Origins of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources’ Soil Survey Program

Timothy D. Gerber1

Introduction

April 1, 2002 marked the 50th anniversary of the activation of the Division of Lands and Soil in the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. While the 30-yr history of that division is well documented (Christman, 1990), its origins are not. The majority of soil scientists currently involved in the National Cooperative Soil Survey have witnessed reductions, not expansions, of soil survey programs during their careers. This account describes the climate that caused a significant expansion in Ohio’s soil survey program to occur and the challenges associated with creating a new soil survey agency at the state level.

Ohio’s Interest in Soils in the 1940s

In 1937, 22 states responded to a Congressional resolution by passing laws to establish procedures for organizing local soil conservation districts. The Ohio Soil Conservation District Enabling Act was not passed until May 1941 (Heft, 1990), but soil conservation districts were organized in 79 of 88 counties before the end of the decade. The Ohio Soil Conservation Committee administered the new program. Its membership consisted of the Dean of the College of Agriculture at The Ohio State University (OSU), the Director of the Ohio Department of Agriculture, and three farmers appointed by the Governor. Many of the district organization petitions to the Committee included a very generalized soil map, to document soil conservation issues in the county.

The 16 field soil scientists employed by the U.S. Soil Conservation Service (SCS) in Ohio in 1947 concentrated on supplying soil maps for conservation plans as soil conservation districts were added (Morse, 1947). Some of the districts were fortunate to have soil maps for all of their farms when they started, since soil sur-