THE land-use planning process of today is a new development about which many agronomists have become increasingly concerned and which has many direct and indirect relationships to the programs and activities of agronomists. During the last three-quarters of a century, agronomists and others have woven the applied science of agronomy into the fabric of our Land Grant Colleges and the U. S. Dept. of Agriculture so that, in most institutions, agronomy is now generally recognized as encompassing the application of the science of soils and crops. Agronomists representing these scientific segments of agriculture have readily adapted themselves to the changing world, and their technological developments have contributed immeasurably to our agricultural progress. Now new situations are to be met.

Agronomists have been concerned with the methods and the manner in which agronomic data are being used as a part of many agricultural programs, especially when they deal with the use of land for plant production. They have been asking: “At what stage would agronomists be called upon? Have they been called upon as frequently as the agronomic phases of the work would justify? How could agronomic data be handled effectively by other than someone technically trained in the principles of soils and crops management? Is agronomic data being ignored?”

Before discussing land use planning and the agronomist, the setting in which this new development was begun should be viewed. In the period before 1933, many agricultural problems were becoming more and more acute. These problems included soil erosion, depletion of soil fertility, the farmer’s inadequate share of the national income, surpluses of agricultural products, and the plight of low-income farm families. The extension service through its programs, the experiment stations through their developments (both with the assistance of the Department of Agriculture), and a number of other agencies were doing fine work, but this work was not enough to cope with a situation rapidly becoming acute. It was generally recognized that new supplementary tools and technics were essential. After the depths of the depression were reached in 1932 and 1933, several laws were enacted to attack specific agricultural problems—erosion, crop surpluses, low farm income, needs of low-income farm families. These laws provided farmers with different types of assistance that they might improve their standard of living and take better care of their land resources. A significant element of many of these programs was that the farmer became an active cooperator with many agencies established, not only as an individual, but as a member of a cooperative group having a common interest.

As these various programs began to function, the need for coordination of their efforts became apparent. The new and old programs needed to be meshed into a working whole and geared to get the best results with the least possible confusion.

After considerable discussion of the problems involved, a meeting was held in 1938 (1) between representatives of the Land Grant College Association and administrators in the Department of Agriculture. A general procedure was cooperatively developed whereby farmers, technicians, and administrators could develop broad programs which would correlate current action programs to achieve stability of farm income and farm resources, and help mine and guide the long-time public efforts toward these goals. This procedure emphasized the need for intensifying the efforts in program building that had been carried on by the extension service in different degrees in many states so that the planning could provide a common basis for the educational program of the extension services, for the research of the experiment stations, and for the activities of the newly created action agencies in the Department.

In the planning processes was found recognition of the essential unity of the farm and the activities of action programs. It was recognized also that the problems of soil erosion, flood control, use of submarginal land, tenure, and farm income were related. Therefore, a method was developed for securing the participation of the agronomist in the planning process. This method involved a new concept of the agronomist’s role as a consultant and resource man in land-use planning. The agronomist is called upon to contribute his specific knowledge of soils and crops to the planning process, within the framework of the objectives of the program. He is expected to be able to participate in the decision-making processes of the program by providing the necessary technical data and by guiding the proper use of land-use planning tools.