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TIMELY FARM TOPICS No. 41a
(Farm Science Serves the Nation No. 21)

SOIL SCIENCE SERVES THE NATION

A transcribed talk by Howard Zahniser, Principal Research Writer, Agricultural Research Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture. Recorded August 13, 194
Time: 5 minutes, 40 seconds, without announcer's parts.

ANNOUNCER'S OPENING AND CLOSING

Opening

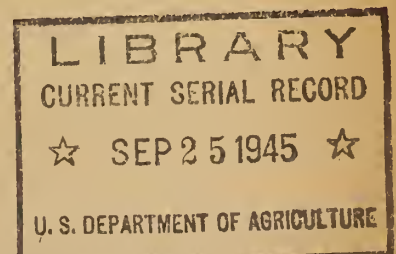
ANNOUNCER: (LIVE):

One of the ways farm science is constantly trying to serve the Nation is by improving the quality of the food that comes to your table. And here's an interesting fact about food. No matter how it comes to your table. . . or what road it travels to get there . . . all food has its ultimate origin in SOIL. Therefore soil science is an important part of farm science. To tell us something about this subject, here by transcription is Howard Zahniser (Zon-eye-zer) of the U. S. Department of Agriculture's Research Administration.

Closing

ANNOUNCER: (LIVE)

Well. . . I wonder how many of the counties around here are included in those 1540 reports Mr. Zahniser mentioned . . . the 1540 soil reports that have already been published. I'll ask the next county agricultural agent I see . . . and thank you for the tip, Howard Zahniser of the Research Administration of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.



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TRANSCRIPTION

Out of the soil come all the products of agriculture. Corn bears a crop that can be eaten directly from the cob. Wheat yields the grain for milling and baking into bread. Grass covers the pasture lands, and helps nourish the herds on which man relies for his meat. And all come from the soil.

Basic to all the science of agriculture is therefore an understanding of soil -- how to determine its nature, how to use it wisely, how to make it better. Start your study of agriculture at the beginning, and you start with soil -- or rather with soils (in the plural). For there are many kinds of soil, and each farmer's problem starts with a need for information about the soils that HE has.

How obvious this all sounds, but when did you last think about it?

Do you know that for the past half-a-century the United States has been making a detailed scientific survey of its agricultural soils? Do you know that even after 50 years this survey is only half done?

Do you know that the results have for the most part been published county by county? And do you know whether there is a published report for your county?

Your best answer to all these questions would be "yes".

Many scientific developments are really dramatic. Suddenly you learn that alpha-naphthaleneacetic acid sprayed on your orchard trees will make the apples stay on until you can pick them. Suddenly you hear that 2,4-Dichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4-D) will kill dandelions, plaintains, and other broad-leafed weeds without damaging grass or grain crops. And you sense directly the services of agricultural scientists.

But all the time some scientists are so gradually accomplishing their particular purposes that you seldom hear of them. For three years it has been my very great privilege to be working in the midst of a great body of agricultural scientists at the Department's Plant Industry Station, near Beltsville, Md. It has been my opportunity to help these scientists make known to the public the results of their research. Time and again I have been excited by new developments, and by the eagerness with which the users of the new information put it to work. But throughout these years I can not recall a single NEWS item released to the whole country about this nation-wide soil survey. It isn't that kind of science.

I am tremendously impressed by this idea of classifying all of the agricultural soils of a great nation, and by the way it has been carried on. I am amazed when I see in our Division of Soil Survey a collection of some 200,000 samples of soil -- each in a small glass tube -- and when I am told that these 200,000 samples represent around 10,000 soil types already classified. And I am proud of my own small part in this work every time I receive a copy of the latest published Soil Survey report. But I seldom have an opportunity to tell the world about it.

Each one of these reports is actually a book. Here at hand I have the latest one received from the printer. It is entitled "Soil Survey of LaPorte County, Indiana". It is paper bound and has 110 pages of solid type -- without any extra white space between the lines. Print this report as a commercial publisher might do and bind it in cloth, and there is a fair-sized book, about your county's soils -- if you live in LaPorte County. And with it is a colored map more than 3 feet high and almost 3 feet wide showing the kind of soil in every part of the County. If I had a farm in LaPorte County, Indiana, I could tell from this map precisely the kind of soil in the field out back of my barn, the kind over across the road, and the kind down along the Railroad tracks. In the printed report I could read a description of this soil and its most successful uses. With this information I could make much better use of the recommendations of experiments stations about my choice of varieties and other farm practices if I had a farm in LaPorte County.

But this is really ... useful-news-to-farmers ... only in LaPorte County. And that I believe is why you may never have heard of this way in which soil science serves the nation. Only once in a lifetime can a farmer expect to hear about a new Soil Survey report on his county, and if he doesn't happen to hear that news he may miss one of the most interesting products of agricultural research -- to HIM. This project is tremendously big -- but its end product is a county report! There have already been published 1,540. If one of them is about your county, you can find it out by talking with your country agent. Your county agent will know whether you can get a report on your county, and if you can -- HOW.

I am sure you will be interested. When one realizes that out of the soil come all the products of agriculture, and knows so well that knowledge is power, it is not hard to sense the value of scientific knowledge about the nation's agricultural SOILS. "Soil Science Serves the Nation."

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