WE NEED not look far toward the horizon to find ample evidence of land that is impaired, misused, and wasted. Right at our feet in almost every community there are many examples of neglect of the land, and, in far too many places, of utter disregard and destruction of this most valuable resource. Many are the patches riddled with gullies, grown up to brush, once corn and cotton fields, but now too poor to farm and lying there abandoned. Poverty abounds where man has been driven to make a living from hilly land that is too stony, too thin, or otherwise unsuited to cultivation. Ugly scars in the landscape from which all the soil is gone not only are evidence of land destruction but are in harmony with the distress of the people. Few regions are without some broken down or deserted farm buildings indicative of failure in land management. Oftentimes the reason for the failure is readily apparent to the investigator, but too often he comes along after and not before. The reason may be a lack of available fertility, slow internal drainage, accelerated erosion, toxic salts, or other unfavorable conditions or hazards, all examples of an attempt to transplant a type of farming not adapted to the area.

Wheat farming failed over a large area in the Dust Bowl because of inefficient water utilization and a lack of adequate crop diversification. Whether the below-average moisture for parts of this area during the last few years is only temporary or whether it is a permanent condition remains to be seen. It is true that certain lands in the Bowl have grown wheat successfully throughout the drought period whereas others, when seeded, have blown away. Mismanagement of land in the Bowl is one of the causes of our recent rural tragedy.

Man recognized in his early effort to extract a living from the land that certain practices were necessary to replenish the fertility and protect it from destruction if this resource was to be maintained. Remnants have been found of bench terraces to protect the land from erosion, of drainage canals to remove an excess of toxic salts evidently made by the inhabitants of Asia Minor and north Africa in ancient times. The use of flood waters of the river Nile to maintain the productivity of the land is as old as history. Unfortunately the use of protective practices and measures on the land never was adopted. Whether it was because of a lack of appreciation or because of economic or political pressure is not clear. Wars could have been the cause in Asia Minor, as that country was overrun with armies for centuries.

Perhaps the world really hasn't advanced from ancient times in its knowledge of conservation since the world war created pressure to produce on land not adapted for that purpose in this country again repeating the practice of improper land use leading to land destruction, poverty, and distress.

The problem of obtaining proper land management appears to be one of education and demonstration, developing an appreciation of the principles by the masses of the people, an understanding of large returns from the land for short periods of time misuse in time of stress destroys it as a resource. The appreciation that its preservation is a necessity for the maintenance of a permanent civilization.

Prior to man's occupation, nature established protective cover over much of the land. This served to check and hold land destruction to a minimum, as well as to maintain much of the plant food in the soil. But man's occupation, due to population pressure and the desire to acquire a larger share of the world's goods, demanded that some of the land be made to produce more than nature was providing under a natural cover. Right there the problem of soil conservation began.

We have learned from experience that some will produce satisfactory yields of crops year after year with only a minimum of care in management. Other lands require special treatments and measures in addition to good management to maintain and prevent them from washing or blowing away.

Still others cannot be cultivated economically, safely in competition with lands in the above described categories, since the complexity of the practices and measures necessary to obtain satisfactory yields maintain the permanence of the land reduces the return to make it unprofitable. Only a portion of this sort of land has been cleared and fortunately the larger part still remains with its original cover.