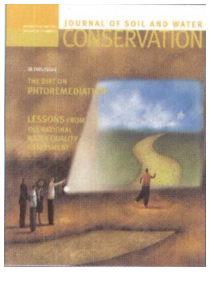
JOURNAL OF SOIL AND WATER
CONSERVATION
JANUARY | FEBRUARY 2002

DEPARTMENTS



On the Cover
Illustration
by Dave Cutler.

RESEARCH

JOURNAL OF SOIL AND WATER
CONSERVATION

Journal of Soil and Water Conservation (ISSN 0022-4561) is published bimonthly by the Soil and Water Conservation Society. Editorial, executive, and membership offices: 7515 NE Ankeny Road, Ankeny, Iowa 50021-9764; (515)289-2331. Advertising offices: 319 E. 5th Street, Suite 3, Des Moines, Iowa 50309, (800)577-4638 or *tsmull@inanews.com*. Periodicals postage paid at Ankeny, Iowa and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation*, 7515 NE Ankeny Road, Ankeny, Iowa 50021-9764. Subscription is by membership in the Soil and Water Conservation Society or by subscription. Membership dues are $60 per year ($75 outside the United States and Canada); subscriptions are $75 per year ($95 outside the United States). Page charges are assessed to authors in pages other than the A-section.

Soil and Water Conservation Society
Assisting in the art and science of conservation since 1943.

RAISE YOUR VOICE

YOUR FORUM TO REACT TO PUBLISHED ARTICLES, TO EXCHANGE IDEAS, AND DESCRIBE INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO CONSERVATION INCLUDING LEGISLATION

"The USLE equation is about as accurate as predicting the hour, the day, and the year that the sun's energy plays out."

Filling Need

Langley-Turnbaugh and Evans (2001) broached a timely subject in their article, *A hierarchical evaluation of soil quality indicators in disturbed systems,* in the Third Quarter 2001 issue given current trends in brownfield redevelopment and large-scale population shifts. By now, fully half the world's population live in urban areas. In the United States, census demographics indicate only about 20 percent of the population live in rural areas. Out-migrations from cities are often only as far as the nearest suburb. Smart Growth and other movements call for reinvesting in central places. Accordingly, contamination may appear to play an increasing role in soil quality decline because we are reexamining more urban sites. Attempts to develop utilitarian measurements of soil quality variability such as are described in Langley-Turnbaugh and Evans fill a need in urban and environmental planning as well as in developing specific site assessment/comparison procedures.

Robert M. Sanford, Gorham, ME

Steepen Spirituality

What a refreshing surprise to discover in the October-November 2001 issue of *Conservation Voices* a revelation of the influence personal and communal spirituality can have on land use in Brian Lavendel's piece. Hopefully, a sign of things to come! Two thoughts came to mind while learning the context of decision making at the three farms (1) these places are not representative of most farms and (2) farmers base their decisions on their economic bottom lines.

A quick check of 1997 USDA-NASS data (the most recent I had handy) shows that the sizes of those farms (70 to 1200 acres) are representative of 70 percent of the farms in the United States. A week ago, I attended four town-hall meetings about the environmental consequences of large-scale animal confinement operations. These demonstrated to me that the hundreds of small and moderate-sized family farmers who attended take into account not only economic considerations, but also consider the environment, their neighbors, their community, and their own spirituality when making management decisions. It is the minority of the farms—the large, industrial-type farms—that base their decisions singularly on their economic bottom lines.

Those who provide technical assistance to the, arguably, 80 percent of farmers who steward and are in close kinship with the land should be encouraged (not discouraged), to steepen (not ignore) their own spirituality so they can better understand the conservation planning decision making processes of the majority of their clients.

Tim Kautza, Des Moines, IA

Make the Human Connection

As always I appreciate receiving a copy of *Conservation Voices*. Craig Cox's comments in the June issue on reaching out about conservation policy are very significant and timely. I often wonder why year after year we continue to struggle with sufficient funding issues for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Something is wrong. The United States probably spends more money on soil conservation than any other country in the world and yet is getting mediocre results. When farmers, conservation districts, and NRCS are dissatisfied with the results then something is wrong. Somehow we need to reconnect the farmer, homeowner, conservation district, and the NRCS relationship in a positive way. And we need to get back to the roots of promoting soil health concepts that may be applied in urban and farm policies.

I prefer the old method of making connections—the human approach. We have email, telephones, cell phones etc. but yet our ability to muster support from our legislators has diminished. The word stewardship has a meaning of caring for what we have. It implies to me a nurturing message that only comes about through human con-

nections. Our gardens are an example of aesthetic understanding. We need to use this analogy in our approach to making better connections.

David B. Friedman, Forked River, NJ

Soil Type Should Be Shared

I always enjoy reading the *Conservation Voices* magazine, and especially enjoyed *The Soil Maker of Chile*, by Stephen Leahy, in the June/July 2001 issue.

It seems like Carlos Crovetto Lamarco is doing an excellent job on his soil management program. I am puzzled, however, on how the 1-inch of additional topsoil was measured.

The farmer, or author, did not mention or share the soil type name or its taxonomy with us, the readers. I'd like to see more authors share the soil type name, and the soil taxonomy that goes with it, in every article. It's the soil resources we are working with. Let's share it.

Martin C. Urka, Brandon, FL

USLE Not Accurate

I read in the October *Conservation Voices* that we have another revision of the Universal Soil Loss Equation (USLE). What a joke! Since the early 1930's, individuals, Soil Conservation Services (SCS)/Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) have been trying to come up with an equation that can predict the amount of soil erosion on any given piece of land. The equation has been adjusted numerous times over the past several years in order to get the predetermined results that the researchers want.

The USLE equation is about as accurate as predicting the hour, the day, and the year that the sun's energy plays out.

I worked on a temporary basis for the NRCS on developing conservation plans called for by the Food Security Act. I observed more soil erosion on land that was not considered highly erodible than on land that was considered to be highly erodible. I have also talked to a good number of NRCS/SCS personnel on the use of the USLE, and 100 percent considered the USLE equation inaccurate and a big joke.

Almost every piece of land has different characteristics and different conservation problems, and these problems cannot be solved by punching a few keys on a computer and coming up with a conservation plan that is based upon the use of the USLE equation.

Over the last few years, I have noticed an increase in soil erosion in the Rolling Plains and Blackland Prairies of Texas. Farmers are plowing and farming over terraces, waterways are not being maintained, and a noticeable amount of erosion is taking place. I guess the farmers are told these practices are not needed according to the USLE equation.

The only way to solve soil and water conservation problems on any given piece of land is to have competent conservation technicians working directly with the land users out on the land.

Van C. Mills, San Angelo, TX

Readers are invited to express their views on land and water management.

Please make your letter less than 150 words. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

Send to Editor:

Deb Happe-vonArb at:

deb@swcs.org

fax 515-289-1227

Journal of Soil and Water Conservation,
7515 NE Ankeny Road,
Ankeny, Iowa 50021-9764