THE SOIL SURVEY IN A UNIFIED REGIONAL PROGRAM OF DEVELOPMENT

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I SHOULD like for us to think together on some uses of soil survey data in the unified regional program of development in the Tennessee Valley. To do this it is necessary that we have a common understanding of the two parts of the subject, that is, of the soil survey and of the regional program. I am taking it for granted that we already have a common concept of the purposes of the soil survey, but I am assuming that most of you are not familiar with a regional program in the sense in which I should like to discuss it.

It may help us arrive at a common concept of a regional program by considering what it is not. It is not alone the production of electric power, or the manufacture of concentrated fertilizers, or the construction of dams, or the development of navigation, or the control of floods, or the improvement of depleted lands, or forest management, or an educational endeavor based on research and demonstration by the people under the guidance of their established institutions. It is all of these, and more. The “plus” is unity and integration. The “plus” is pooling of resources of federal, state, and local units of government and institutions with those of private individuals toward a common unified objective.

We fight for self government. We always have. We strive to uphold the right of the individual, the family, and the community to develop themselves and their resources by methods which permit local planning and administration, and under conditions which enable them to carry out their responsibilities as components of organized society.

There is a relationship between the policies of the whole nation and the welfare of people on the land; and between the people and the land. In some respects we have come a long way in this country, but we have had growing pains. Science, business, politics, and social institutions have not always kept in balance. Nor have regions.

The nearly self-contained rural community of Jefferson’s day has gradually disappeared. The local manufacturing of many years ago is nearly gone. Instead, great industries have been developed with

As industry migrated to those places of concentration and grew, many rural communities lost of their tax base, or at least it became subordinate to the great cities. Yet cities educate only a part of their citizens, for example, while country places educate nearly all of theirs and many more. Communities had a struggle to pay for their necessary social services. They could not reach the manufacturers or the agricultural machinery industry for taxation, even though these companies did business with them, because their factories were in other cities or other states.

In this struggle for taxes, people on the land or social services were denied, or some of both. This privation was passed on to the land itself, which was cut too fast and cash-crop farming pushed to the limit, or even beyond it. This depletion of the land only worsened the economic conditions that caused it. Thus a vicious cycle of declining self-reliance of communities and of soil depletion began — nowhere, but in far too many parts of America.

Under such conditions, people naturally turn to the centers of government which have the power to tax the centers of wealth. Rural areas, having given up much of their resources to cities, even seek to be attached to city counties in order to tap revenues from taxable property, thereby relinquish in large measure their planning and administration. Rural areas beg for state and federal aid in exchange for their local rights and responsibilities. As responsibility is removed, competence declines. In the region of the Tennessee River system an effort is being made to reverse this trend, to put back into the hands of the people opportunity to restore and maintain their resources as a basis for the expression of individual and collective local initiative. The use of the central taxing power and of the powers of the central government does not need to mean central administration—it can mean that if rural communities are to be strong, self-reliant, and prosperous.

For more than a century the federal government has exercised its constitutional function of the Tennessee River.