



FARMLAND INFORMATION CENTER

NORM BERG COLLECTION

DOUG HELMS
NATIONAL HISTORIAN
NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

When Norm Berg became Chief of the Soil Conservation Service, he was a three-decade- plus veteran of the Service, and had ideas how the Service should be organized for effective operation. Almost three decades later, some few people may look back on how the resulting reorganization affected them personally. I am in that small and diminishing group. The reorganization included a position for an historian. I learned of the position from one of Norm's many friends and colleagues, Dr. Wayne D. Rasmussen, the renowned historian of USDA. When I was selected, I could hardly believe my good fortune. I could look forward to work in my chosen fields of agricultural and conservation history. Berg's vision for Service allowed me to leave my rewarding work at the National Archives, where I had made many good friends and professional contacts, and to take those experiences with me to the Soil Conservation Service, working with its records and those of USDA agencies.

Through the years I have come to understand how this act of including a historian was just a small piece of Norm Berg's broad view of advancing conservation. He looked to the future and how the Service might do its work better, understanding that knowledge of the past could contribute its part. During that time in the early 1980s, he emphasized taking a positive attitude toward some of the congressionally mandated requirements. Essentially his attitude was to take the requirements as opportunities, not as obstacles. And he tried to prepare the Service for the current and coming issues in conservation.

It has been a quarter century since Norm was officially my boss, but given his support and friendship, requests from him for assistance seem to gravitate naturally toward the top of the pile.

Through the years that he has stayed active with AFT and SWCS, I have had a chance to observe some of his characteristics. A few of these are encouragement of young people, receptivity to new ideas, optimism, and persistence without pique. Finally, I would add curiosity. He is a reader. Shortly into a conversation, he will say, "I have been reading...."