I am sure there is little doubt in the mind of any person in this audience as to the really serious importance of the nation-wide problem with which we are confronted in the conservation of the soils of the United States. During the past few years there has developed an extensive literature on the subject which has brought to our attention, in no uncertain terms, what has happened and what is happening to our most important natural resource. In the course of these critical analyses of the situation, various national, State and private policies of the past that have been so instrumental in guiding our agricultural expansion to its present stage of development, have been reviewed and many of them quite appropriately condemned, in one degree or another, in the light of our present knowledge and viewpoint. Various cultural practices in the field, many of them of long regional standing, likewise have been held up for the critical scrutiny they have long deserved and have been found seriously wanting from a number of standpoints.

Following the natural impulse to get started upon the correction of the condition as effectively and as quickly as possible, a number of erosion experiment stations were established. Shortly thereafter, numerous large-scale demonstrations were developed by the Soil Erosion Service and still others are being developed by the Conservation Service in every part of the country. In these latter, effort is being made to apply, over substantial areas, the best known methods of coordinated land use which can be formulated or brought together upon such short notice in a given region.

Needless it is to say that many of the methods and practices which it has been found necessary to press into service for this purpose are without adequate experimental background. Perhaps certain phases of the work on the demonstration areas, as well as on the Erosion Stations, may be regarded as based will show, however, that the work on erosion stations and on the demonstration areas has been a tremendously important factor in developing the understanding and concern which now exists in the minds of the people as to the serious situation we are facing in soil conservation work.

THE PROBLEM

Looking at the erosion problem in its broader aspects it is evident we are largely concerned with cause or effect on the one hand and prevention or cure on the other. This being the case it is apparent that we should first develop a sound and comprehensive framework upon which to sketch a background of research sufficiently broad to pass all aspects of the work, including, essential phases of climatology, geomorphology, pedology, ecology, physiology, aerology, hydrology, as well as agricultural economics and many other closely related subjects. As viewed by a nationally prominent hydrologist with whom the problem was discussed, it is readily apparent from the character and number of complex, closely related problems involved that nothing short of a broad, basic plan of research of this nature can possibly serve as a safe and adequate basis for the development of the more extensive phases of work. It is the preliminary aspects of this plan which I am very glad to discuss with you at this time even in this brief way, for I am obliged to confess we have as yet scarcely crossed the threshold in its preparation.

TENTATIVE DIVISIONS OF THE WORK