

INTERVIEWEE: DONALD A. WILLIAMS

INTERVIEWER: T. HARRISON BAKER

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B: This is the interview with Donald A. Williams, the Administrator of the Soil Conservation Service.

Mr. Williams, to begin with, let me outline briefly your career here as I know it, subject to your corrections. You are a native of South Dakota, and after some years in private business mostly as an engineer, you joined the Soil Conservation Service in 1935 and have worked your way up to the position of Administrator, to which you were named in 1953. Is that roughly the outline?

W: That's correct.

B: May I ask, is your position as Administrator normally a political or non-political appointment.

W: Dr. Baker, it officially is classified as a political appointment. However I was appointed during the Eisenhower Administration in 1953 as you suggest, I've served under three Presidents, as you indicate: President Eisenhower, President Kennedy and President Johnson. So from a practical sense it is a non-political or non-partisan appointment.

B: Do you require a formal reappointment with each new administration?

W: No, no, the appointment continues with the pleasure of the Secretary of Agriculture.

B: All right. May I also ask, this is--again as I told you before the tape was on--so the future historian can have a sort of bench mark, have you ever had any direct political activity?

W: No, I have not. I have been active on the edge of partisan politics

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you might say, in the policy area, because each administration has different policy emphasis and, obviously, these are sometimes politically oriented. But I have not found it difficult as a career conservationist or as an administrator to give emphasis to the particular points that the different administrations have desired.

I think the reason for this, basically, is that soil and water conservation through the years has been a non-political or non-partisan activity. There's been strong support from each of the administrations and therefore it has not been necessary, or desirable, to give strong partisan political motivation to it.

B: All right sir. Have you had at any time during your career any direct contact with Mr. Johnson, either as a Congressman or Vice President or President?

W: Yes, I have had some, they've been rather infrequent. While Lyndon Johnson was a Senator, Majority Leader, I had a few occasions to have contact with him. Occasionally during his term as Vice President and only on a very few occasions while he served as President have I been involved in certain activities at the White House which have been of group nature rather than individual nature.

B: Have all of these meetings been in connection with the work of the Soil Conservation Service?

W: Related to work of the Soil Conservation Service. For example, the Keep America Beautiful activity, of which I served as chairman of of the steering committee a few years ago, gave emphasis to Lassie as an anti-litter proponent, and at a White House occasion I was present to participate in that particular activity.

B: That's one of the things the future historian is liable to miss--is

that Lassie the dog television star?

W: Lassie the dog, yes.

B: Did you get to meet Lassie?

W: Oh yes, I've known Lassie.

B: Did the President get to meet Lassie?

W: Oh yes.

B: Didn't pull her by the ears or anything?

W: No, no, no ear pulling that day.

B: Sir, I know you've prepared some things there, why don't you go ahead with the outline you have and then I'll ask questions afterwards.

W: All right, Dr. Baker, I'll proceed and if you desire to break in at any time, please feel free to do so.

First, in a general statement let me say that President Johnson has been a strong supporter of resource conservation and development throughout his entire public career. As Majority Leader of the Senate during the Eisenhower years he was responsible for guiding much beneficial conservation legislation through Congress. As a Senator he was an author of one of the bills which became what we now know as the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act, Public Law 566, which was enacted by the Congress of 1954.

In 1956 while Lyndon Johnson was Majority Leader, the Great Plains Conservation Program was authorized by the Congress.

B: Sir, in that connection, did Mr. Johnson, being a resident on the fringe of the Great Plains, have anything directly to do with the origins of that Act?

W: Not that I am aware of. This Act was sponsored primarily by Congressman Clifford Hope of Kansas in the House but received very strong support

from both parties in both the House and the Senate. I'm not knowledgeable of any personal interest, other than being favorable as a leader to seeing the legislation enacted.

Now his congressional leadership was a major factor in necessary funding in the soil and water conservation and flood prevention programs in particular. During his Administration, President Johnson has continued his interest in and support of resources development programs. I think I should also mention that as a Texas rancher, Lyndon Johnson has for many years been a cooperator with his local soil conservation district the Gillespie County Soil Conservation District. Also, some of his range land is in the Pedernales Soil Conservation District. He developed, with assistance of the Soil Conservation Service technicians, a conservation program for his ranch on the Pedernales River and has carried out an effective ranch plan. Very recently, local leaders in Gillespie and Blanco counties have developed a resource conservation development project which encompasses, I think, all of the properties included in the Johnson Ranch.

B: May I ask here, sir, is there anything particularly distinctive about these projects? Are they the usual sort of thing that fairly large land-owners do in cooperation with others?

W: The Resource Conservation and Development Projects are multi-county projects, largely involving local subdivisions of government, finding it necessary to work together across county lines for development of the economy of the local area which is natural resource related. There are 51 of these projects in the United States of which this particular one is one of the more recent.

But so far as I am aware, President Johnson had nothing personal to do in bringing this project into being. But I am sure in recognition of the problems of that two county area that his interest will be strong, and particularly now that he will be living back in that project area I'm sure he will be following the activities of the local leaders very closely.

B: On his own land, has there anything been done that is not the usual sort of thing?

W: I think that the program that he's carried out is the kind of program that's applicable to the particular climatic situations, the particular soil and water problems and range management problems of that particular area. I am told by our field people that he has aggressively followed through on the conservation recommendations that have been made and that a good program is in effect on the property. Perhaps he has followed through a bit more aggressively than some other ranchers have because of his basic interest.

B: What happens to your field man when he knows that what would ordinarily be just a routine project is a project for the President of the United States?

W: Well, actually, this work started before he became President, quite a good many years before. Of course, it has been extended to some of the land that he has acquired in more recent date. But actually his interest in conservation and working with our local technicians began, I think, when he was first elected to the Congress, or not long after that, a good many years ago and he has progressively developed a program over many years. I suspect that his personal involvement, since he became President, has been a little less than

it was before because of the pressure of time.

I might give you now for the record just a glimpse of some of the broadening aspects of the Soil and Water Conservation Program in the United States, with particular reference of course, during the last few years. The Soil Conservation Service broadened its program and expanded its services to rural areas and urban communities under the Johnson Administration.

In 1935 SCS was established in the Department of Agriculture as an erosion control agency. Soon additional responsibility for flood prevention assistance was added. In the years following, new Congressional legislation has continued to interpret more broadly the basic erosion control and flood prevention assignments.

Soil and water conservation, during the history of the Soil Conservation Service, has been, as I indicated earlier, a bi-partisan endeavor. It has also been a closely cooperative endeavor between the Soil Conservation Service and the locally organized soil and water conservation districts. These districts are locally managed, citizen organizations chartered by the individual state governments. Many other private organizations as well as local, state, and other federal agencies now cooperate in attacking the problems of soil erosion, flooding, and other aspects of land and water management. We have found that progress in sound resource conservation cannot be set off by separate periods of time anymore than soil and water management can be fenced in or fenced out along individual property lines. Resource conservation must be considered as a continuing, going program from one year to the next and from one administration to the next. That is the only way the program can be effective and I'm happy to say that's how it's been during the more than

30 years that I've been associated with the Soil Conservation Service. I think this fact is a great credit to those American leaders who have been responsible for the conduct of our national government during these years, and may I add that certainly President Johnson has not in any way attempted to make the programs of the Soil Conservation Service a partisan political matter, as we have mentioned earlier.

There have been many conservation gains under President Johnson. In the periods that he had held office, substantial gains have been made in every area of soil and water resource conservation. The Soil Conservation Service has reason to be highly pleased with the consideration given this essential work during the period when great demands are being made on our natural resources by a dynamic society. The excellent support of the present Administration for our program has been a major factor in the progress. This support includes effective liaison between the Administration and the Congress. The Soil Conservation Service is proud to have so many good friends and dedicated conservationists on Capital Hill. These friends are members of both major political parties and I know that the bipartisan support SCS has received over the years is the result of non-partisan approach to the conservation of our soil and water resources by both the Administration and the Congress.

During the Johnson Administration the Congress has passed and the President has signed into law many legislative acts aimed at improving the quality of the environment and more effective use of soil and water resources. Among these, to mention a few, are the Water Resources Planning Act of 1965; the Appalachian Regional

Development Act of 1965; the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1966, which for the first time provided for effective liaison between the Secretary of Transportation and the Secretary of Agriculture with respect to soil erosion guidelines to be incorporated into our Federal Aid to Highways system. And, of course, I should also mention the Department of Transportation Act of 1966 which brought into the picture some further recognition of what we now term natural beautification which provides for some of the esthetic aspects of our highway program. The Soil Conservation Service working with the Bureau of Public Roads and the State Highway Departments has for many years had some part to play in this activity.

There have been amendments to earlier acts in this period which, for example, provide for increased storage capacity for flood prevention reservoirs and for assistance in developing outdoor recreation opportunities as a purpose in conservation planning--and other legislation aimed at improving technical and administrative effectiveness within the service and other conservation agencies and organizations. Conservation accomplishments in which SCS has cooperated with conservation districts and other resource agencies and organizations were made possible through understanding and cooperation.

Now I'd like to make some specific comments about certain of our program activities that I think have a special interest during the last few years. First, the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program, Public Law 566, enacted by the Congress in 1954, and amended several times since to broaden it. The inter-relationship of resources is recognized in this law, which Lyndon Johnson helped

to enact as Senate Majority Leader. The benefits of the watershed project extend far beyond the projects boundaries to protect downstream rural areas and towns and cities. For example, watershed projects approved for installation have increased from 289 covering 17 million acres on January 1 1961 to 834 covering 48½ million acres by July 1, 1968. Completed watershed projects increased from 13 in January of 1961 to 205 by July, 1968. Employment from construction on 817 projects was 11,500 man years. An estimated 32,000 new jobs were created. New and expanded businesses increased by more than 1,500 and the annual payroll in these communities rose by an estimated 285 million dollars.

I'd like to comment a bit further about the Resource Conservation and Development Projects which have come into being during the Johnson Administration. I think that among the more significant accomplishments in conservation during this Administration are these Resource Conservation and Development projects which stress what might be called regional or natural resource area development of soil, water and related resources. These projects, authorized by the Food and Agricultural Act of 1962, are administered by the Soil Conservation Service. The first projects began in 1964 when the funds became available. Now, as of November 6, 1968 51 of these RC and D projects covering 168 million acres were underway in 39 states. Now these projects extend the multiple-use concept of resource planning to all land and water resources, generally on a multi-county basis. Already many of these projects are contributing to new employment and increased earned income in their areas.

Another program emphasis that has come about especially during

the last few years has to do with the area of community development. The Resource Conservation and Development projects are one facet of community development but not the only facet. The Soil Conservation Service is working more and more with urban developers, community planners, and local governments in a concerted effort to choose the right development for a particular piece of land; to prevent soil erosion during periods of mass development; to protect rivers, streams, and lakes from siltation and other forms of pollution; to build sound, lasting communities while protecting rural lands from needless devastation. May I also say that the emphasis on these matters helped in the general area of rural-urban balance, by making it more livable for people to remain in rural areas instead of moving so strongly to the cities. Strong emphasis has been placed on these values during President Johnson's Administration.

Now, SCS technical assistance and community planning and development was practically nonexistent 8 years ago. During the '60's, SCS has placed increasing emphasis on such assistance. In 1965, for example, we helped towns, townships, counties and multi-county areas toward developing 355 conservation plans on 3½ million acres. This assistance continued to increase so that in Fiscal Year 1968 we worked with communities toward developing 2,309 conservation plans on more than 137 million acres. Now these plans I refer to are the so-called Community Development types of plans with townships, towns, municipal planning bodies in the rural-urban fringe and so forth.

One of the things that has helped to make this possible has been the increased emphasis during the last several years on gathering

basic data through especially our soil survey program. Now soil surveys are being used increasingly by planning commissions, health and highways departments, municipal and county governments, tax assessors, builders, and other urban interests, in addition to the agriculture community, for sound land use planning and developing. Surveys have been completed on about 332 million acres by June '61, and almost double that, roughly 685 million acres, by June of 1967.

Another area of considerable public interest during the last several years, brought about in part by Mrs. Johnson's interest in the outdoors and in natural beautification but certainly not exclusively from that standpoint, has been the recognition of outdoor recreational opportunities. In recent years the development of recreational opportunities on private rural lands on small watershed projects has been given emphasis as a means of improving income in rural areas, and to provide needed outdoor recreation facilities for the growing urban population. The Soil Conservation Service was authorized to assist in these developments. In fact within the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Soil Conservation Service has been assigned leadership in this activity of working with property owners in the private land sector.

In 1964 the first year SCS kept records on these recreation activities, the report showed about 26,000 land owners and users had developed recreation enterprises over the years, with regular SCS assistance through their conservation districts. By the end of the fiscal year '67 nearly 48,000 had established recreation enterprises with this kind of assistance. And recreation had become the primary source of income for 7,700 who had switched

from livestock, dairy crops, fruits, and similar farming activities to recreation type of land and water use enterprise. Also, I should mention that multi-purpose watershed projects, the Public Law 566 projects that we mentioned earlier, now provide for recreational opportunities for public use and this has increased from about 50 in 1961 to 142 such projects providing specific opportunities by July 1968.

The Great Plains Conservation Program, which as I mentioned earlier, was enacted by the Congress in 1956 while Lyndon Johnson was a leader in the Congress--this is a conservation effort, particularly tailor-made to the 10 Great Plains states lying between the Canadian border and the Mexican border. It is somewhat an outgrowth of the old dust bowl conservation problems of the 1930's but it became apparent in the early 1950's, with some recurrence of dustbowl problems, that the so-called "going programs" of USDA and other agencies were not sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of that area and so a program was proposed in the Congress, supported of course by Mr. Johnson, as well as members of the House and the Senate and both political parties and it became the law in 1956.

During the past seven years, the Soil Conservation Service has assisted more than 23,000 farmers and ranchers to prepare long-term conservation programs on 37 million acres of that area, and the number of the counties participating in the program had increased from 383 in 1961 to 418 in 1968. This program has been a very highly effective program of inter-relating government financial support with long-term conservation plans developed by farmers and ranchers with technical guidance from not only the Soil Conservation Service but other agencies

and organizations, carried out through their local water and soil conservation districts, but a program which is helping to bring stability to that high plains section, which has been so vulnerable to the ups and downs of climate factors.

There is another area, Dr. Baker, that I feel is highly significant that's developed in the conservation field during the last several years. This relates to international program activities. As you know, President Johnson does have a very strong interest in helping underdeveloped countries of the world attain a higher degree of meeting their own problems and certainly one of the key facets of whether or not they can feed themselves, clothe themselves, and otherwise develop their economies is related to the natural resources that they have. So for the past several years the Soil Conservation Service has been called upon by the Agency for International Development of the State Department, as well as by many foreign countries to lend its experience and its judgment, to some of the problems that have been involved in these other countries. Not only as Administrator of the Service have I been involved officially in this activity, but personally I have visited many countries in Central America, South America, and Asia. My own involvement in the activities in Turkey and India I think have been particularly strong during the last five years. At least a dozen of these countries in Central and South America, Africa, Asia and the Near East have been so assisted during the last several years through contractual arrangements developed between the Agency for International Development, the U. S. Department of Agriculture, and the Soil Conservation Service. We have a good many of our professional people in various parts of the

world, including helping in Viet Nam through the past several years with some of the pacification activities that have been taking place there.

I believe, Dr. Baker, this constitutes the highlights of some of the things that come to my mind as especially significant during these last several years.

B: Thank you very much, sir, that was a very concise summary. Now if I could ask some questions that it's prompted.

First of all, if I can phrase this correctly, has the work of the Soil Conservation Service progressed on sort of an even tenor or have there been distinct differences in emphasis between the three presidential administrations you have served under as director?

W: I think that the work has gone along on a quite "stable" basis. I think that the differences of emphasis have come about more particularly because of public need than they have because of the difference of administrations. By this I mean that the public needs now recognized, and of course administration policy and the recognition of them is a factor--but the public need for outdoor recreation is one example. The situation with respect to our inner-city problems brought about in part by people migrating from rural areas to the city and the unemployment and so forth, the recognition of these problems have a particular emphasis during a given administration.

But actually in the growth of our country, we all know that irrespective of administration, these problems were gradually building and mounting and they have been recognized, I think, by both political parties and certain programs provided that will at least in part deal with them. Of necessity as some of these different social and economic

situations have been further recognized, it has had its spin-off effects, so to speak, on the work of the Soil Conservation Service. So we have been giving during the last few years some additional emphasis, let's say, to some of the things that have been given greater emphasis by the administrations during the last few years.

B: Do you feel that the Johnson Administration has taken note of and done something about new developments or problems that you can see from your vantage point?

W: Yes, I think so. Let me use as an example here one of the problems which has been recognized particularly during the last three or four years and that programs are being evolved over time to cope with it. This matter of pollution of our water and our air for example--the general public is much concerned about this and yet we know it's not a brand new problem. We have polluted our air, we have polluted our water for a long time, but it's reached a stage of criticalness during the last few years because of the pressures of people and so on, and our growing needs for good quality water and clean air, such that I think the country was ready to do something about it. So this readiness reflected in the Congress and in the Executive Branch, I think, brought about recognition of the need for legislation, of research, of studies by the office of Science and Technology, for example, which operates under the general guidance of the President.

Now, the Soil Conservation Service, as an agency of the Department of Agriculture, has been heavily involved in some the considerations taking place and under way right now. For example, as a part of the total aspect of the quality of environment, of which pollution

of our water and air are significant elements, the facet dealing with pollution from rural areas. The so-called agricultural pollution facet has come to be recognized by scientists and organizations in the last several years--that sediment is one of the principal pollutants of our streams and our reservoirs and our ponds and lakes and so on.

B: Is this related to the increasing use of agricultural chemicals?

W: Not directly, but indirectly it is--in this way, the silt, or sediment as we call it, reaches the streams in terms of total mass and in total quantity is the principal pollutant. But it's not just the silt, it's what it carries with it into the streams. And this involves both organic and inorganic materials. Organic animal wastes, for example, are heavy sources of water pollution through the runoff water and sediment getting into our stream systems in some localized areas. Also chemicals from fertilizers, from the use of pesticides and so forth, have become factors as a result of the more widespread use of them.

Now, fortunately, many of these problems become opportunities to deal with them from a conservation standpoint because it's axiomatic that if you can reduce the amount and the rate of runoff and, thereby, the amount of water reaching our streams which carries the sediment with it, you automatically reduce some of the organic and inorganic contribution that goes with sediment. These problems are becoming more recognized right now. I suspect strongly that before President Johnson completes his Administration in January that some further focus will be brought to this problem as a result of the studies that are just now being completed by the Office of

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Science and Technology with the active participation of the Department of Agriculture, the Soil Conservation Service, and other agencies.

B: As Administrator of the SCS, do you participate in the legislative drafting process?

W: Yes, I do, both in terms of the nature of the programs that are to be recommended from year to year to the Congress of the United States and in terms of the specific legislative proposals that involve not only the Soil Conservation Service but the Department of Agriculture in the natural resource field.

B: How does that work? Do you deal strictly through the Secretary of Agriculture or do you deal directly with the White House staff?

W: No, we deal specifically through the staff people and the Assistant Secretaries and the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture.

B: When you said staff people, do you mean Department of Agriculture staff?

W: Yes, Department of Agriculture attorneys and other staff people. I might also add on this legislative area, and this was true when Lyndon Johnson was a member of Congress, I can recall very definitely that back there in 1954 Lyndon Johnson as a Senator called upon the Soil Conservation Service for some guidance in drafting some legislation that he wanted to introduce. This is a common practice. This is merely a drafting service which is provided irrespective of political affiliation, but it's common practice for Congressmen and Senators to turn to the expertise in the Executive Branch for assistance of this kind.

B: What happens if a Congressman calls upon you for assistance in drafting a proposal which you think is unwise?

W: Well, when we're subsequently called upon, if we are, to testify in

hearings before the Congress, we so state. In other words, we do not commit the agency or the department to this specific proposal by providing this drafting service. We merely provide it as a service.

B: Have you also been involved in, well the kind of thing you just mentioned, getting legislation through Congress once it is drafted?

W: Yes, under the legislative processes of our country various committees of the Congress hold public hearings, and hearings in which they call upon the agencies of the Executive Branch to testify. We appear before various congressional committees, legislative committees, many times during the year's time on various subjects, some of which are a direct concern to our agency, and some of which are in a broader area of interest, as well as of course appearing before the appropriation committee's subcommittees in both the House and the Senate having to do with the funding of the agency's activity.

B: Does the Administration ever ask you to help in a less formal manner in, oh, persuading informally Congressmen to support legislation?

W: Yes, and let me say that that's not peculiar to this Administration. Under the four presidents who I've served under here in Washington, beginning with President Truman and Secretary Charlie Brannan, before I became administrator of the service, and then under Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy and President Johnson--in each of these Administrations I have been asked to be helpful to respond to requests from congressional leadership whether Republican or Democrat, and we have done this by providing facts pertinent to the subjects, not at what I would call lobbyists but in terms of providing the information needed by the legislative branch.

B: You must have what amounts to a fairly large clientele in the land owners that the Soil Conservation Service deals with. Do you ever call upon them for legislative support?

W: The clientele of the Soil Conservation Service I suppose, broadly speaking consists of the general public which has a concern from where its food and water and fibre comes from. So it is just about everybody in one sense. But more particularly it has to do with the land owners who are operators who use the land whether for the production of food and fiber, or for outdoor recreation purposes, or for certain activities which result in conservation problems which need attention. The best known organized effort, of course, dealing with Soil and Water Conservation activities are the over 3,000 Soil and Water Conservation Districts in the United States which cover 96, I believe, percent of the land area in the country. These Soil and Water Conservation Districts in each of the states have organized an association which is a non-governmental unit to bring about improved program activities. There is also a national association of soil and water conservation districts, of which the over 3,000 soil and water conservation districts in the country are members. The National Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts very frequently, in fact, almost always testifies before congressional committees on legislative or appropriation matters of interest or concern to them. Not only does the Soil Conservation Service, but the Secretary of Agriculture through the years, has looked to the objective leadership of these associations of districts to be helpful in sound programs of natural resource development but in many other ways on programs which related to the

improvement of social and economic well-being of rural America.

B: These organizations are in theory separate and independent of your office, are they not?

W: That is correct. The local soil conservation district is a subdivision of local government. The associations that I mentioned are voluntary associations, non-governmental in nature.

B: Are they in fact that independent? For example, to ask what may be almost a rude question could your office do anything that those organizations badly did not want done?

W: No, I don't think we've been faced with that kind of a situation at any time. Oh there have been certain legislative proposals over the years, I think, in each of the different administrations that the Soil Conservation District Associations have not been particularly interested with, and occasionally some that they have been opposed to. As a member of the administrative team under each of the administrations, I have sometimes born some criticisms from those groups as well as have other administrative leaders.

B: It must occasionally put you in a rather difficult position.

W: Oh yes, but I think that by-and-large the leadership of our American public understands the situations and these have been rare instances. As I mentioned earlier, the broad public interest of a non-partisan nature has very largely guided the legislative proposals made by each of the administrations, so there's not been a problem of this kind. It is a very rare situation.

B: I notice that your service has been moving more into the urban field. Do you mean in this regard the large metropolitan areas in assisting them with public water supplies and that kind of thing?

W: No, Dr. Baker, I do not mean in the inner-city problem except in the educational way. We're trying to help with some of the conservation education right here in the city of Washington, for example, working with the school administration--but in terms of program actions, no. But we are working with some of the metropolitan area planning commissions with respect to some of the rural-urban fringe problems around their cities. This is true--oh, I could use Chicago as an example.

The environs of Chicago for many years have been attempting to bring more order out of the expansion of that tremendous metropolitan area. The outlying counties, bordering the city of Chicago, have organized into metropolitan planning bodies. And they have called upon the Soil Conservation Service for consultation. I would say that this example--which I could cite many, many other metropolitan areas--do very frequently call upon the Soil Conservation Service, not only for basic information they may have about soils and water and so forth, but very frequently calls upon some of our professional people in a strictly consultive sort of way, not in a decision making process.

B: In relation to your work in the international field, do you find that government of other countries receptive to the kind of suggestions you make?

W: They have been especially receptive, I think, to the suggestions coming from Soil Conservation Service. I hope this does not sound boastful, and I do not intend it in any sense in that way. But it is true, that the Soil Conservation Service is respected internationally for its know-how in this area. Many, many hundreds of foreign visitors,

300 to 400 of them a year, from various parts of the world come here annually to work with our people. They go home with a generally favorable opinion about the work we're carrying out and what we're doing. So we have so many requests from underdeveloped countries of the world to be helpful, [that] we literally cannot meet all of them. So it has not been a problem of having acceptance. My own experience in India over the years--which I've been there a half-dozen times in the last eight years, and which you may or may not know, I'm going there soon again with the Ford Foundation for several years to assist India further if I may in the development of its water resources. India is an example of pleading with us for some of the know-how we have in soil and water management because that is so basic to whether or not India is able to feed itself over a period of time. There has been no problem of acceptance.

B: When you get these requests, you said you could not, I assume, for budgetary and manpower reasons, deal with all of them. How do you decide which countries you will give your assistance?

W: Basically this decision is made by the State Department on a country-to-country relationship basis.

B: Is it based on political factors rather than the technical factors of which country is in a position to be aided?

W: By-and-large that is true. For example, the first decision that has to be made by the State Department, and/or the President, is whether or not our country's going to help X country and whether or not the resources available, funding to the Agency for International Development, permits assistance to a certain country, and whether it's in keeping in a timely way with other efforts to be carried

out. But assuming all of these things are favorable, then it comes down to a question of the availability of a certain type of professional expertise from the Soil Conservation Service, soil scientists or water managers and so forth. Then you get right down to the hard facts of life, do we have them or don't we have them, and priorities come into the picture. At any given moment where there are more requests for help than we can supply, it then becomes a joint decision between staff members of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Soil Conservation Service, and the Agency for International Development, as to where the limited resources can be best used.

B: Is your overseas work mostly educational and advisory, or do you get involved in actual mechanics of construction?

W: We get involved in advising the local technical people of the country in how to do things, not just in technical standards and procedures but in actually how to do it. For example, in India one of the things we're helping most with there, the three demonstrational project areas for training people and actually leading them by the hand in doing even some of the more simple soil and water conservation practice work, so that they learn by doing something that they just can't quite understand without doing that.

B: Do you find the farmers, the landowners themselves, below the government levels receptive in innovation of this kind?

W: Yes, we do find them receptive. It's been my experience in various parts of the world that in spite of different languages, different religions, different cultural backgrounds, and different nationalities and so forth, that people under the skin are not too greatly different. The same factors that motivate people pretty much motivate them in

one part of the world as well as another. The differences come about in their different status, their different educational levels, what they understand, their capabilities--economic, social and so forth of course--but my own experience in dealing with the cultivators and the farmers in the different parts of the world, when you can talk about the fundamental things of managing soil and managing water and managing plants, and what that means, they're receptive.

B: Do you get involved in what are really domestic political problems overseas, such as concentrated ownership of land and that kind of thing?

W: Oh, in a general way we do because in the area of land reform or the need of land reform--let me cite Brazil as an example. We have had some of our top-level soil scientists working in Brazil for several years, helping that country map out areas that could be developed in Brazil--and they have many opportunities--in which that land might be developed for economic size cultivators or farmers, rather than going into a large landlord type of estate situations. Similarly, in Turkey where certain types of land reform, change of ownership pattern and so forth, are interrelated to the land operations under irrigation systems and drainage systems and so on, so that it's been possible to work out voluntary exchanges of land based very largely on the recommendations that the Soil Conservation Service technicians have made to make it possible to do conservation work. In other words, one thing interrelates with another.

B: How's your work in Viet Nam gone?

W: The Soil Conservation Service has been faced with the same kinds of problems in Viet Nam as the various other agencies that have worked there. The relative degrees of security or lack of it in different

parts of the country, have made it all the way from fairly easy to do some things in some areas, to almost impossible in other areas. My own two visits to the country in appraising the situation, I felt that we have been able to be helpful in some local communities, but it has not gone anywhere near as well as we hoped it would.

B: I would suppose the obvious answer is the correct one, that it would require peace for really extensive development.

W: Yes, I think that they have been doing some planning ahead in Viet Nam. Our government has worked with the government of South Viet Nam to lay a few plans for future development in the post-war era, and many of these are natural resource areas, some of them pertain to the Mekong Delta area, some to other sections in which it may be possible--we hope it will be possible--in the post-war situation, with a stable government in South Viet Nam, to move forward with some programs that will have a great deal to do with the economic and social well being of those people.

B: To get back to the domestic activities, do you foresee or do you advocate that this regional development concept will be emphasized more and more in the future?

W: I think, Dr. Baker, that regional development has a great deal to be favorable to it but it also has many problems associated with it. My quick answer to your questions would be yes. But I must say "yes, but." Yes, but it must come about with the orderly development of capability of local leadership and understanding of the problems. I don't think it can be a forced draft situation. I don't think it has been a forced draft situation, but I don't think it should be a forced draft situation. The Ozarkias and the Great Lakes areas and the

New England areas and Appalachia and so forth all have problems peculiar to those areas. But one of the problems is the organization and development of capability of local people to deal with those problems instead of it being just a federal program.

B: Is the difficulty in a welter of government agencies at the county-state municipal level--getting some kind of coordination between them?

W: I don't think this is a major problem, to be truthful about it. We hear about it from time to time, but one of the things that I might have mentioned earlier that's been helpful, I think, that's developed during the Johnson Administration is more emphasis on coordination at the local level. There have been developed what we call technical action panels, at each of the counties and at state level. The Soil Conservation Service is chairman of about 40-percent of these technical action panels around the United States, so we're aggressively working in this area. I think that there's really no major problem about agencies working together provided there is a viable local organizational structure with whom to work. It's been my experience over the last 30 years that when you've got capable local leadership, even if you incline to get out of line as a federal agency, they crack your head pretty quick and get you in line. And I think that's the way it ought to be.

B: Sir, in a matter of personnel, do you find any difficulty in getting and keeping good men in your service, both at the headquarters level here and in the districts?

W: Yes, the matter of recruitment of capable personnel is always a problem. I suppose that the Soil Conservation Service does not have quite as great a problem in that regard maybe as some others.

The work that our organization carries on has been attractive to young people for the three decades that we've been working in the field. Most of our recruitment comes from the state agriculture universities. We employ college students between their sophomore and junior year and their junior and senior year. We use them in our field work and they get actual experience, whether they be engineers or soil scientists or agronomist or whatever. Then when they are through with their university career we guarantee them a job, so to speak. Of course, there's quite a mortality, as you could understand, many of them going into defense activities, many of them have chosen a different career. But I suppose 40 to 50 percent of these young men and women that we have employed during their college days come back to work for us as a career. This is our principal area of recruitment.

B: Are your salaries adequate and competitive with private industry?

W: I think by-and-large they are competitive with the salary increases that have been coming along in the last few years. There was a big lag for many years in inequity of salaries in comparison with private opportunities. But this has been very largely overcome, and I think with the additional salary increase that's scheduled to take place in July, 1969, assuming that we don't have too much more inflation, that we will see a high degree of equity.

B: Has your staff including down at the district agent level, been racially integrated?

W: Yes, it has. We have a very, very harmonious relationship with the leadership of Negro institutions across the country in which, as you know, a very large percentage of our agricultural workers are

educated still in the Negro institutions. And we have been actively working with them in curricular development and in taking their graduates, using their young people, and even using their professors during summer months. We have a very, very happy relationship. Fortunately and, I think, meritoriously, the Soil Conservation Service has not been singled out at any time as having any problems in this area.

B: Does this ever create any difficulties for you on the local level, say a Negro agent in a predominately white district, or vice versa?

W: Oh, yes, we have had to grow along with everyone in this area. Sure, there are problems that have to be met in the acceptance of people. But very largely the acceptance of people in the long run is not necessarily related to the color of their skin. We have problems of acceptance of people, white or black, and in certain regions of the United States we had to gradually move along to a point where these people were acceptable. But we made great progress on it and we have many times more Negro employees now in the Soil Conservation Service than we did a decade ago. And I think this is true of most government agencies.

B: I was going to ask you when this movement started. Can you pin it down to the Kennedy or Johnson Administration?

W: Oh, I think the problems got flagged to a major extent during the Kennedy Administration, at which time Vice President Johnson had a particular kind of responsibility in this general area--one of the things that he was given a great deal of emphasis to. The problem became recongized I think very markedly during that era but I think during the last several years of the Johnson Administration

you find programs coming to bear to meet those problems. So I think it's been an evolutionary process.

B: Have you ever had any direct personal contact with Mr. Johnson, that is, any meetings in which he singles out the Soil Conservation Service and says, "I would like to have this program done, or inquired into."?

W: No, not directly. In this regard I have always dealt through the Secretary of Agriculture. Fortunately we've had the same Secretary of Agriculture through both the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations-- with this exception, it was my privilege to receive special commendation directly from President Johnson, I think it was three years ago, for the management improvement activities of the Soil Conservation Service and more efficient cost reduction activities and so forth in which the President came over to the Department of Agriculture. Through personal contact we did receive special commendation.

B: What did he say on that occasion, sir?

W: I don't remember the precise words, except in talking to me and looking at our exhibits which illustrated these management improvements he commented favorably upon them and congratulated the Service. In a broader setting he commended the Soil Conservation Service for its progressive attitude in this area.

B: Is the morale of the civil service pretty good under the Johnson Administration?

W: I can't speak too specifically about other agencies, but I can say that as far as the Soil Conservation Service is concerned the answer is yes.

B: Do you feel that Mr. Johnson goes out of his way to inculcate good

morale, or how does that kind of thing come about?

W: I think that all of the Presidents that I served under here in Washington have made an effort to do this. I don't know that I can say that President Johnson has had the time, even though he had the desire to do many of the things that he wanted to do in this area. He's been strongly favorable to it, but we recall that President Kennedy was, too, and President Eisenhower. So to single him out and say he'd done more than any other President, I don't think I could.

B: Have you had any direct contact with Mrs. Johnson in connection with the Beautification Campaign or anything like that?

W: Only in connection with the Lassie Program and Keep America Beautiful Anti-litter Program at the White House.

B: Was that program an effective one?

W: I would have to say, yes, it is effective. Are you talking now about the natural beauty program in general? I think it has aroused the public to recognition of some of the ugliness we've had through man's failure to do things, or maybe even some of the things he did. I think a certain amount of emphasis that's been good for the public has come into the picture. Sure, effectiveness is a matter of degree. Not all of the things that we'd like to see done are being done, but I think if Mrs. Johnson had not become a focal point of this kind of emphasis and leadership, I don't believe this public understanding would have reached the stage of maturity it has now. I would be hopeful that it's not now forgotten about; if it were, maybe we'd lapse back into some of our former lack of interest.

B: Sir, I've taken a great deal of time and have about run out of questions. Is there anything else that we should cover that we haven't?

W: I believe not.

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By Donald A. Williams

to the

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