



COILED FIELDS hug the hills: these South Carolina strip fields have fitted themselves to the lie of the land.

across your pasture. In the former case soil-laden water from the bare-earth crop is stayed and filtered of its load by the close-growing crop in the strip below. In the latter case your grass has the force of the wind upon it broken by the taller strips.

The single simple purpose which underlies all these practices cannot be better stated than in Henry Wallace's own words. "In the uplands where floods form, nature throws across practically every foot of land an interlacing system of tiny dams. A dead leaf, a blade of grass, or a root tangle can stop a rain-drop from running, hold it back; and floods are made up of raindrops infinitely multiplied. Learning from nature we cease to leave fields smooth and bare, inviting erosion. Instead we roughen the surface, turn the earth itself and the plants themselves into impediments to run-off, protectors of the soil. By the simple device of ploughing on the contour, instead of up and down the hill, each furrow, each harrow scratch, becomes in effect a small dam or terrace. On steeper slopes somewhat more elaborate methods may be needed, but the principle of all of them is simple; make running water walk or creep, store a far greater part of it in that greatest of all reservoirs—the soil; and do this by making the soil and its crops provide, as impediments to run-off, billions of natural little dams."

Co-operation is Needed

Contour ploughing itself has been developed in various specialised ways, as, for example, with an implement which interrupts the furrows every few feet so that a ploughed field becomes thousands of identical pools in wet weather. But the roots of which Wallace spoke as nature's original dams are themselves utilised. On steeper slopes on the farm itself it means fencing them round, putting logs or brush across their bottoms to stay the silt, and planting scrub and

trees. It also means sowing the storm-water hollows where gullies may develop with a mat of close grass and leaving it there undisturbed. The retarding and filtering action of grass is so much valued, indeed, that run-off drains are made wide and their bottoms painstakingly turfed by hand.

These projects have involved considerable modification of farmers' traditional individualism. Each must pay his own transformation costs — which, ranging from 5 cents to 25 dollars, average 5 dollars an acre. The government provides only expert help, and, if necessary, loans. But very often the change-over to conservation practices cannot be made by one farmer unless his neighbours also agree to mend their ways and remodel their farm lay-out. Such co-operation was at first difficult to obtain, but is apparently becoming common as its advantages are seen to be overwhelming.

Altogether 33 million acres of odd corners upon existing farms — gullies, steep slopes, windbreaks — are scheduled for retirement as well as 40 million acres in large blocks. The latter will, however, grow forests for the future. And the odd corners, left to run wild, will bring back beneficial wild life and, in many cases, make a duck-pond possible. This is still 90 per cent project. But two and a-half million farmers signed up in Conservation Districts, eight million acres of Dust Bowl reclaimed, and 20 per cent increased production in the transformed areas seems a good start.

If the results of our New Zealand water-erosion came to the city as spectacularly as the dust of wind-erosion; if, for example, mud from the Kaimanawas or Alpine foothills flooded Queen Street and Colombo Street and silted up the Octagon and Parliament grounds, then we too might awaken to the hand in our national pocket. As it is we shall have to learn from Australian dust and American example.

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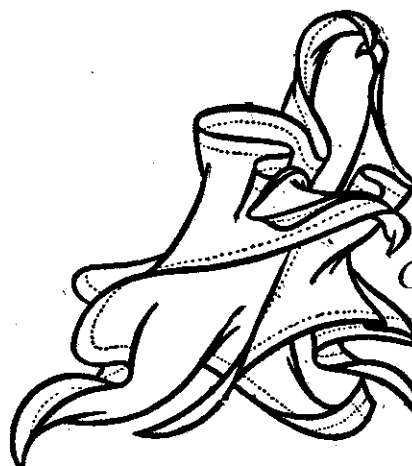
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