THE RELATIONSHIP OF SOIL SCIENCE TO LAND-USE PLANNING

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THIS is an attempt to discuss briefly the relationship of soil science to land-use planning as it is being developed, or as it might be developed, (a) within our Society, (b) within our agricultural institutions and, most important of all, (c) out on the land itself. The essence of this discussion, peculiarly enough, will take the form of a series of entirely friendly questions to which I sincerely trust no one will take any exception whatsoever. They are raised only with the thought of helping us orient and re-establish ourselves in the rather intricate and confused planning maze into which we seem to have fallen and with no thought whatsoever of disparaging the great amount of excellent soils work that has been done in the past.

A. WITHIN THE SOCIETY

The constitution of the Soil Science Society of America provides that the entire field of its subject matter be divided into six well-defined sections, namely, I. Soil Physics, II. Soil Chemistry, III. Soil Microbiology, IV. Soil Fertility, V. Soil Genesis, Morphology, and Cartography, and VI. Soil Technology.

The position and function of the first three of these sections are quite readily understandable as representing the application of the physical, chemical and biological sciences to the study of the soil. The Soil Fertility Section is an even more applied phase that is highly essential in bringing the findings and technics of any or all other sections to bear upon a fundamental study of plant requirements for normal, successful growth in a given soil environment. Section V is the soil survey, expressed in its most elegant form. It might well be regarded the backbone of the science in whatever relationship it is concerned. Indeed it could quite properly be made the “No. I” section in the series if we should care to give them a rigorous functional sequence. With respect to Section VI, however, there seems to be a considerable degree of dissatisfaction in part perhaps with its name but also in the uncertainty and indefiniteness of the field that can Society of Agronomy appointed the speaker to be the first chairman of this section of the embryonic Soil Science Society of America. In celebration for the organization meeting to be held in Washington during the autumn of that year, naturally my first question was, “What is it?” In a letter dated February 21 of that year, Dr. Salter advised that, “The scope of Section VI is so wide that I should hesitate to take the responsibility for picking a name for it . . . Of course, it will be able to designate the section by some appropriate cognomen in the printed program, but the name chosen for this purpose would scarcely be official until acted upon by the Section.” Therewith I was referred to Dr. Albrecht, Chairman, at that time the Soils Section of the American Society of Agronomy, for any further comfort that might be.

In a letter dated February 27, Dr. Albrecht had the following to say in the matter of a temporary title for Section VI and the field to which it should devote its efforts:

“This matter has not had official sanction; I have taken the liberty to coin the title ‘Soil Science and Land Use’, though on some occasions have used the term ‘Soil Science Applied to Land Use’. There is no precedent for this since the International Society of Soil Science has not been consistent in its terminology.

“We hope you will feel at liberty to include in this section a wide variety of the phases applied to land use, since the first program so often as a precedent for those of the future. Naturally, soil conservation will occupy a prominent place, but many other aspects should be for later attention. Land classification and land use have already had attention in the Soil Survey Association under the leadership of Schoenmann, so that some attention to it by the joint meeting would serve as an amalgamating performance of the two organizations this year. The agricultural engineers attended the Chicago meetings last year and highway engineers have also been concerned in soils program. The foresters are doing soils work and many other activities are so dependent on soil or agronomic studies that advantage can be taken by bringing these various phases together under Section VI.”