A Student Trainee Program of the Soil Conservation Service

The Administrator's Viewpoint

ERNEST C. SHILLINGBURG

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 sophomore, 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
The Student Trainee's Viewpoint
WILLIAM R. STEPHENSON

In a few weeks, I shall be graduating from college and beginning a full-time career in the Soil Conservation Service. My two years as a student trainee with this Service have meant much in my training and development and I welcome this opportunity to tell something about the Student Trainee Program from the viewpoint of the college student.

The Civil Service examination for a student trainee in the Soil Conservation Service is open to college students who have completed their freshman year. After passing the examination, the student is offered an appointment as a student trainee which provides the opportunity for practical experience at good pay during the summer months.

It is no secret that a person learns much faster from experience than from theory alone. Such summer employment, therefore, gives the student a chance to apply some of the knowledge he has learned during the school year. Even more important, he learns how to adapt the ideas and techniques he has learned in school to the particular needs and situations he finds in the field.

After a summer of practical experience as a student trainee, I found that I was better able to determine what further college courses I needed. Having some idea of what I wanted and how I was going to use the information made my college work more interesting and meaningful. As I gained still more experience in my second summer employment, I found, too, that I was better able to plan my elective courses. I also learned the importance of being able to find the information I wanted and was encouraged to develop my own personal library and file of technical material.

The most important decision facing a college or university student is that of choosing his career or life's work. This, in many cases, is not an easy decision and all students should take advantage of any opportunity to gain information and experience that will help them make a wise decision. They need to know about the opportunities to grow and advance in the organization they select, the kind of help and guidance they will receive, the kind of people with whom they will work, and whether they will enjoy working with one agency. The Student Trainee Program provides them with such an opportunity. The student trainee learns, first-hand, how the Soil Conservation Service operates, the technical and other standards it follows, and its relationships with other agencies and with farmers and ranchers. Consequently, he is able to decide whether he is interested in working with this organization.

The range student will find that summer work with the Soil Conservation Service is well rounded and provides experience in many technical operational procedures. The trainee also comes in contact with a wide variety of agricultural personnel—agronomists, biologists, engineers, foresters and soil scientists. These experiences and contacts enable him to size up the occupational possibilities in other technical fields and he is better able to determine his own particular interests.

Most college students need to work and earn some money during summer vacations between college semesters. The student trainee posi-