling across the nation on U.S. Highway 2!)

Montana is a broad spectrum of mountains, prairies, rivers, glacial features, wheat (Triticum aestivum L.) fields, minerals, cattle, railroads, rodeos, "chinook" winds, blue skies, and more wheat fields. In addition, it is a land of beautiful sunsets. I burned up a lot of 35-mm film on those sunsets! The State has been made famous by Glacier National Park; Charles M. Russell, a renowned western artist; General George Armstrong Custer; many Indian tribes, including those who defeated Custer but lost their land to the plow; and the Missouri River, which was a highway to the Northwest for the Lewis and Clark expeditions. Also, Montana must surely be famous for its cold winters, which are almost as severe as those of Alaska.

To soil scientists (at least detailees), Montana is an endless sea of wheat fields that stretch from the "Rockies to Eternity." In fact, when Gabriel blows his horn, Montana farmers will either be on a tractor or a combine, or in a truck on the way to the grain elevator!

Many Hill County soils are classified in Aridic subgroups or in the order of Aridisols. Currently, some of these placements are being debated. Sam Brown and I, however, would not argue too much. For example, from January through August of 1988, the county only received 3 in. of moisture!

The major cropland soils of the county include the following series: Scobey (fine, montmorillonitic Aridic Argiborolls); Telstad (fine-loamy, mixed Aridic Argiborolls); Joplin (fine-loamy, mixed Aridic Argiborolls); Hillon (fine-loamy, mixed (calcareous), frigid Ustic Torriorthents); Kevin (fine-loamy, mixed Aridic Argiborolls); and Phillips (fine, montmorillonitic Borolic Paleargids).

Surface textures are mainly loam or clay loam with a few minor series having sandy loam surfaces. These textures are a major factor in determining Wind Erodibility Groups (WEGs) in Montana. Calcium carbonate is extremely commonplace in the soils of Hill County, and is usually within 10

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