

## CONSERVATION & AGRICULTURE IN A MODERN WORLD

From a speech presented by Professor Eilif Dahl of the Agricultural College of Norway at the A.C.W.W. Conference in Oslo, Norway.

In introducing his subject, Professor Dahl said, "In our world conservation has become a major public concern. Perhaps thirty years ago the conservationist was looked upon as a sort of odd idealist, now he is becoming respected and governments seek his advice.

"Why has conservation so suddenly become important? There appears to be three problems. They are (1) Since the beginning of the industrial revolution there has been an unprecedented growth of human population and human activity. Can this growth continue forever? Can man learn to live in equilibrium with his environment and not at the expense of inherited capital? (2) Through the use of machines and the development of modern industry man's ability to change his environment has increased tremendously; it is now virtually possible to move mountains, but the question is has man the wisdom to use all this power for the benefit of mankind? The pollution of air, soil and water has reached proportions where an increasing part of the nation's resources must be used to combat the immediate threats posed by the pollution of our environment. (3) In an affluent society where the basic needs for products are satisfied for most citizens, man is in an almost unprecedented situation. In a poor man's society, man's need for products is imperative; a hungry man is not interested in preserving the beauty of the countryside, he is interested in food.

During the last twenty years the conservation movement has developed both in influence and in basic philosophy. To many early conservationists, conservation was more or less equivalent to the preservation of nature. This attitude is not defended by modern conservationists. We now speak of conservation as the wise use of resources; it involves both use and preservation.

"I would prefer the definition 'Conservation is the wise use of resources in the best long-term interest of man.' This brings up a question of priorities. In older agricultural communities, apart from feeding the family, nothing was more important than to preserve the production potential of the future. A good farmer should leave the farm to his children in as

good if not better condition than he received it. When we raise a family we are planning for more than twenty years ahead. Whether we are business men, farmers, scientists or factory workers, we have children for whom we wish a liveable future.

"It is then the responsibility of governments to restrict the use of resources and other economic activities to preserve our long-term interests.

"First of all it must be in the long-term interest of any country to protect its agricultural potential. Then it would seem that there is no long-term solution without population control. If we want to avoid having children die of malnutrition or downright starvation, the number of people on earth must not exceed the number for which there is food available.

"The XI International Botanical Congress in Seattle in 1969 resolved that the aim of conservation was to preserve productivity and diversity in nature. Why preserve diversity?

"Man needs something which for lack of a better expression might be termed mental satisfaction. Mental satisfaction can be achieved in different contexts. One can have mental satisfaction in social context with friends, in a cultural context, in the appreciation of art. Many find mental satisfaction in contact with nature.

In 1968 the United Nations Association of the Scandinavian countries decided to assemble a group of experts to discuss the rights of people with regard to their environment. A proposed 'International Declaration of the Human Environment' was drawn up. This declaration if accepted by the nations is not legally binding but can later become the basis of conventions which legally protect the rights of the individual citizens. Some important points of this proposed resolution are:

1. Everyone has the right of living in an environment where human beings can develop in a satisfactory way, both physically and mentally. This right means an environment with clean air, clean soil, and access to unspoiled nature, as well as protection against damages which can accompany unrestricted exploitation of natural resources."

The Professor concluded by saying, "I believe that the idea of conservation, the concern for future generations would come easily to country women. They have reared their children, want them to grow up and in time have children of their own. Some country women are living on farms which have been in the family for generations. This much is certain, that if we under the banner of economic progress use up our resources our children and grandchildren would need for survival, they are not going to thank us."