

Symposium on the Plowing of Fragile Grasslands in Colorado

Organized by: **W.A. Laycock**, Past President, Colorado Section, Society for Range Management. USDA, Agricultural Research Service Crops Research Laboratory, Colorado State University, Fort Collins 80523

On Nov. 18-19, 1982, the Colorado Section of the Society for Range Management sponsored a symposium to look at the issue of plowing of grasslands in Colorado. Speakers were invited to represent a wide spectrum of interests and viewpoints about the subject and included: a farmer involved in plowing, a real estate man involved in sales of plowed land, ranchers, State and Federal Agency personnel, individuals and organizations who had taken public stands on the issue, and scientists involved in research on the issue. The following are abstracts of the papers presented and a summary of the meeting.

Introduction to the Problem

W.A. Laycock, Past President, Colorado Section
Society for Range Management
Fort Collins, Colo.

According to Soil Conservation Service figures, approximately 500,000 acres of previously unplowed rangeland in Colorado was plowed in the past 4 years. Part of this has been plowed in solid blocks several miles square and some is in land classes with relatively low production potential and relatively high erosion risk. This has led to concern by many people about potential wind and water erosion from these lands. The exact acreage that has been plowed in all of the other Plains states is not known but it is large. For example, the amount plowed in South Dakota in the past 7 years is approximately 700,000 acres.

On August 6, 1982, the Colorado Section of the Society for Range Management passed a resolution expressing concern about the plowing. A copy of this resolution is available at the SRM office in Denver.

In the symposium we have tried to include all viewpoints, including those of resident farmers doing some of the grassland plowing and concerned individuals and organizations who feel that such plowing should be prohibited. The subject of plowing the rangelands is much more complex than most of us realize. The memories of the Dust Bowl days are still present and many people fear that the next extreme drought that covers the entire Great Plains, such as that which occurred in the 1930's, will cause a new Dust Bowl.

Two books reviewing the history of the Dust Bowl have appeared recently. Donald Worster (1979. *Dust Bowl, the Southern Plains in the 1930s*. Oxford Press, New York, 277 p) reviewed the history of 2 counties (Haskell County, Kansas, and Cimarron County, Oklahoma) in the middle of the Dust Bowl from settlement through the Dust Bowl. A recurring, disturbing theme is that conservation and wise use of land are impossible in a capitalistic society. R. Douglas Hunt (1981. *The Dust Bowl*. Nelson-Hall, Chicago, 214 p.) presents a more even-handed review of the history of the settlement of the plains and the causes and effects of the Dust Bowl. Hunt presents an interesting history of severe and prolonged dust storms in the plains before the 1930's during the following years: 1830, 1854, 1860-1864, 1874-1878, 1886-1888, 1892-1893, 1895, 1901-1904, and 1912-1914.

The purpose of the symposium was to review the causes and effects of the new wave of plowing of grassland in Colorado in the last few years. If we are heading for another Dust Bowl, what can we do to prevent it? If the fears of another Dust Bowl are unfounded, what can we do to educate people and allay those fears?

Local Control with a Tough Issue

Milton E. "Bud" Mekelburg, Pres., National Association of Conservation Districts, (NACD) Yuma, Colo.

The plowing issue is extremely complex. The position of the NACD is that people must use the land as wisely as possible with minimum regulation. A rapidly surfacing opposing view is that there is nothing to worry about because "we have plenty of land out there." The economics of the situation are poorly understood and hardly ever mentioned. The agriculture industry is caught in a tremendous trap. I don't hear about economics of the cattle situation, a situation as serious as it's ever been. In order to conserve something, you must come back to the profit motive. If cattle prices were high enough to make a profit, then the rancher would not be looking for other ways to turn an unprofitable situation into one that makes a profit.

What can be done concerning the plowing of fragile grasslands? One approach is the "sodbuster" bill of United States Senator William Armstrong (R-Colo.) which would prohibit incentive payments to farmers who plow grasslands. U.S. Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) does not support this bill because he feels that plowing is not a national problem. However, it is: 25-30 states have the problem and many of them are east of the 100th Meridian. In Washington, the American Land Forum has proposed another option: that the federal government give state and local governments money to buy marginal lands and restrict use of such land from that day forward. I do not support this idea.

It is clear that there are no easy solutions and that whatever is done must be done through the political process. If at all possible, much of the problem needs to be handled at the local level. However, local governments must be responsive or action will be taken at higher levels. It is up to the people who are involved to make sure that action is taken at the local level and to also see that local governments are not over-responsive.

"Sodbuster" Amendment

Introduced by

Senator William L. Armstrong (Colorado)

(originally introduced as S. 1825 and later as amendment to the Senate Agriculture Appropriations Bill for FY 1983)

The Problem:

- This country loses some 5 billion tons of topsoil to erosion each year, according to the Soil Conservation Service. Much of this erosion is in the arid Western Great Plains area.
- Fragile grasslands and other marginal soils are being plowed at an alarming rate, creating the conditions whereby another great dust bowl could occur. In Colorado alone, 500,000 acres of this fragile land has been plowed just in the last three years.
- This sod cover is not replaceable in our lifetimes. Nature takes 100 years to replace a single inch of topsoil, so the damage is permanent.
- Government incentives are available to the speculators who plow this land, through our price support system. These programs, important in other respects, are unintentionally encouraging this destructive practice.

The Amendment Provides:

- Government price supports, crop insurance, disaster payments, Farmers Home Administration loans, and Farm Storage Facility Loans will be unavailable to crops grown on newly plowed fragile lands.
- The amendment does not apply to lands already in production, or which have been plowed before the date of enactment. And it does

not apply to lands where erosion is not a problem: the Soil Conservation Districts can approve plans whereby exemptions can be made for lands not erosion-prone.

Concept of Amendment:

- This amendment will not stop erosion, nor will it tell farmers what they can and cannot do on their own land. It will simply stop government from subsidizing erosion.
- Impact on the budget is negligible, though there will be some savings.

Status:

- The House and Senate conferees failed to include this amendment in the version of the Agriculture Appropriations bill passed by both houses in December, 1982. The bill will be reintroduced in Congress in 1983 by Senator Armstrong.

A Matter of Rights

*J. Evan Goulding, Commissioner of Agriculture for Colorado
Denver, Colo.*

Very few public issues generate a collision of as many rights, responsibilities, risks, and duties as does the current dust blowing, sod busting, grasslands plowing controversy. The practice is largely economically motivated and therein rests the basic conflict. The Constitution of the United States permits laws to be made by the majority for the protection of society but the same Constitution operates to protect rights of the individual from the will of the government or the masses.

Property owners may have a right to protection from damaging effects from the dust blowing from neighbor's property, but how is that reconciled with a neighbor's right to use his property as he sees fit? A county may have a right to protect its citizens from the health hazards or damages, but does it have the right to restrict property uses, and thereby limit the value of the land, or its salability?

Zoning and other land use restrictions have been proven to be legal, as well as effective, in urban settings. What rights are different in rural situations? Does an urban taxpayer have a right to expect that his taxes will not go to reclaim land that was unwisely destroyed by some landowner, unwisely exercising his right to "do as he damm well pleases?"

The Weld County Experience

*June Steinmark, County Commissioner, Weld County
Greeley, Colo.*

About three years ago, a realtor purchased several thousand acres of grassland in Weld County. He plowed it up fence-to-fence, employing no stripping techniques, planted a crop of wheat, supposedly made a good profit, then sold the land to Canadian farmers. This spring the weather was unusually dry and the winds unusually strong; the land blew and topsoil piled up on adjacent grassland, covered fences, and invaded homes.

It was also reported this year that another Canadian had purchased and was going to plow up approximately 15,000 acres.

Through Colorado's Dust Blowing Act, the County Commissioners can only act after the grassland has been plowed and the dust is blowing; however, even this legislation has insufficient enforcement powers.

The Board of County Commissioners had several options to follow to regulate the plowing of grasslands. The Board opted for an emergency procedure and on May 18, 1982, passed an emergency Ordinance which went into effect on that date. Generally, the Ordinance requires that anyone wishing to plow up grasslands in Weld County that have not been plowed up within the past five years must obtain a permit before any plowing takes place. The permit is issued automatically by the Clerk to the Board of County Commissioners if the applicant comes to the County with a conservation plan that has been approved by the local Conservation District Board. If the local Conservation District Board disapproves a conservation plan submitted by the applicant, the the applicant has an opportunity to appear to the Board of County Commissioners and have a hearing, at which time the board can issue a permit regardless of the decision of the local Soil Conservation District Board. If anyone violates the Ordinance by failing to get a permit, the Board can impose a penalty of a fine of \$300 per day and/or ninety days in jail pursuant to the Home Rule Charter Powers Act.

To date, we have received 6 applications and approved 6 under the

Ordinance. We have heard reports of the possibility of someone plowing up land without seeking a permit, but as yet haven't initiated any proceedings to enforce the penalty provisions of the Ordinance.

Policies and Procedures Governing Plowing on State Lands

Rowena Rogers

Chairman, Board of Land Commissioners, Denver, Colo.

A total of 5,823 acres of State trust land have been converted from rangeland to dryland wheat between 1974 and the moratorium in 1982. This is hardly a significant number in relation either to the total plowout during that time or to the total area of almost 3 million acres administered by the Land Board.

The Enabling Act transferred these grant lands to the State of Colorado for the limited purpose of providing the State with a source of revenue for specific uses, mainly the support of public schools. By this fundamental law, the first consideration of any decision affecting the trust land must be the fiduciary interest. In 1982, 128,452 acres of State land currently being farmed returned \$1,397,170.00. In the same year 2,719,118 acres of State grazing land returned \$2,032,918.00. Those figures raise the question why so little trust land has been converted.

One answer is that free enterprise, not the bureaucracy, initiates the decision to convert. State land lessees are farmers and ranchers struggling like everyone else to make a go of it. With few exceptions, the school section is only part of an operation and is managed according to how it fits into the whole.

In the past, a State land lessee's conversion application was forwarded to the District Conservationist of the U.S. Soil Conservation Service for comment. If the District Conservationist approved the conversion, the Land Board approved it subject to the lessee becoming a Soil Conservation District cooperator and converting according to an approved plan. If the District Conservationist recommended against conversion, the Land Board disapproved the conversion, subject, however, to appeal by the applicant.

This procedure which I have described is an abeyance. Last spring the Land Board placed a one-year moratorium on conversions. This action was not taken because the potential amount of State land conversion was not of any statistical significance. It was taken because the cumulative plowout had reached such proportions that there was broad public concern about conversion, and it was apparent that the Land Board was under fire for not forcing on its lessees the disadvantage of conforming to a nonexistent public policy which did not apply to surrounding land.

The moratorium is to allow time for the adoption of public policies which would have equal and nondiscriminatory effects upon all landowners. The action by the Weld County Commissioners, the Brown and Armstrong bills before Congress, the resolutions by the Cattlemen, the Farm Bureau, and the Colorado Association of Soil Conservation Districts, and this very Symposium—all are steps toward the delineation of such public policies which the Land Board will welcome and respect.

Grassland Conversion: the State's Viewpoint

Robert M. Zebroski

*Colorado State Soil Conservation Board
Denver, Colo.*

The State Soil Conservation Board and the eighty soil conservation districts have been given the charge of encouraging the proper use every acre of land within its capability. The conversion of fragile grasslands to cropland has certainly focused the attention on land capability.

In the 1981 legislative session, a bill was introduced to authorize counties to pass ordinances to regulate the cultivation of fragile grasslands. When the bill failed, the State Soil Conservation Board and the Colorado Department of Agriculture jointly prepared a "Model Regulation Concerning the Cultivation of Fragile Grasslands". The Model did not give counties any authority which they did not previously have in the Land Use Control Enabling Act of 1974. Also, the Model did not encourage a no-plow law but a permitting system instead.

The procedure as outlined in the Model to obtain a permit to plow fragile grasslands is not complicated. The applicant is required to submit to the County Commissioners the following: (1) a completed application form, (2) a legal description, (3) a map delineating the proposed land use change, and (4) a conservation plan approved by

the local soil conservation district. A hearing is conducted by the Commissioners. If all the requirements are met, the application is approved. The controlling factor in the system is the approved conservation plan based on soil capability.

The Model has been made available to all the counties in Eastern Colorado and a number of soil conservation districts have met with their County Commissioners to encourage the passage of some form of the Model. The Model was used to establish the ordinance for Weld County.

The Dust Blowing Act of 1954 (revised) can be used to reduce the dust blowing on lands already converted. The County Commissioners and local soil conservation districts cooperate to prescribe a treatment to correct the situation, reduce the damages and the hazards from wind erosion. Changes in the Act are proposed in the upcoming legislative session.

The decision as to the conversion of the fragile grasslands to cropland should and can be made at the local level. County Commissioners have the authority and when coupled with the resource data available from the local soil conservation districts and other sources, a wise decision based on land capability can be made.

A Farmer's Viewpoint

*Melvin Layne,
Layne Farms, Englewood, Colo.*

In the last ten years, government policy has vacillated between all-out production, embargos, farm shortages, and human rights. Everytime after an embargo, prices fall to a point below cost, many farmers again go broke. Lack of a consistent government policy, inability to get food or allow food products to go to the nations needing them, and world recession has brought the farmer-rancher to his knees. The farmer has not been helped by the financial problems of the rancher. The rancher, farmer, and feeder would have all benefited if the livestock industry could have remained solvent. Unfortunately this has not been the case. As reasoning and fact have given way to emotions, facts have become more obscured.

According to recent government reports, whether you or I like it or not, we are losing prime farmland at the rate of 3,000,000 acres a year. Therefore, new farmlands must be systematically brought into production to allow for the loss.

Incredible as it sounds, according to a USDA report, by the year 2000, we will be importing food instead of exporting. Some of those that today would try to stop new croplands from production see the opportunity of large profits at the expense of the consumer.

Government and some people seem to be seeking a way to control sod-breaking. Legislation of farming practices on new ground or traditional farmland might be the answer, but would raise questions which every rancher and farmer should ask: 1. With every law there is a loss of a right or the transfer of that right to someone else, and 2. If the decision was taken years ago to transfer that right, would we be the breadbasket of the world?

Some would have you believe if we just stopped the foreign investor and outside money from flowing into agriculture, our problems would be solved. In fact, as agriculture debts continue to rise more outside monies will be needed to insure adequate food supplies for the future.

Speaking as a soil conservationist who has made his living from the land, I become frustrated with being blamed by governmental agencies, the press, and others for causing a dust bowl. I believe we will see another dust bowl but it will be caused by high winds and lack of rain, not the farmer. All of the land my father farmed in the 30's is still producing wheat.

There will be some land broken that will produce, and there will be some that won't. We need to leave that decision to the rancher and farmer. If we do not, I fear the inevitable dissolution of the greatest provider in the world, The American Farmer-Rancher.

Views of a Farmer and Realtor

*Joe Hendricks,
Hendricks Realty, Fort Collins, Colo.*

My experience has consisted of being an active farmer, a real estate broker and a corporate farm manager. Land sales to foreign investors have not been the cause of most of the plowing of grassland. However, land sales to foreign investors, who generally pay cash, get local farmers out of debt and allow farmers to stay on the land as tenant farmers.

Most of the land purchased has been good land. New farming

technology now allows the farming of land previously good only for range. Canadian farmers have benefitted Colorado farmers by offering knowledge of technological advancements. The Canadians have taught us how to undercut and how to stubble mulch. Dry weather conditions, not just soil mismanagement, has been a large cause of soil erosion.

Some of the problems involved in plowing grasslands come from outdated or improper soil classification by the SCS. Other problems involved inadequate staffing and local Soil Conservation Service (SCS) personnel who have fallen behind the times. One example is a current SCS brochure that shows plowing with a one-way plow, which is now outdated.

What are the solutions to the present controversy? I would like to see no laws passed unless they are from county commissioners. County commissioners know their land and are best equipped to deal with any problems. Sure, there are some areas that shouldn't be plowed, but that guy is going to go broke. We can always put the land back into grass.

Today's Inaction—Tomorrow's Problems

*Marshall L. Frasier, Past President Colorado Cattlemen's Association,
Frasier Farms, Woodrow, Colo.*

I have been asked to outline the Colorado Cattlemen's Association position on the Plowing of Fragile Grasslands. The Association stand taken at our December 1981 Mid-Winter Convention in Colorado Springs states, and I quote:

"WHEREAS, the population of the United States is increasing and so are the acres of rural land being taken out of production which will require increased emphasis on the wise use of remaining land; and,

WHEREAS, thousands of acres of previously unplowed grassland is being cultivated annually with no regard to soil features, topography, erodibility, climate, and limitations on future cropping practices; and,

WHEREAS, much of this recently plowed sod is extremely erodible making it difficult to establish vegetation; and,

WHEREAS, well-intended federal government price support and allotment programs tend to aggravate this situation by encouraging farmers to plow marginal land that is the most erosion prone.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, THAT THE COLORADO CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION SUPPORTS THE EFFORTS OF SENATOR ARMSTRONG, AND URGES SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 1825 AS INTRODUCED TO MAKE INAPPLICABLE SUPPORT PAYMENTS, DISASTER AID, AND STORAGE FACILITY LOANS FOR LAND THAT HAS BEEN UNCULTIVATED FOR 10 YEARS."

On May 6, 1982, Ralph Yoder, Dave Rice and myself were in Washington D.C., representing the Colorado Cattlemen's Association, to testify on S.B. 1825 when it was introduced in committee. Many of you were also there and testified and all that testified were for this approach to the problem.

The Cattlemen's Association has traditionally supported the free enterprise system, that a landowner should be free to use his land as he sees fit. Also, the members of our Association have, time and again, taken a strong stand against Government support programs and Government controls. We are very concerned about the large acreages of fragile grasslands which have been plowed in the last five years. These are in low rainfall areas, with thin topsoil and/or steep slopes, or in most cases a combination of all three.

We, of course, are all concerned about the potential for soil blowing which will happen in times of drought. (I lived in western Kansas in the 30's.) Of more concern to many of us with rangeland downstream from this plowed land is the erosion by water. The damage caused by mud filling stock ponds and covering hay meadows will be, perhaps, more costly and of more lasting effect than that caused by soil blowing.

A Rancher's Viewpoint

*Ralph Yoder, Past President, Colorado Cattlemen's Assoc.,
Karval, Colo.*

My talk will cover the experience I have encountered in the past in regards to the damage which has been done; the problems and expense incurred from soil movement from high winds; and also the damage from big rains washing soil from steep terrains into stock

ponds, filling them and covering grass meadows with silt.

I highly object to farm programs that have encouraged, and almost required farmers to use practices that have been damaging to dry land farming areas over a period of years.

I feel it is very important that we encourage the passing of a law that will discourage the plowing of marginal grasslands. This law should include a clause making an owner or operator liable for damages to others from his eroding soil.

The Board of Control of the Colorado Cattlemen's Association has endorsed and is working with other farm organizations and County Commissioners to draft a bill concerning blowing soil and damages to others.

Land Speculators Rape and Kill Colorado Grasslands

*Edith Phillips, Landowner,
Ault, Colo.*

Weld County has sadly witnessed a plowout of fragile grassland since 1976. This land, 90,000 acres has been classified as fit for grazing but not farming. Half of the 90,000 acres has been plowed in the last two years by speculators out to make tremendous profits. Many acres of the newly plowed grassland were seeded by the government over a twenty year period.

Eastern Colorado has suffered horrendous dust bowl problems especially this year where more than 500,000 acres of grassland, marginal and classified as fragile, have been plowed. Most of the newly plowed land was sold within a year to unsuspecting naive foreign buyers who block farm and use unscientific methods.

As a result of the plowout at Keota in northeastern Colorado the area became a dust bowl of five foot high sand dunes with thirty foot bases. A hundred miles of fences were covered and grama and buffalo grass ruined beyond return.

Speculators who bury ranchers and livestock declare it an act of God. It is an act of stupidity to block farm fragile land with an inch of topsoil in arid climate lucky to get a few inches of moisture a year, sometimes none at all. God does not have a plow to destroy the rancher or the grassland.

It is a matter of time for the ugly conditions of 1930 and the eternal and disastrous drought cycle to come full circle. Our government with goodies tempting farmers will create a Sahara Desert beyond return costing taxpayers more millions to reseed the land for the coming generations.

The Long- and Short-Term Effects of Plowing Grasslands on Wildlife Populations

*Steven J. Bissell, Colorado Division of Wildlife
Denver, Colo.*

How wildlife responds to the plowing of grassland depends upon numerous factors: whether the area plowed is large or small; what crops are produced on the plowed ground; what happens in terms of revegetation in the years following plowing; and what species of wildlife are considered.

Obviously, the most proximal effect of plowing is the complete loss, for a time, of habitat suitable for anything other than traveling from one spot to another. Nesting habitat for prairie birds is usually lost and this is potentially a serious and permanent impact. Fawning areas for mule deer and pronghorn are also lost. The immediate effects on small mammals are probably also serious.

Depending upon the crop planted, these losses will continue for several years to come. If the plowing is large scale and areas of suitable habitat are not maintained nearby, then the losses may be permanent.

Plowing the native prairie soil also increases pest species. Kangaroo rats, deer mice, and plains pocket gophers are most common and reach higher densities in soils which have been broken out.

Some studies indicate that if irrigated crops or crop rotation practices are used on plowed grasslands, certain species of small mammals will remain in some numbers. Certain crops will also provide cover and food for larger species, but usually fail to supply sufficient needs for survival.

Subsequent to plowing, some grasslands in Colorado have either been reseeded or allowed to "go back." Recent studies indicate that if vegetation which reestablishes itself is similar to native grasslands, and if areas which weren't plowed are nearby, then native species are able to recolonize. However, if the vegetation which moves in is

different than native grasslands, then the species inhabiting it will be different and usually occur in lower numbers.

In summary, plowing of native grasslands usually results in wildlife losses both in the long and short term. These losses may be mitigated by leaving areas unplowed, planting suitable crops, and insuring that revegetation in subsequent years approximates native prairie.

Preservation of Colorado's Fragile Grasslands

*Jeanne Davies, Master, Colorado State Grange,
Denver, Colo.*

This year marked the first time I can remember hearing ranchers and farmers of Colorado concede that some type of control may be needed in land use to prevent the plight of the 30's dust blowing conditions. With over 500,000 acres of new ground broken up in the past two years, blowing topsoil created some serious problems for landowners, their neighbors and many other people. The reasons given for plowing do not compensate for the long term problems that will be felt, not only in the next few years, but in generations to come.

We attended the hearings in several areas of the state this past spring where blowing dirt was a particular problem not only in the destruction of the land itself but also to the health and safety of the people in the area.

The Colorado State Grange supports any plans that include a close study of existing land problems by those most affected in the given area. This could include the SCS, local farmers, and the County Commissioners.

Some counties in Colorado are rapidly becoming urban counties. Development takes its toll on grasslands as well as prime cropland. At one time, the growing cities, ribbons of highways and expanding airports did not pose the threat to the open spaces that they do now.

Each of these potential problems warrants study by the people and groups concerned with the preservation of our land. It will take communication and cooperation in months and years to come by these same people to assure an effective solution to the problem of the preservation of our grasslands.

Difficulty of Re-establishing Perennial Grasses on Plowed Lands in Eastern Colorado

*William J. McGinnies, Agricultural Research Service,
Fort Collins, Colo.*

Based on the history of Great Plains agriculture, we must assume that many of the native grasslands currently being plowed will be abandoned. To stabilize the soil and the agricultural base, it will be necessary to return these plowed and abandoned areas to perennial grassland. Most of the plowed areas receive less than 15 inches annual precipitation.

The natural revegetation of abandoned fields to shortgrass requires 25 to 50 years or more. In a study of succession in 1944, David Costello found that short-lived perennial grasses dominated the abandoned areas in 5 to 10 years, and the three-awn stage appeared 10 to 20 years after abandonment. Carrying capacity of the three-awn stage is only about one-third that of shortgrass range dominated by blue grama.

Because natural revegetation is so slow, the abandoned areas may be seeded to perennial species, but failures will be common. Blue grama has been particularly difficult to establish in range seedings on the Great Plains where annual precipitation is less than 15 inches. For 23 plantings of blue grama in Colorado made between 1944 and 1968, only 30% were successful, and for 20 other plantings made in New Mexico and Colorado between 1965 and 1975, 25% were successful. Thirty-five percent of the plantings of cool-season wheatgrasses in Colorado produced successful seedings, but persistence of the wheatgrasses was much poorer than for blue grama. Where average annual precipitation was 16 inches or more, up to 50% of the blue grama seedings were successful. Because most successful seedings usually result only from plantings made during a "wet" year, we must anticipate a high percentage of failures when seeding abandoned plowed lands on those parts of the Great Plains where precipitation averages 12 to 15 inches annually.

Species Availability and Practical Methods for Re-establishing Grass on Disturbed Areas on the Great Plains

Art Armbrust,

Sharp Brother Seed Company, Healy, Kans.

Plow-out of grazing lands in the Great Plains has caused considerable concern to many segments of our populations in recent years. Economic conditions of the early 1970's and the short-term profit potential from this production have worsened these conditions. Concerns have arisen as to whether or not these lands can be adequately reestablished to perennial grasses.

Our experience in the Great Plains during the 1950's to the present indicates that if adequate cover crops and good seeds are utilized and proper post establishment management is practiced, stands can be re-established using a high degree of success. New cultivations and planting equipment, modern cultivation techniques, and recent developments in agricultural chemicals should be looked at closely to improve still further successful revegetation of these areas. Several potential approaches will be presented to stimulate additional ideas to help in solving these challenges. It is my personal opinion that by using all the available technology and combining our past experience these areas can be successfully revegetated.

Summary of Afternoon Panel

Tricia Swift,

ACCORD Associates

(Formerly ROMCOE Center for Environmental
Problem Solving)

Boulder, Colo.

Among the many issues raised, there appeared to be sev-

eral central ones recognized by all:

- How to preserve individual property right.
- How to improve the transfer of good management practices among farmers/ranchers.
- How to protect adjacent or downwind/downstream property owners from the adverse effects of bad management practices or decisions.
- How to enable farmers and ranchers to stay solvent and on the land in the face of general economic adversities.
- How to integrate management of state land with the management of other land.
- How to improve the working relationships between Soil Conservation Service personnel, County Commissioners, and farmers and ranchers.
- How to rehabilitate land that has been inappropriately plowed or that is converted back to grassland, and how to finance that rehabilitation.

There was general preference that problems be resolved at the county level wherever possible. Several speakers expressed belief that State Government, through the Department of Agriculture or the State Land Board, could and should exercise leadership in the development of an agreed upon process for developing a policy. The controversy is not likely to go away, and the way it is resolved will have broad consequences for the economics and viability of farming and ranching activities in the State of Colorado.

Editor's Note: Many SRM members live on the Great Plains or have lived and worked there in the past. It is felt there is enough interest of members and others about the "plow-up" problem to reproduce in some detail what took place at a Symposium on the subject sponsored last fall (1982) by the Colorado Section, SRM.

Even though the problem has been aired by only one Section, there is reason to believe there are other areas throughout the world with similar problems and conditions.

It's Yours

Every member of SRM has the responsibility of seeking out and soliciting new members for our organization. The Board of Directors, your Membership Committee, and the Membership Chairman of each Section will help provide the materials, incentives, and ideas to help in the solicitation of new members and the retention of our present membership; but the basic job of membership recruitment must be a responsibility of the local Section and its present membership.

We are now at the time where some of our members may be wavering on whether to re-signup. All of us must make a concerted effort to contact these people directly to keep them involved in SRM. We feel this is best done by personal contact at the local Section level. Let us all give an extra effort to keep all our fellow members involved in the Society. After all, it is a lot easier to keep a customer rather than to solicit a new one. Over the past few years we have grown by 20 percent new members each year, but at the same time have lost 20 percent of our existing members each year. Let us work together to lower these "drops" to less than 5 percent this year. By all of us working together, we can help our Society grow both in membership and stature.—**Art Armbrust**, Chairman, Membership Committee