

DEVELOPMENT AND CONSERVATION OF LAND RESOURCES

Present development and improvement of land is not comparable to the large-scale pioneering and homesteading of new areas that were so important during the settlement period in American history. However, considerable development and improvement of land, much of it on existing farms, is still taking place. The development of land includes the preparation of unimproved or presently nonarable land for crops and improved pastures by carrying out such practices as installing drainage, clearing woodland or brush, removing stones or old stumps, and leveling, ditching, or terracing unimproved land for irrigation. Improvement of land refers to the application of these various measures to land that is presently used as cropland or improved pasture, but that can be made more productive by carrying out additional land improvement.

Many farmers have only limited acreages of cropland available with which to expand the farm business. On many small farms on which capital and land resources are limited, more effective use of existing land resources in the farm unit may be possible by carrying out certain development or improvement measures. Operators of large farms may have a choice of making more intensive use of the existing acreage of improved land or of developing additional land in the farm.

Development and improvement of land by irrigation continues to expand. During the last decade, the acreage irrigated has increased by 7 million acres. About half of this increase represents the development of new cropland. The remainder results from irrigation of dry cropland in the West and the supplemental irri-

gation of cropland in the humid Eastern States. The productivity of some of the land already being irrigated in the West also may be increased by supplementing the existing sources of water with additional water from new irrigation works. Leveling and releveling of land is an important aspect of development and improvement of land by irrigation in some areas.

The drainage of land for agricultural uses has been a major practice in the development and improvement of land for many years. Approximately 65 million acres were in organized drainage enterprises at the time of the first census of drainage taken in 1920. Land in organized drainage enterprises in 1959 totaled 102 million acres.

The appreciation of the need to conserve such basic resources as soil, water, forests, grassland, and wildlife has resulted in the development of programs aimed at the wise use of natural resources that are a vital part of the Nation's wealth. Recently, several agencies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture working together have completed a National Inventory of Soil and Water Conservation Needs. This inventory contains comprehensive data tabulated to present the major soil and land-use characteristics of the country. This basic information was used in analyzing the present and prospective conservation needs of the country. The results of this inventory are in process of publication.

In this section of the graphic summary, some selected maps and graphs are presented to illustrate the present status and significant changes taking place in the development and conservation of land resources.

