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*James G. ...
DC - North Group 14
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THE STORY OF THE OTERO SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT

NARRATOR: Tonight we bring you the story of the Otero Soil Conservation District.

This is the fifteenth in a series of programs dealing with activities of farmers and ranchers who have banded themselves together for the purpose of promoting better land use and crop production. But before we take up the district activities, let's look over that part of the state and learn something about the country and the people who live there.

Lying in southern New Mexico between the two large southward-flowing rivers--the Rio Grande and the Pecos--Otero County is endowed with mild climate and beautiful scenery. Where great buffalo herds once roamed, sheep and cattle now graze. Here, also, are the towns of Alamogordo, Cloudcroft, Tularosa, Three Rivers, Escondido and others. Some of the battles of the famous Lincoln County wars were fought here, and Billy the Kid passed through this section many times--usually with the sheriff's posse hot on his trail. But we are getting ahead of our story.

What is now Otero County was the home of the war-like Apache Indians whose descendents now live on the Mescalero Reservation. Incidentally, the name Mescalero comes from the word mescal, a plant similar to the century plant, of which these Indians are very fond. The heart of the plant is roasted in pits for several days until tender. In taste, it resembles molasses candy and is very palatable even to the white man. Also, the Indians have been known to make a potent drink from this plant which put them in the mood of a good warrior.

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In 1530, Cabeza de Vaca passed near here on his return to Mexico City from the ill-fated Navarez Expedition to Florida. Francisco Vasques de Coronado wintered in the valley of the Rio Grande in 1540, but we have no record of him or his followers visiting this mountainous country. Undoubtedly one of the first white parties to enter this region was an expedition led by Antonio de Espejo in 1582. This group was searching for two padres who had failed to return from an expedition the year before. The expedition descended the Pecos River, then called the Rio de las Vacas, so named because of the large herds of buffalo found there.

The Spanish did not colonize this part of the state as they did the Rio Grande valley. This was due mostly to the hostility of the Apaches, who lived up to the name given them by the Spanish and meaning "enemy". Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Spanish tried in vain to conclude a peace with these Indians.

During the first decade of the nineteenth century, Spanish power began to decline and this country was lost to Spain in 1821, becoming a part of the Mexican Republic.

By this time the United States had its eye on this country, and in 1848 Mexico relinquished its claims to the land north of the Rio Grande in the treaty of Guadalupe-Hildago. However, all of this had little affected the part of the state we are interested in tonight, for up to this time there had been almost no settlement by white men. In 1850, the New Mexico territorial government was set up and the region now comprising Otero County was included in Dona Ana Partida. Indian troubles were practically settled in 1886 with the capture of the renegade Chief Geronimo, and since that date the Apaches have lived a more or less peaceful life on their reservation.

As a part of Lincoln County in the 1870's, the region now comprising Otero County witnessed the bloody Lincoln County wars and names like John Chisem, A. A. McSween, John H. Turnstall, L. G. Murphey, James G. Dolan and John H. Riley are well known by old-timers.

In 1899, there had been enough development in this part of the country to convince the territorial legislature that Lincoln County might well be divided into two counties. Thus, in that year, Otero County was created and named after the territorial governor, Miguel A. Otero.

This has always been a ranching and farming country. Cattle and sheep are grazed on the mountainsides while valleys and flood plains at the mouth of the perennial streams produce vegetables, fruit, grain, cotton and alfalfa.

Much of this land is hilly, and soil readily washes off the steep slopes. Otero County farmers first recognized severe erosion in the form of large arroyos and then the more subtle sheet erosion. These farmers and ranchers are men who have loved and fought for their land. They decided to do so again. Realizing that there is strength in numbers, they banded together to fight, as their fathers before them had done when threatened by Indians. They banded together to fight the erosion menace on the land, and formed the Otero Soil Conservation District in 1941. Together, they represent the ownership of nearly two-and-a-half million acres of land. Their program is designed to control this menace--soil erosion. The Otero district boasts of some mighty fine accomplishments. We wanted to have some of the supervisors here to talk to you personally, but transportation problems being what they are, and farmers and ranchers so busy at this time of year on their "Food for Freedom" program, they could not come to Albuquerque. However, let's re-enact what might be a typical meeting of the board of Supervisors.

Mr. G. V. Clayton, of Tularosa, chairman of the board, is speaking:

MUSICAL BRIDGE.....

SOUND EFFECTS--Voices, rattling of chairs, etc. Rapping gavel.

G. V. CLAYTON: The meeting will come to order. It's fine to see all you supervisors and farmers here this evening, also Jim Wayne, our district conservationist, and Les Beaty, our county agent. This is a particularly important meeting, for we are going to hear reports from various parts of the district by the farmers themselves. The hard days of getting the district organized and the program functioning are behind us, and conservation practices established on the land are increasing rapidly. In my own community the farmers and ranchers are behind the district program, and we are getting the job done. Curt Johnson, who lives in my community, is a cooperater and has done a lot of conservation work. Curt, what are some of your problems and what are you doing about them?

CURT JOHNSON: Well, you know one of the big problems we have in the Tularosa community is the shortage of irrigation water. One of the main reasons for this is that we have been wasting a lot of water because of poor irrigation practices. Our land isn't leveled properly, our runs are too long, and it takes two or three men to irrigate when it should require only one. I am convinced that the district conservationist and his staff are correct in saying that we can reduce our labor requirements by two-thirds and make our water go a lot further by properly leveling and bordering our fields, and by installing proper headgates and turnouts. I have just finished leveling and bordering two of my fields. Now all I have to do is turn the water in and watch until it's through, then turn it into the next border. It cost about \$15 to \$20 an acre to treat these fields in this manner, but I think it's worth it.

G. V. CLAYTON: I agree wholeheartedly with Mr. Johnson, and there are a number of other farmers in our community who are adopting these same practices. We are now treating one of my fields in this manner. In the mountain areas, the problem is somewhat different, so I would like to have our district secretary, Mr. Bell from High Rolls, and Mr. Henry and Mr. Hunt from La Luz, discuss the program for their communities. How about it, Mr. Bell?

C. M. BELL: Our farm land is all on hillsides and steep slopes in the narrow valleys. Our principal crops are fruits and vegetables. To properly utilize the water and protect the soil, it is necessary for us to either bench terrace the land or plant on the gradient, which we call graded contours. In our orchards, we maintain a good cover crop of grass and clover. It costs quite a bit to install proper practices on a hillside farm, but these practices pay dividends. Mr. W. O. Hunt, who lives in La Luz canyon, has a complete conservation program on his place. Mr. Hunt, I wish you would tell the group about your problems and the results you're getting from the program on your place.

W. O. HUNT: I have only 10 acres of cultivated land, and this is divided into a number of small fields. When we started the conservation program on the place, all of these fields, with the exception of one near the house, were badly gullied. These gullies were from 3 to 4 feet deep and 6 to 8 feet wide. This field near the house was so unlevel that it was practically impossible to irrigate. I knew that if I expected to stay here and make a living, something had to be done. It was either a matter of terracing and leveling the land and building up the fertility of the soil, or moving off and finding another farm. With the assistance of district representatives, the county agent, and equipment which was loaned me, we terraced the land, filled the gullies and put it in shape for irrigation. I then planted an orchard which

began to produce last year. During last year, my wife and I employed a man for a total of 60 days, doing all the rest of the work ourselves. It was tough going, but we couldn't get help. We produced and sold about \$3,000 worth of vegetables and fruit, and had enough feed stored up to carry our milk cows and hogs through the winter. If we hadn't put this program on the land, I wouldn't be here today, and the land would be ruined. Mr. C. C. Henry has a different program, because of different conditions. What are your ideas about conservation, Mr. Henry?

C. C. HENRY: When I bought my farm, most of the land had been practically ruined by erosion. The former owners told me that some of the fields had been abandoned because they wouldn't produce anything. I put the land on the contour, planted cover and green manure crops, and began to fill up and plug the arroyos. If everybody in this section would preserve their soil, build up its fertility and farm on the contour, or terrace where necessary, they wouldn't have much trouble making a living.

G. V. CLAYTON. Thanks, Mr. Henry. And now let's hear from a district supervisor, Mr. J. F. Mahill of Mayhill. His area has both dry land and irrigation farming, in addition to ranching. What are your chief problems, and how are your people handling the program in your section, Mr. Mahill?

J. F. MAHILL: In 1941, the floods did thousands of dollars of damage to farmlands along the Penasco and its tributaries. After these floods, we had to do a lot of emergency work--clearing the land of debris, constructing new river channels, installing river bank protection dikes, and reconstructing our diversions. On some fields, gravel, sand and other debris were piled up from 12 to 18 inches. Many of these fields have been reclaimed by clearing them of the debris, which was used in construction of soil saving dikes. On the dry land, the farmers have been doing a lot of terracing, and our

principal problem there is getting sufficient equipment to take care of the needs. Now let's hear from Mr. E. C. Calentine.

E. C. CALENTINE: I live in James canyon, which is typical of the Penasco River tributaries. All the good farming land was being cut up by small gullies. Now nearly all the farmers in James canyon, and many in Cox and other canyons, are getting their land terraced. The district conservationist and his staff have encouraged construction of graded terraces and diversions, which are doing the job in fine shape. As a result of my terraces, the gullies are under control, and last year my oats produced between 50 to 60 bushels per acre, as compared to an adjoining farm that was not terraced which didn't make more than 25 bushels per acre. We are all concerned about the big gullies that have cut out through our fields, but we believe that the proper treatment will take care of them. Don't you agree, Mr. Mahill?

J. F. MAHILL: I certainly do, and I want to say that I'm amazed at the amount of work that has been done in my section of the district to get conservation on the land.

G. V. CLAYTON: That sounds mighty good. And now, let's hear from Mr. W. A. Gage. He's another board member. Mr. Gage, tell us about your portion of the district, around Pinon.

W. A. GAGE: Well, we are just beginning to get our eyes open, and we have a lot of demands for conservation plans and other assistance this year. Our greatest need has been and still is some good educational demonstrations. Most of the work done in my portion of the district is around Weed, where the same type of program is being carried out as was mentioned by Mr. Mahill and Mr. Calentine. The demand for assistance is increasing in this community.

G. V. CLAYTON: We haven't heard anything from Ralph Morgan of Alamogordo. He's our district treasurer.

RALPH MORGAN: Well, there isn't much farming in my section of the district. What we do have consists of small farms in and around Alamogordo and La Luz. Some of the farmers are asking for assistance in reorganizing their irrigation systems and leveling their land for proper irrigation. Ranchers in my section are doing a lot of range improvement work--building tanks, constructing water diversions and seeding grasses. One of the biggest problems we have on the range land is that overstocking has killed out most of the grass. We have plans for reseeding from twelve to sixteen hundred acres. By the way, our district treasury is in pretty good shape. We have between \$2,000 and \$2,500, and I am glad the board is purchasing some equipment for use in our program.

G. V. CLAYTON: Thank you, Mr. Morgan. I am sure all the members of the board agree that we should proceed as quickly as possible to get needed equipment for our district. Now, let's hear from our district conservationist, Mr. James G. Wayne.

JAMES G. WAYNE: You gentlemen have covered the subject thoroughly, and about all I want to say is that I am very happy over the splendid interest you are showing in your conservation program. Largely through your efforts, the program is going over with a bang. The county agent has given us lots of assistance, and I would like to hear from him. Mr. Beaty.

LESLIE BEATY: I find farmers and ranchers all over Otero County are interested in the soil conservation program. You people are doing a mighty good job. Some of you have indicated that you are in need of educational work and demonstrations. Mr. Wayne and I are planning some educational tours and demonstrations this year, but before plans are completed, we will talk

further with you about them. I want to assure you that I am anxious to cooperate with you every way I can with your educational problems.

G. V. CLAYTON: Well, gentlemen, that just about concludes the reports on the Otero Soil Conservation District. If there is no further business, we'll stand adjourned.

MUSICAL BRIDGE.

NARRATOR: Thanks to all you gentlemen for helping us to present the story of the Otero Soil Conservation District.

And now, goodnight.

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