# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SPINK COUNTY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT NO. 20

Spink county is located in the east central part of South Dakota and was settled in the late 1870's and early 1880's by a class of substantial farmers from Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa. They found a land much to their liking because it was fairly level and good soil.

The topography of the area is level to undulating with some fairly steep breaks along the James River in the southern part of the county. A large portion of the land is quite level with poor drainage in some areas.

The James River flows through the middle of the county from north to south. The drainage is mostly through the river and Turtle Creek and Foster Creek as the tributaries. There are the Twin Lakes south of Redfield and Cottonwood Lake a few miles west of the Twin Lakes. These lakes and streams were the original natural sources of water, but the water had to be supplemented by wells. In some areas, the water from shallow wells was not very reliable, and so deep wells were dug--these were flowing wells and together with the shallow wells, were a reliable source of water.

The soils of Spink county are rather variable from silty clay loams to loams, silt loams and sandy loams. In the area around Hitchcock and north are sandy loams, and in some cases quite sandy. An area on either side of the James River and extending three-fourths of the way across the county is rather level with well to imperfectly drained silt loam and silty clay loams, except in some real flat areas and other areas with hard pan spots. The remainder of the county is undulating to nearly level loamy soils and fairly good drainage.

As the sod was broken out, it was first cropped with wheat and some flax as cash crops and oats for feed. This area was, and still is, a very good grain farming area. About the time of World War I, the farmers began growing some corn. It proved to be a more profitable crop on some of the soils and the acreages increased very rapidly until it was well over 100,000 acres, but has never equaled that of wheat. The acreage seeded to grasses has been small.

The soil resources had been exploited through continuous cropping with nothing returned to either protect the land by adding organic matter or supplying the plant food that had been removed through crops. As a result, most of the soils had lost much of their granular structure and when the dry years came along, they were at the mercy of the winds and run-off water. All of the soils blew and drifted badly, especially the sandy soils. And the sloping lands washed and gullied. As these conditions continued, the people became alarmed and tried desperately to control the situation.

By 1940, many of the people had visited the erosion control demonstration project at Wolsey and saw that something could be done, and so they decided to attempt to organize a Soil Conservation District under the provisions of the State Conservation Districts Law.

A committee of two farmers from each of eight townships was set up

to contact the farmers from these townships, explain a district and its operations, and ask them to sign a petition for a hearing on the matter. Several meetings were also held to further explain the matter. These are the townships and their representatives:

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| Belmont Township: | Phillip E. Kreimann, deceased; |
| | Lars Swanson, Hitchcock, S. D.; |
| Garfield Township: | William H. Otto, Tulare, S. D.; |
| | Harry Ost, Tulare, S. D.; |
| Buffalo Township: | Elton MacNeill, Tulare, S. D.; |
| | Lewis Roeber, deceased; |
| Lake Township: | Walter Tubandt, deceased; |
| | Ray Hartwig, deceased; |
| Tulare Township: | R. C. Schwichtenberg, Tulare, S. D.; |
| | Don Ruhlman, Sioux City, Iowa; |
| Crandon Township: | John Schroeder, Jr., Redfield, S. D.; |
| | Herman Koester, Redfield, S. D.; |
| Redfield Township: | Hans Jessen, Tulare, S. D.; |
| Exline Township: | James Dawson, deceased. |

A hearing was held in July 1941, resulting in a favorable referendum and the district was organized on October 16, 1941, as the Tulare-Redfield Soil Conservation District. Additions to the district were made in 1944, 1945, and 1947. Then in March 1961, the name of the district was changed to the Spink County Soil Conservation District and that portion of the county that was in the Carpenter District became a part of the Spink County District.

The first supervisors of the district were: James W. Dawson, Redfield, 1941-1948; Elton MacNeil, Tulare, 1941-1948; Walter Tubandt, Redfield, 1941-1959; Phillip E. Kreimann, Doland, 1941-1963, and Robert Schwichtenberg, Tulare, 1941-1964.

Other supervisors who have served the district are: Oscar Wolner, Turton, 1948-1960; Harold Schwenn, Athol, 1946-1960; Willis Wagner, Athol, 1955-1956; Layle Evans, Verdon, 1956-1959; Harold Jilek, Mellette, 1957-present; Lester Dennis, Mellette, 1960-present; Kenneth Wicks, Doland, 1963-1966; Merlin V. Hahn, Doland, 1963-present; Donald Jessen, Redfield, 1964-present; Raymond Shult, Doland; Jake D. Gross, Doland, 1966-present.

As soon as the organization work was completed, the supervisors set up their program and designated their problems as:
Serious wind and water erosion;
Soil drifts and hummocks on the sandy areas;
Loss of fertility and organic matter;
Dwindling water supply.

They proposed to meet these problems by the use of such practices as:
The use of crop rotations with grass and legumes;
Crop residue management;
Contours and terraces where needed;
Planting trees for windbreaks and shelterbelts;
Controlled grazing;
Distribute grazing by rotation and control;
Distribute grazing by use of dams and dugouts;
Preserve areas of wildlife habitat;
Weed control--both annual and perennial;
Drainage where necessary.

The district was fortunate during its early years to secure the loan of heavy equipment for some of its earth moving jobs.

The 1969 supervisors were: Lester Dennis, Mellette, chairman; Jake Gross, Doland, vice chairman; Donald Jessen, Redfield, treasurer; Merlin Hahn, Doland, supervisor; Harold Jilek, Mellette, supervisor; and John Koob, Redfield, county agent, secretary.



A good shelterbelt is an asset to a farmstead in all parts of South Dakota