

PREFACE

The year 1999 marked the Centennial Anniversary of the National Cooperative Soil Survey. Early historical records show that the early settlers in Nebraska noted the soil type, the topography and the vegetation of the land they were settling. It was not until the latter part of the 1800's that agricultural land use interest by the public and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) convinced the United States Congress to make an inventory of the nation's soils and their production potential. This interest in 1899 created the soil survey program under the USDA Division of Soils, directed by Milton Whitney.

The first areas to be surveyed in 1899 were the Connecticut River Valley area of Connecticut and Massachusetts, Cecil County Maryland, the Salt Lake Valley of Utah, and the Pecos Valley of New Mexico. The first surveys in the east were concerned mainly with soils and their ability to produce quality tobacco while those in the west were interested in determining the suitability of marginal land for agriculture uses.

From the very first, soil surveys were done in cooperation with state experiment stations, land grant universities, and other local agencies. This cooperation arrangement between the USDA, State universities, and other agencies is known today as the National Cooperative Soil Survey. Nebraska was one of the early leaders in getting the soil survey program underway. The Nebraska legislators in 1893 formalized the existence of a geological survey and later established the Conservation and Survey Division in 1921. The Conservation and Survey Division was a broad-based natural resources organization and became the state lead for the state part of the Federal State soil survey program.

Nebraska has had a rich and productive soil survey program. All except six counties in the Nebraska Sandhills were completed and published prior to 1940. A second series of soil surveys commonly referred to as modern soil survey was completed for all counties with Cherry County fieldwork completed in 1995. Several of these older soil surveys are being updated under the new Major Land Resource concept of maintaining quality soil surveys for all lands.

Acknowledgement

This document was prepared under the direction of a special committee of the Nebraska Society of Professional Soil Scientists. A special thanks and recognition is extended to all those who contributed to the extensive work and quality soil survey products produced by the soil scientists and other disciplines in this recognition of the National Soil Survey Centennial celebration. Principal committee members were Jim Culver, Norm Helzer, Mark Kuzila, Steve Schaeffer, Steve Scheinost, Glenn Borchers, Wayne Vanek, Charles Mahnke, Charles Hammond, Bob Pollock, and Don Yost.

This document on the History of the Nebraska Soil Survey is not all-inclusive. The committee was sincere in capturing significant events in the state soil survey program. However, this effort was tempered to some degree by the committee's ability to readily get all pertinent information, available resources, interest, and background of the committee members. The committee's work was underway for several years, as this was a volunteer activity and priority for completion was accelerated in 1999 as part of the Soil Survey Centennial celebration. The committee apologizes for any omissions, oversights, and inconsistencies of the information presented in this document.

Individuals who wish to provide additional information or make corrections to any part of this report may send them to Jim Culver National Leader, Soil Survey Technical Services, NSSC, 100 Centennial Mall North, Room 152, Lincoln, NE 68508 or Norman Helzer at 1015 Lamplighter Lane, Lincoln, NE 68510.

This publication has utilized selected information from other reports, such as the "Resource Notes" by the Conservation and Survey Division-UNL, History of Soil Surveys of other states, NRCS State files, and personnel files of several soil scientists.

The content and format are designed to highlight the accomplishments of the soil scientists working in the state and not necessarily a chronological report of the state soil survey program. This report will serve to document some parts of the cooperative soil survey program. Highlighted are the 1) old legends for soil surveys, 2) contribution of the accelerated program and associated events and 3) the process of soil map finishing for publication of soil survey.

A number of photographs showing various phases of the Nebraska Soil Survey Program are included at the end of several sections. The committee chose not to give credit to who took each photograph. The photographs were a collection of original slides, color photographs, and black and white photographs. Many of the photos were from old Soil Conservation Service files, personal photographs of Don Yost, slides and photographs from Glenn Borchers and Jim Culver, and a variety of other sources.

The committee appreciates the excellent contributions and reviews of many soil scientists and others. Special thanks to Janet Bauer for assembling material for committee meetings and final drafts of the material during the last months of this project; Jim Culver and Norm Helzer for coordination and organization of materials; Richard Johnson for editorial assistance, and Stan Anderson for editing guidance.

The excellent assistance and leadership of Janet Bauer in preparing the final text document, Tammy Nepple in preparation of photographs and graphics for publication, and Suzann Meierdierks in the design of the cover are sincerely appreciated by the Committee and the Nebraska Society of Professional Soil Scientists. Their outstanding work significantly contributed to a quality, informative, and professional product.

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