TAKING STOCK OF OUR NATIONAL RESOURCES IN SOIL

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The greatness of a nation may be judged by the enlightenment of its members and the intelligence which it displays in the utilization of its material resources. Of all the resources which we possess, our soils are by far the most important, and yet no other resource has been so wastefully employed or so ruthlessly exploited. To their inherent fertility and their vast expanse may be attributed the phenomenal growth of the United States during the past 100 years.

It is not surprising that the pioneers should have been most wastefully of that resource which was the most abundant. In the early days, when the soils became depleted it was a matter of individual economy, if not adventure, to move farther west onto virgin soils rather than maintain the fertility of the old. Although this custom may have been best for the individual and contributed to the national development, it has nevertheless left a serious problem on our hands. During the past half century our population has increased to such an extent that our farmers can no longer evade the problems which their soils present, but must meet them where they are.

This is interesting to observe that some of the leaders of agricultural thought appreciated their responsibility to the soil even in early days. The first attacks made on soils problems took the form of field experiments with crop rotations, green manuring, commercial fertilizers and other fertility studies. Almost 30 years ago it was decided that we should take stock of our soils resources on a nation-wide scale. Accordingly the United States Soil Survey was established, about 1899. Since that time the work has grown in scientific technique as well as in the area surveyed. On July 1, 1928, 753,707 square miles had been surveyed in detail on a scale of 1 inch to 1 mile. In addition, 597,523 square miles had been surveyed by reconnaissance method on the scale of 1 inch to 4 to 6 miles, depending upon the terrace. This means that about 28 per cent of the more level, present and prospective, agricultural lands of the country have been surveyed thus far in detail, that the reconnaissance surveys have been restricted chiefly to the Great Plains area, and that no appreciable

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