DISCUSSION ON HOW TO IMPROVE SOIL MAPS.


The improvement of the legend as suggested is, I believe, the greatest improvement that can be made in the soil maps at the present time. The legend is the key to the map and as such should be made as simple and yet as comprehensive as possible.

The explanatory legend in tabular form accomplishes this. True it might be said that a person desirous of knowing more about the soils found on the legend at the present time need only refer to the report. But, just as the introduction to a good speech or magazine article is made as interesting as possible to interest the listener or reader in what follows, so soil maps that are made interesting and comprehensive in themselves are more likely to get a "half interested" person to read the report than one which cannot be interpreted as readily. Moreover, soil maps will become of greater value. Their use will become much more general, for then it will be possible to mount them and use them as wall maps in schools, banks, post offices, and even hotels. And, as a result of this, greater publicity will be given the work and greater support and cooperation secured.

A small improvement could also be made in the culture legend. The enclosing of three or four conventional signs in one rectangle as is now used makes the legend somewhat misleading and difficult of understanding, especially by persons not used to reading maps. For example, it is difficult to tell what all the signs in the first large rectangle stand for, or to distinguish the signs for trail and secondary road, mine and mine dump, or swamp and salt marsh.

The using of a different sign for a church and a school house, although probably of minor importance, should also be recognized. It would very likely mean very little additional expense, but would mean much to the farmer trying to locate his farm with reference to a certain church or school. Moreover, I believe that any signs not used on the map should not be included in the legend. No doubt, there are good reasons for having a standard legend, but the more simple a legend can be made the more easily it will be understood.

With reference to the colors used on the maps at the present time, the general policy has been, I believe, to use strong contrasting colors between adjoining soils. This color scheme is effective, but I believe it could be made more effective if the contrast between soil types in a certain physiographic province could be made subordinate to the color contrast between different physiographic provinces. To explain,—if in a certain county part of the soils are of glacial, part of loessial, and part of alluvial origin, the color contrast between these different provinces should stand out on the map distinctly or above the color contrast of the soils within any one of the given provinces. True, it is always possible to trace the line between upland and bottomland, but if the color scheme can be such that at first sight this line of demarcation stands out, the map will be greatly benefited, and farmers (especially) will get the idea of soil differences, shown on the map, more readily.

Certain difficulties in engraving might probably be encountered at times by using this scheme, but I believe that whenever possible the color contrast between soil types should be subordinate to the color contrast between soil provinces.