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A LAND-USE PROGRAM FOR SOUTHWESTERN UNITED STATES

by

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A national program of land-use is being advanced by the federal government and the various states. It is being advanced through the National Resources Board, and the different state planning boards, cooperating with the Land Policy Section, Division of Program Planning of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, and with other federal and state agencies.

For this purpose the United States has been grouped into regions. One of them comprises New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, and California. Another embraces Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. In these regions the land-use program is identical with that which is in progress in all other regions.

The program aims at close cooperation with existing federal and state agencies in assembling, analyzing and coordinating basic data related to land use, especially in areas of maladjustment. Against this background of fact it is proposed to project and recommend policies designed to aid in effecting improvement in the use of the land areas embraced by these regions and to relate that use to the broader national program of land-use adjustment.

The federal agencies having an interest in this program are the National Resources Board, the Federal Relief Administration, the Department of the Interior, the Department of Agriculture, and the Rural Credit Administration. Under the Department of the Interior are primarily the Indian Service, the National Park Service, the Soil Erosion Service and whatever agency may be set up to administer the Public Domain under the provisions of the Taylor Bill. Under the Department of Agriculture are primarily, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, the Forest Service, the Biological Survey, and different other Bureaus interested in land use. Then, between the federal and state agencies, are certain federal offices, particularly the office of Experiment Stations and the Agricultural Extension Service.

State agencies include state planning boards, state colleges and universities, conservation commissions, and others concerned with land use.

Most of the foregoing agencies already have done much by way of advancing their respective interests in land use. Data have been assembled, maps have been drawn and numerous estimates made as to the feasibility of effecting needed adjustments. It is equally true, however, that much of the work thus accomplished has been prosecuted in the light of the administrative interest of the respective agencies rather than from the standpoint of statewide coordinated use.

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An exception to this procedure may be found in the work of different colleges and universities, but even so, limitations in funds and personnel usually have prevented the consummation of aims and objectives.

In each state, therefore, as well as in the nation, there is a place for a kind of clearing house through which, by cooperative effort, may be consummated a well-defined picture of the entire land-use situation, with the interests of all agencies fully coordinated. It is to this end that the Land Policy Section is aiming to cooperate with state planning boards and other agencies in the development of a unified land program. By helping within each state to construct a mosaic of the land situation within that state, it will be possible to assist the National Resources Board to construct a larger mosaic of the regional and, in turn, the national land situation.

As at present constituted, the program of the Land Policy Section, Division of Program Planning, Agricultural Adjustment Administration, has two major phases. The first, or emergency, phase relates to the Division of Rural Rehabilitation of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration in the purchase of submarginal farm land as a step toward the relief and rehabilitation of stranded farm families. Money for the purchase of this land comes to the Rural Rehabilitation Division of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration through an allotment from the Public Works Administration and from a recent Deficiency Bill Appropriation.

Many different meanings have been given the term "submarginal land," and it is difficult briefly to define it. Without pausing at this time to attempt a definition, I shall state that, for the purpose of the present program, submarginal land purchases are being related to the human problem found upon land which has been farmed over a sufficiently long period of time to prove its relatively low worth. As a result of the unproductiveness of such land, the people occupying it have had to have financial help in one form or another for a number of years, and now are among the rural groups in greatest distress. Taxes there are delinquent and counties are struggling to satisfy the cost of road and school requirements. In such areas the relief problem is acute, but the distress of the families affected is not necessarily the result of the present conditions of economic disturbance and drought, being largely the result of unfavorable physical conditions which cannot readily be controlled. By removing the families from this land and by rehabilitating these people under more favorable circumstances, it is believed that permanent relief can be effected at a saving in cost to the counties concerned, as well as to the states, and the federal government. This action will make possible, also, a different and, presumably, a higher use of the land called submarginal.

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In the expenditure of the submarginal land fund no wholesale purchase of submarginal farm land is contemplated. Rather it is intended that the fund available will be used to set up in selected problem areas a few "repeatable demonstrations" aimed at pointing the way to adjusted and beneficial land use. These demonstration projects before approval must be thoroughly planned and coordinated with respect to (a) the justification for purchase, (b) the means of rehabilitating the people removed from the submarginal land purchased, and (c) the use and administration of the purchased tract. Upon approval, if not before, a project manager is appointed to be responsible for seeing it through. The land then is purchased, the people removed from it for rehabilitation, and the purchased land assigned to some existing agency for administration. Resettlement of the people now on submarginal land is accomplished in cooperation with the Relief Administration through funds furnished by the latter to supplement whatever other funds may be available through the Farm Credit Administration or other sources, as arranged by the State Rural Rehabilitation Corporation, which is to function in each state for this and other purposes.

The submarginal land purchased may be assigned for administrative purposes to the Forest Service, if it relates to forest use; or to the National Park Service, the Indian Service, the Biological Survey or the Soil Erosion Service; or it may constitute a grazing district within the Public Domain. The character of the land purchased and its suitability for particular uses will determine its ultimate assignment for administrative purposes.

This first, or emergency, phase of the program has a direct relation to the second, or long-time, phase. The one, in fact, besides helping to effect rural relief and rehabilitation, may serve as a guide in accomplishing the objectives of the other.

It is the aim of the second phase of the program to effect through cooperative and coordinated effort a fully rounded-out report of the land situation, especially with respect to areas of maladjustment. This report will constitute a part of the larger report on national resources, which is being prepared by the National Resources Board.

To facilitate and expedite the assemblage of data within the states, and to effect coordination among various agencies contributing data, the National Resources Board, cooperating with the Lend Policy Section of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, has provided research assistants, known as land-use consultants. These have been appointed under the Public Works Administration and will be attached to the State Planning Boards.

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The selection of each consultant, in so far as practicable, has been with a view to satisfying the cooperating agencies in the accomplishment of the state, regional, and national objectives.

The objective of the National Resources Board is "to present in a national report of land-use problems and policy, the geographical extent and character of the land-use problems in the United States." To this end the cooperating agencies through the appointed consultants are asked to "delimit all areas or districts in which some readjustment or reorganization of major uses of land seem desirable, to characterize the problems in each, to indicate the nature of the adjustment desired," and make definite recommendations for policies and actions.

The southwestern states included in Region Nine have many problems in common. Each has much land with only a small percentage of the total in cultivation. Each is largely dependent upon irrigation for crop production, and each has a water supply which is extremely limited and which, therefore, largely determines the use which can be made of the land. Each state is characterized as a range state, and land-use is broadly related to grazing as the chief support of a livestock industry. Land-use in these states, also, is influenced tremendously by policies governing the administration of federal lands. Hence it is particularly important in this region to effect the closest kind of cooperation between federal and state agencies. It is my belief that such cooperation is being effected and that it is lending due emphasis to the importance of the peculiar problems with which this region is confronted. I am convinced that out of the program which is being advanced through this cooperative activity great good will come to each state, and thereby to the nation at large.