

AGRICULTURE

The Dust Bowl Again

The Dust Bowl presents a problem to our nation in times of drought. How to meet this problem if spring brings severe dust storms is discussed by a top conservation expert.

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► PROLONGED drought in the Great Plains is fast brewing ominous dust storms again. Thus far the storms have not grown to the proportions of the "black blizzards" of the nineteen thirties. Then a number of "dusters" reached the Atlantic coast. On May 12, 1934, a great "black duster" rolled across the country from the southern Plains to blot out the sun over the nation's capital and deposit Plains soil on the decks of ships hundreds of miles off the Atlantic coast. It was the first such experience since white man came to America. But others followed, during the thirties.

This time we have had no such dust storms; they have been more of a local nature. But what may happen with the return of the wind-erosion days of spring no one knows.

Frequently this current drought is referred to as the worst we have had. No, the one of the thirties was the worst, according to my experience. This time we have had no great trans-continental dusters; nor have we heard of crows building their nests of bits of wire picked up from barren farmsteads, in the absence of enough plant material for normal construction purposes.

But we gain nothing from such comparisons, except perhaps faith to go ahead with a sound program of anti-drought operations, which is the only effective way to curb wind erosion and dust storms.

Problem Is Complicated

Proposals appearing in the press are encouraging. At least we have a plan, parts of which are already in operation. The plans reported may sound complicated but the problem itself is highly complicated.

It may profit us to examine some aspects of our fight against the effects of drought during the first dustbowl period. That was a prolonged dusty and disastrous drought that extended across the Great Plains from Canada deep into Texas and adjacent New Mexico. The whole vast area was parched, including even the deep alluvial soils of river bottoms. At first Russian thistle, which has great tolerance for drought, was cut for hay, but finally that, too, succumbed to drought. At first, hay was shipped in but eventually trainloads of hungry cattle had to be shipped to remote pastures. Farmers by the hundreds gave up, abandoning their lands to move in waves of migration to distant states. And there was "dust pneumonia" and

numerous accidents along dust-dimmed roads.

Then the rains came and good crops of wheat and sorghum. The people forgot. They plowed up more virgin grassland along with much of what farmers had gradually reestablished with the assistance of soil conservation measures.

"Suitcase farmers" came in, leased land, tore down fences, plowed up everything and seeded wheat. Some of them made fortunes, repacked their suitcases, moved out and forgot their crimes against the public. But nature neither forgot nor forgave. Accordingly, we are being punished again for interference with the stern laws of nature.

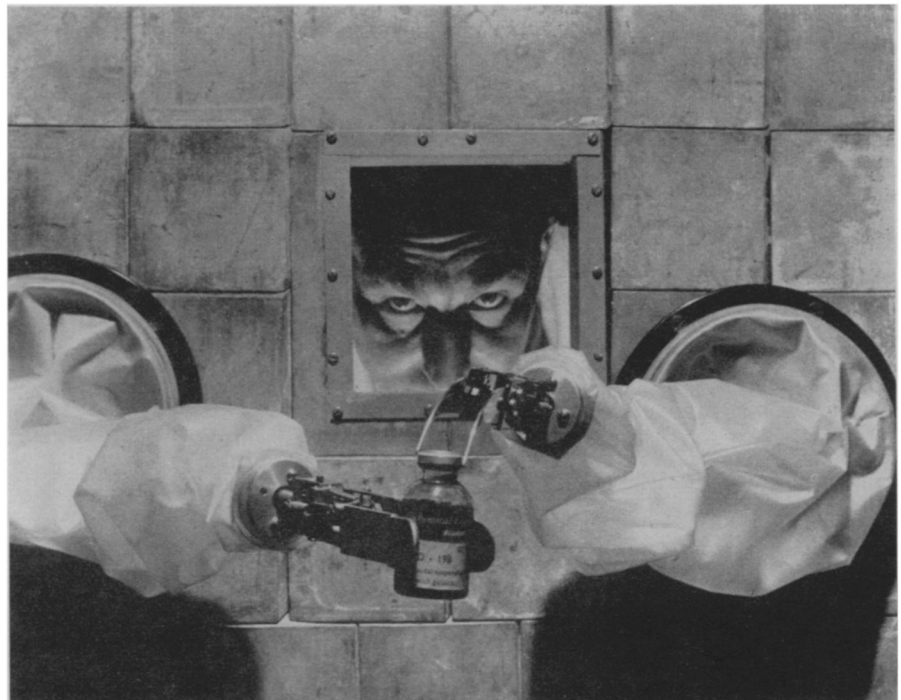
Not all has been forgotten—and that is what I want to point out. Experience sometimes provides valuable suggestions. I have reference to the experience of the Soil Conservation Service, whose birthday corresponded closely with the great dust storm of May 12, 1934.

The Soil Conservation Service ran head-on into the catastrophic drought of the 1930's and its attendant evils without com-

bat experience or proved implements of attack. Fortunately the Service was founded on the concept that soil erosion can be coped with only through the use and protection of land according to the needs and capability of the different kinds of land a farmer has, making use of those adaptable measures and combinations of measures required for sustained productivity of the soil.

New Measures Developed

Every proven measure was utilized and many new measures were quickly developed through trial and error. The old practice of listing was amended by contour application. Crop residues were carefully protected from overgrazing. Good results came from using wheatland for wheat, grassland for grass, and sorghum land for sorghum. We harvested seed of all the good grazing grasses of the region and planted them in contour furrows within their known range limits. Pasture areas were contour furrowed; even hole-digging machines were used on the contour on some of the more vulnerable lands. Wild sunflower—a weed—was planted in some of the more stubborn areas. Every implement and every planting were held to the contour. It probably was the world's greatest contouring movement, with the



ISOTOPES BOTTLED—Remote control is used to bottle atomic compounds "cooked" in British atomic furnaces and sent all over the world by air and ordinary mail. They are being used more and more in medical and biological research and industry.