Report of the Committee on

SOIL SURVEY REPORTS, MAPS, AND TECHNIQUE OF MAPPING

by

W. E. HEARN, Chairman

The Committee on Soil Survey Reports, Maps, and Technique of Mapping has no formal report to make as no new suggestions and recommendations, other than those already offered, have been given. The Soil Survey has endeavored to apply these recommendations, and considerable progress has been made. Each member of the Committee was consulted and given an opportunity to express any new ideas and offer suggestions for the improvement of our soil survey reports and it is the concensus of opinion that our soil survey reports have been improved within the last few years. This is further borne out by Mr. Sidney D. Frissell, Editor of the Bureau of Chemistry and Soils, who says that continual improvement is being made in our soil survey reports. He further states that much unnecessary and monotonous repetition has been eliminated and that today we are producing more readable reports than ever before, yet without sacrificing any important facts.

The improvements in the reports and also in the field mapping are due largely to the fact that the field men and inspectors are studying the soil profiles more closely than formerly, and are endeavoring to find out more specifically how the characteristics of the soil influence agriculture. The chemists also have studied soil profiles and have contributed a great deal of information which corroborates with the field judgment, and in some instances, has led to the establishment of new soil series.

It is safe to say that we have gained more knowledge about the soil profiles, their classification and the mapping within the last five years than we had gained in the 25 years previous. Our problem now is to present this information in a clear, readable form.

In the recent instructions by Dr. Marbut in connection with the outline of the soil survey reports, he has called attention to a more logical arrangement of the data in the Soils and Crops Chapter; that is, to describe the soils in a general way, group them, provided a grouping can be made, either on soil characteristics, agricultural usage, surface relief or drainage conditions, and then describe each soil type and phase. This is to be followed by a discussion of the crops grown and the distribution of each crop or group of crops in the county. It is important to show how the soil characteristics have influenced the agriculture of the region. In almost every area, where climate and other natural conditions are uniform, the soil characteristics determine the kind of crops that are grown. The exceptions occur where economic conditions such as markets and transportation facilities demand that a particular product dominate the agriculture.

The grouping of soils in these reports, on the basis of their relative agricultural value, has served a useful purpose. In many parts of the country a demand has grown for land classification to be used in valuation for taxation, for the selection of land for forestry and other purposes. Further the loss sustained in farm loans by both private and governmental agencies has called attention to the necessity for more accurate land appraisals, and it has long been conceded that the Soil Survey is the agency which has collected the soil data that is fundamental for this purpose. Those engaged in land classification and appraisal, however, have, in the past, justly complained that the material in our reports was not arranged in such a manner that it could be used by them without long study and often additional information was required. The present report, if well written, is in itself a classification report as far as the natural factors that influence agriculture are concerned, and it should be possible to take such a report and arrange the soils of the area in their relative positions with reference to proper land utilization, disregarding the economic factors.