UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Bureau of Agricultural Economics

WHAT IS COUNTY PLANNING?
(AS SEEN BY THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND ITS ACTION AGENCIES)

By Gladwin E. Young, Regional Representative,
Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U.S.D.A.

Address, Mid-West Sociological Society,
Des Moines, Iowa, April 19, 1940

What I should like to give here today are my interpretations of what county planning is, as I think the United States Department of Agriculture sees it. County planning, as your program has called it, or agricultural land use planning, or agricultural planning, are generic terms for the concept of a process that is still evolutionary. Agricultural land use planning, as I shall call it in this paper, is not a project--it is an institution. It is a cooperative institution in the process of development. The organization and the ideals and objectives, even though their origins are deeply rooted, are not yet fully formulated.

Perhaps the statement that agricultural land use planning is not a project should be qualified, in view of the fact that project agreements have been entered into with 45 States this year. The State Extension Services and Experiment Stations in these States entered into cooperative agreements for work in agricultural land use planning with the Bureau of Agricultural Economics acting as "a staff agency of the Secretary in its general planning work". These project

agreements and memoranda of understanding, however, represent organizational features of what I am describing as the institution of agricultural land use planning.

Ideals and Objectives

The ideals and objectives of agricultural land use planning are rooted in democratic concepts that were expressed early in our town meetings, where citizens participated with elected administrative officials in making decisions for administration of local government. Agricultural land use planning carries with it as one of the fundamental ideals that it shall be a process which fosters a greater sense of responsibility among farm people themselves of the part they should take in developing policies and guiding programs which so vitally concern them.

Within recent years, several of our farm programs have been administered directly from the national government to the farms and farmers of the nation. These national programs with national objectives have added an incentive for more direct concern between the individual and his national government. The Department of Agriculture has recognized that the operation of present programs places on the Department a responsibility for developing democratic procedures whereby farmers can assist in guiding administration of the programs. This has not resulted in any lessening of responsibility of local government or State government in the democratic procedure. There is every indication that the agricultural land use planning process, as it is now being carried on, is resulting in a better orientation of the individual to his local problems, as well as an orientation of

the responsibility of the various levels of government to contribute with him to the solution of his problems.

An immediate and direct objective of agricultural land use planning is"to develop and currently revise agricultural plans and policies that will serve to coordinate various agricultural programs and related public activities, to increase their effectiveness in promoting long-time as well as emergency objectives, and to develop needed additional programs".[1/] As an autonomous institution, agricultural land use planning is expected to provide a recognized organization through which will develop plans and recommendations prepared by farmers, technicians, and administrators, working cooperatively. Plans thus developed by the cooperative work of all will be sounder and more workable than those that could be developed by any one group, working without the advice and counsel of the other.

In the wake of our rapid agricultural expansion there have arisen certain major agricultural problems directly traceable to our past land policies. These problems include over-expansion of crop acres beyond present needs, loss through erosion of irreplaceable top soil on millions of acres, stranded individuals and communities on cutover forest lands, floods and dust storms resulting from major changes in vegetative cover and artificial drainage, the decline or extinction of wildlife, and similar problems which we so frequently lump together under the one term "land use problems".

All of these are man-made land use problems from which evolve a long series of very difficult human and social problems. An exceedingly mobile population was a characteristic of our development until

1/ Address by Bushrod W. Allin at annual meeting of American Farm Economics Association at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, December 28, 1939.

very recent years. First we moved west, and then to cities. Now both of these doors to migration either are almost closed or the doorkeepers are a lot more particular about who comes through than they used to be. But the need for migration of farm population has not disappeared. The adjustment of farm population to agricultural resources is one of the most fundamental and most important problems of land use adjustment that will confront us for generations to come. Population adjustment is a slow and painful process and deserves more careful and deliberate planning and guidance than we have yet given it. Our present land use planning efforts are directed at giving us a realistic and fundamental background of information for appraising the need for population adjustments. These adjustments must be a part of our effort to gain a stable and permanent agriculture.

In attempting to get at solutions to many agricultural problems involving conservation, population adjustment and institutional adjustments, farmers acting individually are practically helpless. Group action and public action must supplement individual action. Indeed, the public not only has a stake in agricultural land use adjustments as a basis for security and permanency in agriculture, but through its land policies of the past has created a public responsibility which cannot be ignored. This responsibility grows out of land policies that permitted and even encouraged too-rapid expansion and exploitation of our agricultural resources, without a wise choice being made in settlement upon or use of land. Past generations of farmers who shared in the rapid exploitation and development of our virgin agricultural resources left a heavy burden of adjustment to be borne by the present generation of farmers. Past generations of urban people

who shared in low-cost food produced from the virgin fertility of free land and who built their cities from the cheap lumber of virgin forests, also have passed on a responsibility for sharing present-day costs of land use adjustments. Our young government disposed of millions of acres for individual use, regardless of their suitability for exploitation and use, thereby creating acute problems with which the present officials in government must cope. As a nation we are morally obligated to assume the responsibility of attacking constructively our land use problems. This generation of farmers cannot be asked to bear all the burden of making adjustments for misuses of our land resources by past generations. A growing consciousness is being shown by present-day farmers of their own responsibility to contribute to conservation of agricultural resources, but the entire burden cannot be theirs, and ought not to be.

By consciously and systematically using our collective abilities to plan, and by conscientiously and intelligently employing our resources to carry out these plans in a democratic manner, we can attain a greater degree of permanent security. Unquestionably a higher plane of general welfare can be reached if a systematic attempt is made to pool the combined foresight and judgment of farmers, experts, educators, and administrators in charting our course. If we are to build a permanent agriculture, it is a job for the farmer, his neighbors, his county government, his State government, and his national government. This principle is recognized in the agricultural land use planning process now under way in nearly all of the States.

It seems to me that planning for a permanent agriculture will assist in developing and crystalizing the agricultural policies of the

nation, and will find early expression in sounder agricultural programs. At any specific time it would be difficult to describe or define our national agricultural policy. This is because our national agricultural policy is never fully expressed at any one time. It is always in the process of development and change. Part of it is not written down, but is found in the minds of the people. It is partially expressed in national and State legislation, but is also shown in individual attitudes, such as are inherent in customs, traditions or cultures. Further expression is given by public opinion, which rejects or accepts current programs. Some of the more recent elements of our national agricultural policy are given expression in various acts of Congress and State Legislatures. These include the recognition of public responsibility for sharing the cost of conserving land resources and for ameliorating social distress growing out of past land misuse. Similar recognition is given of the public responsibility for maintaining and rebuilding the public domain from land where private ownership results in economic waste and social losses. Along with these expressions of newer elements in our agricultural policy, there is the increasing sense of responsibility by farmers for the conservation of land resources. Then, underlying all this, there persists the basic national policy of encouraging ownership and operation of adequate family-sized farms.

The Organization for Agricultural Land Use Planning

I have stated that agricultural land use planning is a cooperative institution, and not merely a project. Some of the ideals and objectives of agricultural land use planning also have been discussed here as a part of an effort to define what it is. A description of the

organization of the various planning committees, however, must be an integral part of the definition.

The land-grant colleges and the United States Department of Agriculture have assumed responsibility for developing the organization through which agricultural land use planning functions. The task of sponsoring the organization and providing leadership for agricultural land use planning has been assigned to the Agricultural Extension Service and the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. The Agricultural Extension Service, through its long and successful experience in developing farm leadership and organization in the States, was a logical choice to perform this task for the land-grant college.

The Secretary of Agriculture, through a reorganization of the Department in October 1938, assigned to the Bureau of Agricultural Economics the responsibility of cooperating with all agencies in the Department in developing general planning work. To meet this new responsibility, the Bureau itself was reorganized to include, among other things, a Division of State and Local Planning with a representative in each State, and an Interbureau Coordinating Committee in Washington to advise with the Bureau chief. In addition, an Agricultural Program Board was established to serve as an advisory council to the Secretary. This Board consists of the heads of the action agencies, the Chief of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, and the Department's directors. The Land Use Coordinator is chairman.

The first steps taken toward organizing for land use planning work after the reorganization of the Department included two memoranda of understanding. One of these was between the Bureau of Agricultural

Economics and the various other agencies of the Department, setting forth the basis for cooperation and stating a willingness to participate. The other memorandum was between the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and each of the land-grant colleges. This memorandum has now been signed in 45 States.

The memorandum with the land-grant colleges provides for establishment of a State Land Use Planning Committee, with the Director of Extension as chairman and the State representative of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics as secretary. The committee includes in its membership a number of farm people representing each type of farming in the State, the State Director of the Agricultural Experiment Station, Chairman of the AAA State Committee, SCS State Coordinator, FSA State Director, a representative of the Forest Service, and any other State or United States Department of Agriculture officials having responsibility for the management of land use programs in the State. Usually the farm people on the State Committee are also members of their respective county committees.

The county and community land use planning committees are established as the cornerstone of the whole planning organization. In each county engaged in land use planning there has been organized a county agricultural land use planning committee, consisting of at least ten farm people, a few forest owners, where forestry is a problem, the county agent, at least one member of the AAA Administrative Committee, the Farm Security Administration supervisor, and any other State or federal official in the county who has responsibility for administration of agricultural land use programs. Farmers are in the majority on the committee, and a farmer is chairman. Usually the county agent is secretary.

This committee correlates on a county basis the land use plans, programs, and policies developed by the community committees.

In order that the committees may operate in such a manner that results obtained by the county committees can be coordinated at the State level, and the State material made useful on a national basis, a work outline was prepared and is being followed generally in each county engaged in planning. This work outline provides for delineating the boundaries of local land use areas that differ from each other in physical and land use characteristics, as well as problems. Each of these land use areas is then classified in terms of suitability of the land in each area for some particular use or combination of uses. For example, areas are classified as not suited for farming, but suited for forest and recreational uses; or as areas not now in farms, but suitable for a specified type of farming; or as areas that should remain in farms, but within which there should be important shifts in type of farming.

After the various classes of land are established by the community committees and correlated into a county map by the county committee, recommendations are made as to the shifts in land use or adjustments in farming practice that are desirable for each land use area. Further recommendations are developed by these cooperative county committees concerning action that should be taken by individuals, by local organizations, by officials of the county government, by the State government and State organizations, and by the Federal Government or national agencies, in reaching the land use objectives agreed upon as desirable for the county as a whole.

An important cog in the machinery is the Joint Land-Grant College-BAE Committee provided for in the memorandum of understanding.

It consists of the Extension leader of land use planning, who is appointed by the Director of Extension, a representative of the Agricultural Experiment Station, and the State representative of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. This three-man committee not only acts in an advisory relationship to the agencies it represents, but is also a working committee for assisting the State Land Use Planning Committee. It has responsibility for developing details of procedure to be followed in the planning work, for encouraging the development of related research work, and for formulating the provisions of the annual project agreement covering the cooperative work of the three agencies most directly concerned with the task of guiding the planning program.

Agricultural Land Use Planning in Operation

In the first twelve months after the land use planning program was initiated jointly by the Department of Agriculture and land-grant colleges, the program reached 1,120 counties in 47 States. More than 70,000 farm men and women are now cooperating as members of organized county and community planning committees. Farmers have accepted enthusiastically the opportunity the program affords them to participate with technicians and administrators in developing agricultural plans, policies, and programs. Approximately 19,000 of these farmers are members of organized county land use planning committees, and nearly 51,000 farm men and women are serving on 6,807 organized community committees.

These are evidence of tangible accomplishment during the year, but it has been a year in which the planning leaders have necessarily

relied in great part on methods of trial and error in this uncharted planning field. The general provisions of an agreement between the Land-Grant College Association and the Department of Agriculture provided the basis for getting the organization formed, and a work outline prepared by the Department served as a guide for initiating the planning work in the counties. Relatively little experience has yet been gathered on the procedure and relationships necessary effectively to translate plans into action. However, encouraging progress in this direction has taken place in recent months.

The first essential step a county planning committee takes is to make an inventory of the county, its land, its people, and its economic and social structure. Following this general inventory comes an analysis of events and forces that have caused or contributed to the prevailing problems.

The inventory and analysis of what is happening to the agriculture of the county finds county committees facing squarely problems of population increase or decline, crop yields, land abandonment, soil erosion and depletion, tax delinquency, living standards, farm tenancy, health standards, school facilities, road-building costs, public debt, farming practices, rural relief, mortgage foreclosures, and similar problems directly or indirectly related to the land.

An integral part of making the inventory and analysis of relationships "between man and land" that exist in the county is the mapping of many of these significant situations. One of these significant maps is a classification of land according to its best suited use or uses. A few "experts" have wondered about the value of land classification maps prepared by county committees. However, experience is showing that no other device is quite so effective in developing an

understanding of relationships between the condition of land resources and the welfare of persons living on the land. No other device has been found so effective in recording recommendations for programs or practices to meet the varying needs of different areas. The accuracy of land classification maps has been found adequate to guide action of many programs.

After studying and analyzing its situation and preparing the land classification maps, the county committees turn attention to determining not only what adjustments in land use should and can be made, but also what adjustment in forces affecting land use are needed. It is at this point in the process that the adequacy and effectiveness of individual farmer practices are tested, along with the testing of adequacy and effectiveness of public programs. Representatives of public programs participate in this process along with farmers. If all have participated in the inventory and analysis process, the recommendations of the committee have a good chance to obtain unanimous approval, and hence to provide a sounder basis for unifying all programs.

In the beginning, one county in each State was selected where a special effort could be made to develop a unified program for the first year. This "unified county program" is an effort to test the realism of the planning organization that has been set up. It is an effort on the part of all "action" agencies to coordinate their activities so that each will dovetail and supplement the other as much as possible in getting something done about the problems and recommendations brought out in the planning work. At first, only one county was included in this effort in each State because this was admittedly

a new way of doing business and we have to "learn by doing". Additional counties are now planning to undertake this phase of the planning process.

As would be expected, no planning committee has developed a final land use plan for its county. Indeed, the planning process is recognized as a continuous one. At this early date only phases of the plans have reached a degree of finality sufficient to warrant action. However, much definite action is being taken on the basis of recommendations made by the land use planning committees. A few examples of this action can be cited here for some of the States represented at this conference.

County planning committees have recommended and are contributing to the organization of soil conservation districts. In one county, four townships were consolidated into two. The land classification maps already have served as a basis for a rural zoning ordinance in several counties in two States; as a basis for determining the location of tax delinquent lands not to be resold in several counties in one State; as a basis for establishing priorities for expenditures on roads in some counties; and as a basis for considering the need for change in school curriculum by the county school superintendent in one county.

The Agricultural Extension programs in many counties have been built around the recommendations of county committees as a result of intensive planning work. County committees in one State advised with the Soil Conservation Service in the relocation of CCC camps; four county committees, meeting jointly, used their classification maps in recommending location of REA lines. Classification maps and

recommendations have been used to guide submarginal land acquisition and rural rehabilitation in several counties. County committees in one State have worked with the Forest Service in establishing priorities of lands for purchase. Several county committees have worked jointly with AAA administrators in developing a better adaptation of agricultural conservation programs to their counties.

Contribution of Sociologists to Agricultural Land Use Planning

As explained previously, a joint committee composed of the State BAE representative, a representative from the Experiment Station, and the Extension leader for land using planning, is responsible for determining and recommending the procedures to be followed in the land use planning work. It is the responsibility of this committee to determine the velocity and volume of special considerations which this new planning machinery can handle without bogging down. These planning leaders are confronted with the very real problem of gearing and timing such special considerations.

It is not hard to sympathize with subject matter specialists who say their particular specialty has not yet received its proper emphasis in the land use planning process. Special techniques of the sociologists have not yet been completely utilized in many places, and it is also true that other basic information, such as soil survey maps, have not been used to best advantage. However, there has been and will continue to be a trial-and-error process in developing a land use planning procedure, which eventually will bring into consideration all available information and technical aid that can be useful to the planning committees.

Procedure now developing in most States does not bring in the subject matter specialists during the early stages of deliberations of the county planning committee. The justification for this procedure is based on a psychological approach. This approach is aimed at developing as much as possible in the minds of the farmer members of each planning committee the fact that they are expected to take active responsibility in preparing plans for the county. To establish this concept it is important that farmers recognize that their intimate acquaintance with local conditions puts them in a position to provide information and judgments which only they can give.

As deliberations of the various county committees continue, it frequently is seen that adequate information about many problems is not available as a foundation upon which to build plans. In these cases, the county committees frequently appoint subcommittees to look into their assigned problems in greater detail than is feasible for the entire committee. These subcommittees ask subject matter specialists and technical experts to work jointly with them in further analyzing their problems and in developing recommendations. In this way a sounder basis for plans is provided than would be possible if either the farmers or the technicians arrived at them alone.

Requests from county land use planning committees for the help of specialists are a part of the two way educational process characteristic of agricultural land use planning. Local people have an opportunity to receive help they believe they need, at a time when they are most receptive to it and most ready to supplement such help with their own efforts. On the other side of the picture, the specialists are

given an opportunity to test the realism of their contributions and to reorient the scope and direction of research and educational efforts. There are already many examples of "service research" being carried out at the request of county planning committees.

Perhaps it would be worth while to review a few situations in States of this region that illustrate the participation of sociologists on special problems. Other situations could be given to illustrate the contributions of soils specialists, farm management specialists, land economists and others.

In Ohio, Indiana, Wisconsin and Iowa, rural youth studies are under way to assist county planning committees in their search for ways and means of contributing to improvement of rural youth problems. In Minnesota a study on rural relief is just being completed for a county committee that is concerned with whether the land resources on certain classes of land are adequate to support the families there.

An outstanding example of participation and leadership by sociologists in assisting a county committee is being given in Wayne County, Missouri. Here the sociologists are assisting families who must move from a newly-created flood control reservoir. The contribution of this type of effort toward developing a unified program of action should be emphasized.

The Wayne County Planning Committee recognized the need for coordinated action on the problem of relocating some 600 families from the site of a reservoir being created by the Wappapello dam. A request was made to the State Land Use Planning Committee for assistance. As a result, the Department of Rural Sociology, University of Missouri,

and the Division of Farm Population and Rural Welfare, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, are cooperating in a survey to determine the needs of these families.

Concurrently with starting the survey, a conference was called of State and federal agencies which could assist the families in their problems of relocation. A committee was established consisting of representatives of the Farm Security Administration, Social Security Administration, National Youth Administration, Work Projects Administration, Agricultural Extension Service, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, and the Department of Sociology at the University of Missouri. At succeeding meetings a classification was worked out for families, based on the type of assistance needed and the agencies that could best supply the help. The Wayne County Planning Committee then notified each family by letter which organization it should contact to obtain help in working out family plans for relocation.

There can be no doubt of the practical assistance that sociologists have given in this cooperative and coordinated effort. Some might question the effort as a piece of fundamental and profound research. At the same time, this study and succeeding studies of where these families relocate and how they were able to adapt themselves to new and different locations may develop some fundamental principles to guide relocation from similar areas where other flood control dams are scheduled to be built.

In summarizing, it should be emphasized that agricultural land use planning as a process is proving to be realistic and challenging to farm people and their leaders. As an institution, the organization, the ideals and objectives, and the scope are fairly well defined but

are still in the process of development and refinement. Results to date justify the expectation that planning will continue to make increasingly important contributions to the welfare of agriculture.