Some Aspects of Soil Erosion as a National Problem

By

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A prominent business man was quoted as saying: "Progress is not how long you can keep a thing, but how quickly you can economically scrap it."

Perhaps this statement is true in its application to machines employed in the speedy processes of modern-day mass production. In the instance of some of our capital natural resources, however, the soil in particular, the scrapping of that resource on any large scale can not in any sense contribute toward national economic permanency. Nevertheless, we have on our hands a well-going program of land scrapping, including great areas of high-grade farm land, through the agency of unrestrained soil erosion. In this evil process it is difficult to see any contribution to continuing agricultural welfare or to national economy, because when this machine, the land, is scrapped it can not be replaced and most of it can not be economically restored. However, many farmers have considered it to their advantage, under pressure for immediate returns, to cultivate rapidly eroding land, regardless of the accumulating evil consequences in the form of rapid land exhaustion.

On the other hand, soil erosion as an agent of land depreciation and destruction constitutes the biggest problem confronting the physical side of land utilization in this country. To confine this nation-wide menace within the bounds of reasonable safety is going to tax our best efforts and ingenuity.

Our agricultural lands are declining in productivity and usefulness at a vastly greater rate than most of us have suspected. Indeed, we have entertained no very serious suspicions about the destructiveness of the process. The extent of the damage is incapable of accurate statistical measurement at this time owing to the small amount of information we have on the subject. This is going to be an exceedingly difficult task at any time, since the effects of erosion are highly variable within very narrow limits. However, on the basis of detailed and reconnaissance observations and surveys it is possible to make some very rough estimates.

(1) U.S. Bureau of Chemistry and Soils.