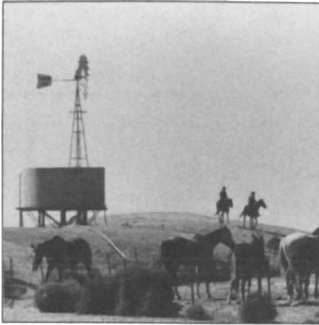


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**Cover**  
Wheat, a universal symbol for food and fiber, brings to mind the task of protecting the soil resource base, thereby assuring an agricultural productivity sufficient to feed people in the decades ahead. See page 13. Photo by Jim Romo, Missoula, Montana.

The Soil Conservation Society of America is dedicated to promoting the science and art of good land use, with emphasis on conservation of soil, water, air, and related natural resources, including all forms of beneficial plant and animal life. To this end, SCSA seeks through the *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation* and other programs to educate people so that mankind can use and enjoy these natural resources forever.

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## PEN POINTS

### Misleading cover note

I feel strongly that the cover picture on the November-December 1980 number should have additional explanation. The implication that the area shown is part of the area devastated by the volcanic eruption is not the case.

The area shown is a logged area on which volcanic ash appears to have whitened the residue left after logging.

Mention should be made of the blossoming plants with the pink flowers, which belie the word "devastation." The flowers are undoubtedly fireweed, which naturally follows logging.

W. A. Rockie  
Newberg, Oregon

*You're right, Mr. Rockie. The photo was taken in the vicinity of Mount St Helens during reseeding operations, but the area pictured is not part of that devastated by the volcano's eruption.*

*In addition to the misleading cover note, we failed to mention that the photo was taken for the Soil Conservation Service by Photographer Tim McCabe.*

Editor

### More articles for farmers

I have been a member and subscriber for many years and have profited greatly by your publication.

However, I am a lawyer and have had considerable education in chemistry, physics, and mathematics. As a result, I can understand many of your articles, but some of my tenants have not been so fortunate in their education. Many of your articles and arguments "go over their heads." They are impressed by the written word but are unable to comprehend your explanations. I do my best to interpret your articles in their language but cannot just give them one of your issues and hope the ideas in it will be carried out.

For example, in your issue for July-August 1980...appear two fine articles, "Computing Soil Erosion by Periods Using Wind-Energy Distribution" on page 173 and "Costs of Alternative Policies for Controlling Agricultural Soil Loss and Associated Stream Sedimentation" on page 177. Both are over the heads of the average dirt farmer.

I am on the committee for soil erosion

and sedimentation in Warren County, Illinois, and am deeply interested in the subject. Is it not possible to get articles understandable for the average dirt farmer who is naturally reluctant to change his methods and is only willing to do so when he understands the value and procedure of the new method?

Frederick H. Lauder  
Monmouth, Illinois

### Many factors affect loss of farmland

Protection of the nation's limited supply of prime farmland is sometimes given less serious attention than it deserves when we view only one or two of the many factors that indicate the potential future need for our highly productive cropland. There are at least 12 natural and man-made factors that contribute to the concern for conserving our limited supply of these lands.

These factors include:

1. Acid precipitation that is reducing productivity on some agricultural lands.
2. Surface mining industry that will inevitably reduce the area and productivity of agricultural land as it goes about the extraction of coal and other minerals.
3. Use of crops for fuel. The increasing popularity and demand for gasohol and similar mixtures as alternative fuels will increase the need for crop production.
4. Lower groundwater levels, particularly in the western plains, could cause land to go out of crop production and revert to grassland that can be sustained with the limited rainfall of that area.
5. Drought. Low rainfall and high temperatures during recent years have reduced production in major regions of the country. These cyclical weather patterns have been documented in the past and may be expected in the future.

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*Conservationists' Pen Points" is a forum for comment on previously published material, land and water management controversies, and SCSA affairs. The JSWC invites readers to express their views on such items in a letter to the editor. Letters are judged on clarity of expression and pertinence. They should be brief. Long letters may be shortened.—Editor.*

---

6. Higher transportation costs, related to higher fuel costs, will encourage crop production as close as possible to the consuming market.

7. Spreading urbanization, with its accompanying facilities, airports, highways, and transmission lines, intrudes into our supply of farmland.

8. Soil erosion in many areas continues at a rate that inevitably will diminish our supply of productive farmland.

9. Higher cost fertilizer, insecticides, and irrigation power means higher cost agricultural products. This can only be counteracted by using our most productive land—that land that can produce food and fiber at least cost for the requisites of production and with least damage to the environment.

10. Reservoirs, needed to provide more dependable water supplies and flood control for urban and rural needs, will flood extensive areas of agricultural land.

11. New industrial crops to produce substitute materials for critical imports, such as rubber and waxes, could compete for available agricultural land.

12. Increasing export demand is predicted to help meet our international balance of trade and to feed the world's increasing population.

Other factors could be listed. These are some of the more obvious. The numbers of acres involved can also be quantified. However, debate over the preciseness of numbers only distracts us from the basic, undeniable fact that prime farmland is a limited valuable resource that should be conserved with great care.

There are other positive factors that will lead to greater productivity from the land—agricultural research will produce new strains of crops, improved tillage practices will reduce erosion and conserve moisture, biological controls will reduce dependence on pesticides. We can assume that technological progress will continue—but it is not prudent to assume that such progress will offset the many compounding factors at work on the negative side tending to reduce crop production and increase demand. Their cumulative effect will cause a crisis in the predictable future. Our children or grandchildren will certainly curse our stupidity if we do not act to protect our valuable resource, prime farmland.

Warren T. Zitzmann  
Falls Church, Virginia



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