

Ferdie J. Deering

JAN 22 1985

Conservation, a Never-Ending Job

IT requires good vision to see a ray of sunshine on a dark, cloudy day. Soil and water conservationists have good vision.

At the convention of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, I asked leaders about anticipated cuts in funds and proposed abolition of the Soil Conservation Service.

All foresee drastic fund reduction but none expects the SCS to be eliminated. The SCS provides technical assistance to land owners and operators in conservation planning.

"This crisis will give us an opportunity to evaluate what has been accomplished and to impress upon the public how essential it is to conserve soil and water" was the consensus. The public is being impressed daily with news from Africa that shows what happens when conservation is neglected.

The United States was headed in that direction until 50 years ago when a national soil and water conservation movement took hold. Ok-

lahoma, one of the newest states, was about the worst eroded and most drouthy of them all.

When consequences of erosion were realized farmers, business people and public officials went to work with zeal. In a few years Oklahoma was a national showcase for conservation. Through "conservation evangelism" and government assistance, our direction was reversed. Fields were terraced, farming methods changed, dams built to save water, and not nearly as much soil went downstream.

The job isn't finished after half a century. Soil and water conservation is a process; not a project. We still lose tons of topsoil from every acre of cropland every year.

About 18 months ago I wrote a series of articles for *The Farmer-Stockman* on conservation in Oklahoma. I interviewed a number of longtime leaders. Without exception they said we need a revival of conservation evangelism.

"Farmers are plowing up land

that had been restored to grass to stop erosion," said Richard Longmire of Pauls Valley, a conservation district director for 47 years.

In brief remarks to the OACD convention, Nolen Fuqua of Duncan, almost 91, and another original district director, said we need a renewed drive to complete upstream flood control. Gene Sawyer of Carnegie, OACD president, is optimistic that conservation will gain renewed momentum.

Leonard Solomon, executive director of Oklahoma Conservation Commission, has said it may take a shortage of food and fiber or another dust bowl before the American public will give conservation top priority. Let's hope not!

Conservation of our natural resources, especially soil and water, is absolutely vital to our nation's future. We should take a lesson from our own past and another from the present situation of hungry people in other countries.