THE RELATIONSHIP OF SOIL CHARACTER AS EXPRESSED BY CERTAIN SOIL TYPES, TO CHOICE OF LAND FOR RESETTLEMENT IN THE SOUTHEASTERN COASTAL PLAIN REGION

by

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During the early settlement of the United States a high percentage of land had a fertile topsoil. While foreign markets were good and the demand was heavy for crops such as those produced on American farms, prices enabled a farmer to make some kind of living on most any land freshly cleared. In recent years this monopoly on crops has been broken by the production of the same crops in other countries. In many instances the fertility of the topsoil has been greatly reduced.

With the foregoing facts in mind, we can readily see that the farmer who succeeds must have good land on which to work. Farmers who have lands from which the topsoil has been eroded or from which the fertility has gone will naturally find the going difficult or almost impossible. Not all good land is in cultivation, but a large part of it is. In some localities good land has been cultivated and later left idle. It is clear that some adjustment must be made on our lands. With that adjustment in view, funds were set aside by the Federal Government to purchase submarginal land on which farmers were failing. Other funds were set aside to purchase fair to good farm lands upon which to place families removed from submarginal land. A third fund was set aside to purchase land for use of relief families who with help could become self-supporting on the farm.

The Resettlement Administration, to whom I have been loaned, was charged with the duty of selecting and purchasing these lands. The submarginal land was not so difficult to find, but it was somewhat difficult to purchase in some cases at the low valuation we felt should be placed on the land.

The first step of the Resettlement Administration in its program to put the land of the Coastal Plain Region to its best use was to select and purchase several blocks of poor farm land for development in demonstration land use projects. These blocks were located in widely scattered areas, chiefly to furnish demonstrations to as many people as possible.

Important factors. When an area considered for purchase, one of the first steps was to consult a soil survey map. If the map showed considerable areas of soil types desirable for crop purposes, a shift was made in the location of the area. On the other hand, if the map showed a high percentage of poor soil types, the area would be further considered. In no case was 100 percent soil found in a block; instead, several spots of fair to good soils often surrounded by a considerable area of submarginal farm land.

What constitutes a poor soil type in the Coastal Plain Region? In some instances a very poor soil type from a farming or crop standpoint is a very desirable soil type from a timber or pasture standpoint. Therefore, many blocks purchased may be expected to produce excellent pastures or forests though they have been of little value under cultivation. Most of this land can be put into some kind of forest, but in some instances other uses will be made of certain portions of it, depending on the adaptability and the needs of the vicinity. Certain areas will make excellent pasture and light forest combinations where needs for pasture are found, and will no doubt be developed. In other sections, there may be need for game preserves, and these can be developed.

Generally soils having the following characteristics were accepted as suited to crop production: (1) deep sand, coarse or medium texture, such as Blanton, Kalmia, St. Lucie, Ruston, Thompson; (2) heavy plastic clays, little or no sandy covering, such as Susquehanna, Eutaw, Lufkin, and Flint; (3) soils of the flatwoods region having a hardpan layer, such as Leon and St. Johns; (4) soils with poor drainage, either internal, surface, or both, examples of which are Plummer, Bladen, Myatt, and Grady; (5) steeply rolling or very eroded sandy loams, sandy loams, and gravelly.