

A Student Trainee Program of the Soil Conservation Service

The Administrator's Viewpoint

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The Soil Conservation Service's primary responsibility is to assist farmers and ranchers to develop and apply basic soil conservation plans fitted specifically to the soil and water resources involved. It gives on-site technical assistance for soil, water and plant management and sound land use to owners and operators primarily through soil conservation districts. In addition, the Service provides technical and financial assistance to local organizations in watershed protection and flood prevention.

This requires a staff of approximately 13,000 full-time personnel located in every state, Alaska, Puerto Rico and Hawaii. To maintain this staff, the Soil Conservation Service must continually recruit new employees and develop them for professional careers in this work.

The Student Trainee Program, initiated in 1948, is an effective method of obtaining new employees for the Service. It is effective for the Agency and attractive to the college student. Through participation in the Student Trainee Program the college students majoring in range management, soil science, civil or agricultural engineering, geology, or other agricultural fields are afforded an opportunity to obtain summer employment in their respective fields of work, and at the same time start their professional careers.

The operation of the Student Trainee Program is very simple. The undergraduate student in any of the above majors takes a Civil Service Examination. Usually this examination is taken at the completion of his freshman year but may be taken at the completion of the

sophomore or junior year in college. If he successfully completes this examination and is selected, the student is given summer employment and is granted educational leave, without pay, to allow him to return to school. Obviously, it is better to take the examination at the end of the freshman year.

This discussion of the Soil Conservation Service Student Trainee Program outlines two viewpoints of the in-service educational training of range managers.

The administrator's viewpoint is presented by Ernest C. Shillingburg, formerly Work Unit Conservationist in Texas, Regional Training Officer, and presently Head, Personnel Section, Soil Conservation Service, Temple, Texas.

The student's impression is given by William R. Stephenson in an article written as a senior student in range management at Texas A. and M. College. Stephenson was a student trainee with the Soil Conservation Service during the summer of 1955 and returned to that agency in June, 1956 as a range conservationist. He was recently selected by the Texas Section of the American Society of Range Management as one of the outstanding senior range students in Texas.

This gives the student three full summers of employment and the additional opportunity for further development in his chosen professional field of work with the Soil Conservation Service. The salary for the summer employment is \$246 per month after the freshman year, \$264 per month after the soph-

omore, and \$284 per month after the junior year.

The student trainee is assigned to work with a professional employee in the Soil Conservation Service. He gets special and intensive training that is integrated into the work program and at the same time complements his scholastic work. He is given professional guidance, not only in his major field such as range management, but in other related sciences in the broad field of soil and water conservation.

This summer employment follows a specific training plan which serves as a systematic guide for his development and gives the student practical work with emphasis on his college major. The student trainee who is majoring in range management will follow a training plan that emphasizes the range activities of the Soil Conservation Service. The professional employee assigned to guide him will be a range conservationist. However, the trainee will also work with soil scientists, engineers and soil conservationists to further his development as a career employee in the Service. All of these sciences are coordinated and integrated in the Service's program, and whether the professional employee is assigned to a full-time position as a range conservationist or to the more general job of soil conservationist, he will have a working knowledge of all the related fields.

Upon graduation, the successful student trainee is promoted without any further examination to the entrance or trainee level of the appropriate professional field, at a salary of approximately \$305 per month. Experience has proven that former student trainees usually advance more rapidly from this entrance level, than new employees without this experience.

A typical reaction to the Student Trainee Program is the following statement by a former student who majored in range management, "I had been looking forward to my return because of the many advantages and opportunities. The

Student Trainee Program was very interesting and educational and filled all my expectations. The thing that particularly appealed to me was that during my summer employment, I was given added responsibilities and the opportunity to make decisions on the problems with which I was confronted. At all times the staff of professional men were ready to assist me when I needed it. In addition to training in the field of range conservation, I received training in related fields which will be of extreme importance to me. It impressed upon me the fact that my selection of electives should be made carefully. I have already recommended it to other students who are interested

in a career with the Soil Conservation Service and will continue to do so in the future."

The increasing interest in the Student Trainee Program indicates that it will become the Service's primary source of professional personnel.

The Student Trainee Program has made a substantial contribution to the Service's recruitment needs since its beginning. From 1948 through 1955, a total of 1,272 student trainees were selected and placed in the Service; of these, 842 are still on the rolls. The Student Trainee Examination has resulted in approximately 360 new undergraduates being available for employment with the Service for the

summer of 1956. Texas started the Student Trainee Program in 1952, and since that time has appointed 91 student trainees, of which 73 are still working for the Service. Texas plans to employ 50 new student trainees during the summer of 1956. In addition, 24 sophomores and juniors will return for summer employment, and 17 graduates will be promoted to the beginning professional level to start a full-time career in the Service.

The Soil Conservation Service has found the Student Trainee Program to be an excellent basis for a long time recruitment program. It has brought more good personnel into the Service in recent years than any other single program.