DISCUSSION OF THE FIELD MAN'S GREATEST PROBLEM.


The field man's problems vary, necessarily, with the character of the area being surveyed, the conditions under which the work is being done, and in no small degree upon the individuality of the field man himself, but one question almost invariably arises: "How much detail shall I try to show?"

We shall attempt no specific advice, or give any general recommendations for nothing along these lines would be essentially new to the field men assembled here. We will however venture a few suggestions which possibly may be helpful in some instances.

The Bureau's scheme of classification admits of a high degree of differentiation but, as we all know, it is impracticable to indicate all the soil variations easily recognizable in the field. The best of mapping consists essentially in grouping into types and phases the closely related ones. Some features must be given clear recognition, others more or less subordinated. Time, cost and human limitations must be taken into consideration. At this point the field man might ask, In what way can I make this survey best serve the agricultural interest in this particular area? What problems are arising with which some soil distinctions are, or seem to be, related? Are there not some features within the scope of my work which seem especially desirable to indicate?

In most of the older counties of the Northern States the use of lime, the increasing interest in commercial fertilizers, the adaptation of soils to particular strains or varieties of crops, and the necessity of conserving soil fertility on the thin or eroded lands, are outstanding problems. If all the technical soil distinctions could be expressed all these agronomic problems, so far as soil surveys apply to them, would be provided for, but as previously mentioned this is not entirely practicable. But if it is possible to twist our field methods a little bit and thus make the map show more clearly some of the soil variations connected with these problems it seems desirable to do so, even if some technical distinctions have to be slighted.

The recognition of topographic phases seem desirable whenever they may express appreciable differences in land values. The careful delineations of muck deposits, of permanent marshes, and of bodies of water, seem well worth while. As an official reference for non-resident land owners, investors, and financial institutions, the soil maps should show the boundaries of these features with as much accuracy as possible.

In the survey of undeveloped sections of the country a sort of moral responsibility rests upon the field man in his classification of the land. A detailed map carefully executed places him in the clear. This is not always practicable, but a separation of agricultural and non-agricultural lands as measured by present economic conditions should always be made. Here again the judgment of the field man as to land values should take precedence over his knowledge of soils. One of the first interests his report will probably serve is the highly important one of assisting people not previously acquainted with the region in the selection of land for a farm home.

In conclusion it seems desirable to lean toward the so-called practical side of soil mapping whenever a choice must be made between this and the extreme of technical separation.