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# Acreage Reserve Participation in South Dakota Wheat Areas

Allan M. Severson

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# ACREAGE RESERVE PARTICIPATION

IN SOUTH DAKOTA WHEAT AREAS

ECONOMICS DEPARTMENT

AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION

SOUTH DAKOTA STATE COLLEGE

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ACREAGE RESERVE PARTICIPATION

IN

SOUTH DAKOTA WHEAT AREAS

by

Allan M. Severson  
Research Assistant

Economics Department  
Agricultural Experiment Station  
South Dakota State College  
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The Agricultural Act of 1956, which contains the Soil Bank Act, <sup>1/</sup> was enacted in the spring of 1956. The soil bank program is divided into two phases, the acreage reserve and the conservation reserve.

The acreage reserve is available to farmers with acreage allotments for the basic commodities, which are wheat and corn in South Dakota. The farmer takes part in the acreage reserve program by signing a one-year agreement with his Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Committee (hereafter referred to as the ASC Committee) and reducing his acreage below the assigned allotment on his farm. In return for taking the land out of production, the farmer will receive a payment for each acre below his allotment.

The conservation reserve is a long-term program to adjust production and increase the conservation of soil, water and forest resources in the nation. The length of the contracts varies from a minimum of three years to a maximum of 15 years depending on the type of operation and practice adopted. Through this program the farmer has an opportunity to receive government assistance in carrying out conservation practices on his farm. <sup>2/</sup>

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<sup>1/</sup> United States Congress, 84th, Second Session, Agricultural Act of 1956, May 26, 1956, Public Law 540, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., 1956, pp. 1-11.

<sup>2/</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Information, The Soil Bank's Conservation Reserve, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., January 1957, pp. 1-2.



### Objectives of Soil Bank Program

The basic purpose of the soil bank program was to reduce land inputs seeded to surplus crops, thus reducing the production of surplus crops. The objectives of the program in 1956, as stated by the United States Department of Agriculture were as follows: <sup>3/</sup>

1. The soil bank is a major national effort to reduce the flow of surplus commodities into government and non-government storage.
2. The soil bank will increase on-the-farm conservation, leading to better use of natural resources and the building up of seriously eroded land.
3. The soil bank is designed to improve the income for the individual farmer.

### Acreage Reserve Program

The acreage reserve is a temporary program to reduce the production of wheat, cotton, corn, rice, tobacco, and peanuts. This program is available to any farmer in South Dakota who raises wheat, and to all farmers who raise corn and who are located in the commercial corn area.

Some specific benefits intended for farmers who participated in the 1957 acreage reserve program according to the United State Department of Agriculture were as follows: <sup>4/</sup>

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<sup>3/</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Information, The Soil Bank Program, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., September 1956, p. 1.

<sup>4/</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, The Soil Bank: 1957 Acreage Reserve, United States Government Printing Office, January 1957, p. 1.

1. Earn special payments to protect their current income while land is in the reserve and out of crop production
2. Get the payments for the reserve acres even if they encounter a bad growing season.
3. Improve the retired acres with cover crops which may qualify for regular Agricultural Conservation Program (ACP) assistance.
4. Be in a position to reduce their overall investment in the year's farm operations.
5. By cooperating with other producers, cut down burdensome surpluses and improve market prices.

#### Agencies to Administer the Program

The Commodity Credit Corporation and the Commodity Stabilization Service, agencies of the Department of Agriculture, have general responsibility for administering funds used in the program. State, county and community ASC committeemen are administering the program to farm operators within their areas. The county committeemen receive regulations and instructions from the Department of Agriculture to explain the program to farmers, sign contracts, check compliance and make payments to farmers.

#### Other Farm Programs Continue

The soil bank is designed to supplement the existing agricultural programs. Price support programs, acreage allotments and marketing quotas for some crops are in effect; and their administration is closely tied to the soil bank.

#### Purpose and Scope of This Study

There is a continuous need for appraisal of farm programs. Farmers, administrators, and legislators are concerned with means of achieving farm policy goals. This requires information regarding the effects of present farm programs. The total effect of the 1957 acreage reserve program is

complex and beyond the scope of this study. However, administrators' and farmers' opinions about present programs are of interest and help point the way toward improvements.

#### Wheat Acreage Reserve

This study is limited to the wheat acreage reserve program in South Dakota for 1957. The acreage reserve program was enacted too late in the spring of 1956 to have full application. However, the special program for 1956 did permit many farmers to place crops already planted into the reserve and receive compensation. Starting with the 1956 fall seeded wheat, the 1957 wheat acreage reserve was fully implemented and gave all eligible farmers an opportunity to plan in advance to participate.

Each state is allocated an allotment from the national allotment which was 55 million acres for the crop year 1956-1957. <sup>5/</sup> The county in turn receives an allotment, the amount of which restricts the wheat acreage that may be placed in the acreage reserve. This county wheat allotment is scaled down to the farms within the county, based on the cropping history of wheat on the individual farm. <sup>6/</sup> Farmers raising spring wheat may place as much as 50 per cent of their farm allotment, or 50 acres, whichever is larger, into the reserve. One hundred per cent of the allotment is the maximum for winter wheat.

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<sup>5/</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, Commodity Stabilization Service, Compilation of Statutes, Agriculture Handbook No. 113, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., January 1957, p. 45.

<sup>6/</sup> The allotment for each farm within a county is based on the acreage seeded for the production of wheat during the ten calendar years immediately preceding the calendar year in which the allotment is determined. Adjustments are to be made for acreage diverted under previous agricultural adjustment programs, abnormal weather conditions, crop-rotation practices, types of soil, topography and trends in acreage planted to wheat.



The payment each farmer will receive for retiring an acre of eligible cropland is based on a unit rate for wheat in his county multiplied by an average of past yields on his farm. <sup>7/</sup> The national average unit rate for wheat in 1957 was \$1.20 a bushel. This unit rate will vary in different states and counties.

The acreage reserve contracts were signed on a first-come-first-served basis, not to exceed the maximum, until the total county allocation was used. If additional funds became available, some farmers could put additional land in the acreage reserve over their initial allotments.

#### Wheat Acreage Reserve Goal in 1957

A national goal was established to place about 27 per cent or 15 million acres of the national wheat allotment into the wheat acreage reserve. <sup>8/</sup> In all counties in South Dakota, 27.2 per cent of the 1957 wheat allotment was placed in the acreage reserve; however, participation varied throughout the state. The county with the highest participation had 65.2 per cent of the wheat allotment diverted to the acreage reserve, while the county with the lowest participation had only 3.6 per cent. <sup>9/</sup> The county which had the lowest participation was included in this study.

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<sup>7/</sup> The average of past yields on each farm is called a "normal yield" for payment purposes in the acreage reserve.

<sup>8/</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Information, The Soil Bank Program, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>9/</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, State Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Office, (Private Communication), Huron, South Dakota, August 1957.

### Similar Studies on Farm Programs

Studies have been conducted to evaluate and to obtain farmers' reactions on other phases of the farm program. The soil bank program is relatively new and very little research has reached the manuscript stage at the time of writing.

Schnittker, Bray and Bowlen of Kansas conducted a study in 1955 on Kansas Farmers' Views on the Wheat Price Support and Control Program. <sup>10/</sup> This study concluded that the quota program had reduced wheat production in Kansas for the crop years 1954 and 1955. The diverted acreage, however, had increased the planting of non-allotment crops; namely, grain sorghum, barley and hay. The farmers also felt that the government program, in the past three years, had been of very little value to the "small" farmer.

A North Central Farm Management Research Committee made a similar study on Farmers' Reactions to Acreage Allotments. <sup>11/</sup> This committee found that most wheat farmers complied with their allotment; however, this differed throughout the states studied (Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, and Kansas were included in this survey). The reasons the farmers gave for complying with their allotments were the desire to avoid disrupting rotations and fields, and the need for wheat to use as feed.

Another study conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture <sup>12/</sup> revealed that acreage allotments, marketing quotas and the associated price support program had little influence on total farm production in 1954 and

<sup>10/</sup> John A. Schnittker, J.O. Bray and B.J. Bowlen, Kansas Farmers' Views on the Wheat Price Support and Control Program, Kansas Agricultural Experiment Station, Agricultural Economics Report No. 77, Manhattan, Kansas, February 1957.

<sup>11/</sup> North Central Farm Management Research Committee, Farmers' Reactions to Acreage Allotments, Kentucky Agricultural Experiment Station, Lexington, Kentucky, December 1955, pp. 6-7.

<sup>12/</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, Effects of Acreage-Allotment Programs, Production Research Report No. 3, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., June 1956.

and 1955. The allotments had tended to encourage yeild-increasing practices on diverted acreage. Very little diverted land was established to conservation practices because of the desire to raise the more profitable allotment crops. Summer fallow was the most common use for diverted acreage; however, feed grains were raised in some areas. In the wheat area, weather conditions seemed to affect the production of wheat more than acreage allotments and marketing quotas. The study further concluded that wheat producers did in general comply with their allotments in 1954 and 1955.

#### Studies on Acreage Reserve

The soil bank program was in its first full year of implementation in 1957; therefore, not much major research on this program has been completed. At the present time one study in Kansas has been published. <sup>13/</sup> Another has been conducted in Indiana, <sup>14/</sup> but at the present time it is being summarized and no information is available.

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<sup>13/</sup> John A. Schnittker and Patrick E. Smythe, An Appraisal at the Acreage Reserve Program for Wheat, Agricultural Economics Department Report No. 79, Kansas State College, Manhattan, Kansas, March 1958.

<sup>14/</sup> J. C. Bottum, Information on Soil Bank Research, (Private Communication), Agricultural Economics Department, Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana, August 1957.



## CHAPTER II

### OBJECTIVES AND PROCEDURES

#### Objectives

The two main objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To identify the obstacles of participation for the 1957 acreage reserve program in the South Dakota wheat area.
2. To identify the factors which encouraged farmers to participate in the 1957 acreage reserve in the South Dakota wheat area.

#### Problems

The questions regarding acreage reserve participation to which answers were sought in this study are as follows:

1. How important is the failure of tenants and landlords to reach acceptable agreements over the share of payments and terms of contracts in causing non-participation in the acreage reserve program?
2. Do diversified farms show less participation than grain farms?
3. Do farmers who use a large number of soil conserving practices participate less than those who use few soil conserving practices?
4. Are comparatively large farm units in a better position to participate than the comparatively small farms?
5. How does the problem of assigning normal yields by the local ASC officials affect participation?
6. How important is difficulty in understanding the acreage reserve system in reducing participation?
7. Do poor farm operators and farmers living on poorer grades of land participate more than the better operators and farmers having better soils?

8. Do older farmers tend to use the acreage reserve plan more than the younger farmers?
9. Does shortage of farm labor cause some farmers to participate?
10. Do poor crop prospects before the time of the acreage reserve sign-up cause many farmers to participate?

### Procedure

The area selected for this investigation included nine counties located in the major wheat producing section of South Dakota. The area studied was located outside the commercial corn area so the only eligible commodity for the acreage reserve was wheat.

Six counties were selected in the major spring wheat area and three counties in the major winter wheat producing area. Area I and Area II represent the spring wheat area while Area III represents the winter wheat section of South Dakota (see Figure 1 in Chapter III). The spring wheat area was divided because of the differences in economic and physical characteristics of these two areas (see Chapter III). The selection of counties in each area was based on the highest number of acres planted with wheat for the years 1955 and 1956. <sup>15/</sup>

Three members of each county ASC staff were interviewed to ascertain their reaction to factors affecting participation in the acreage reserve program. The members of the ASC staff interviewed consisted of the chairman, vice chairman, and the office manager in each county. <sup>16/</sup>

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<sup>15/</sup> South Dakota Agricultural Statistics, South Dakota Crop and Livestock Reporting Service, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, March 1957. pp. 16, 19, 25.

<sup>16/</sup> From here on in this study, these officials will be referred to as the county committeemen.

County committee members were selected for two main reasons. (1) Time and expense involved eliminated a more comprehensive farmer study. (2) The questionnaire used was pretested on farmers, and some farmers were not well enough informed about the acreage reserve regulations and were not cognizant of their particular situation. The county committees of each county are responsible for administering the program to the individual farmer. These officials explain the acreage reserve program to each farmer as much as time permits during the sign-up period, sign the contracts, and administer the program. Several committeemen mentioned that they had been able to work with most farmers individually. These committeemen are elected by farmers and are required to be actively engaged in farming, with the exception of the office manager. These officials are usually located in different parts of the county so they also are familiar with general farmer attitude throughout the county. From this, it was assumed that these officials should be aware of the general problems affecting farmers within their counties.

The questionnaire used in this study consisted of three main parts (see Appendix A). First, some questions were asked pertaining to specific hypotheses by free-response questions. Secondly, a more restrictive type of question was used to classify and summarize the material discussed in the free-response phase. Finally, each committeeman interviewed was asked to list and to rank in order to importance what he considered the obstacles to acreage reserve participation in his county. Other factors were also recorded and summarized, provided they affected acreage reserve participation. The free-response and restricted questions provided the main information for this study and did not lend themselves to simple tabulation. The

information obtained from these questions is summarized in Chapters IV, V, and VI. The final questions, along with other information gathered in the questionnaire, provided a ranking of the obstacles to acreage reserve participation which is shown in Chapter IV.

## CHAPTER III

### CHARACTERISTICS OF AREA STUDIED

The counties surveyed in this study include Brown, Edmunds, and Spink east of the Missouri River, and Corson, Perkins, Dewey, Lyman, Jones, and Bennett west of the River. These counties form three distinct areas, divided on the basis of economic and physical differences in land utilization, size, and tenancy, climate, topography, and soils, as follows (see Figure 1).

Area I        Brown, Edmunds and Spink Counties

Area II       Corson, Dewey and Perkins Counties

Area III      Bennett, Lyman and Jones Counties

#### Area I (Brown, Edmunds and Spink Counties)

#### Economic Factors: Farm Land Utilization, Size and Tenancy

In this northeastern wheat area, spring wheat occupies the largest acreage of any field crop (see Appendix B, Table I). Highly diversified, this area also is suitable for other cash grains as well as for beef cattle, sheep, hogs, poultry, and dairy cattle (see Appendix B, Table II). A relatively high percentage of land in the area is cropland, ranging from a high of 77 percent in Spink County to the low of 65.2 percent in Edmunds (see Appendix B, Table IV).

Farms in Area I range in size from an average of 723 acres in Edmunds County to 580 acres in Brown. The number of tenanted farms in this area is higher than in either of the other two, with 30 percent of the land in Spink County, 26.6 percent in Edmunds, and 22.8 percent in Brown operated entirely by non-owners. The percentage of farms having part tenancy and part ownership ranges from a high of 80.5 in Edmunds County to a low of 60 percent in Brown. The relatively small farms in this area are adequately

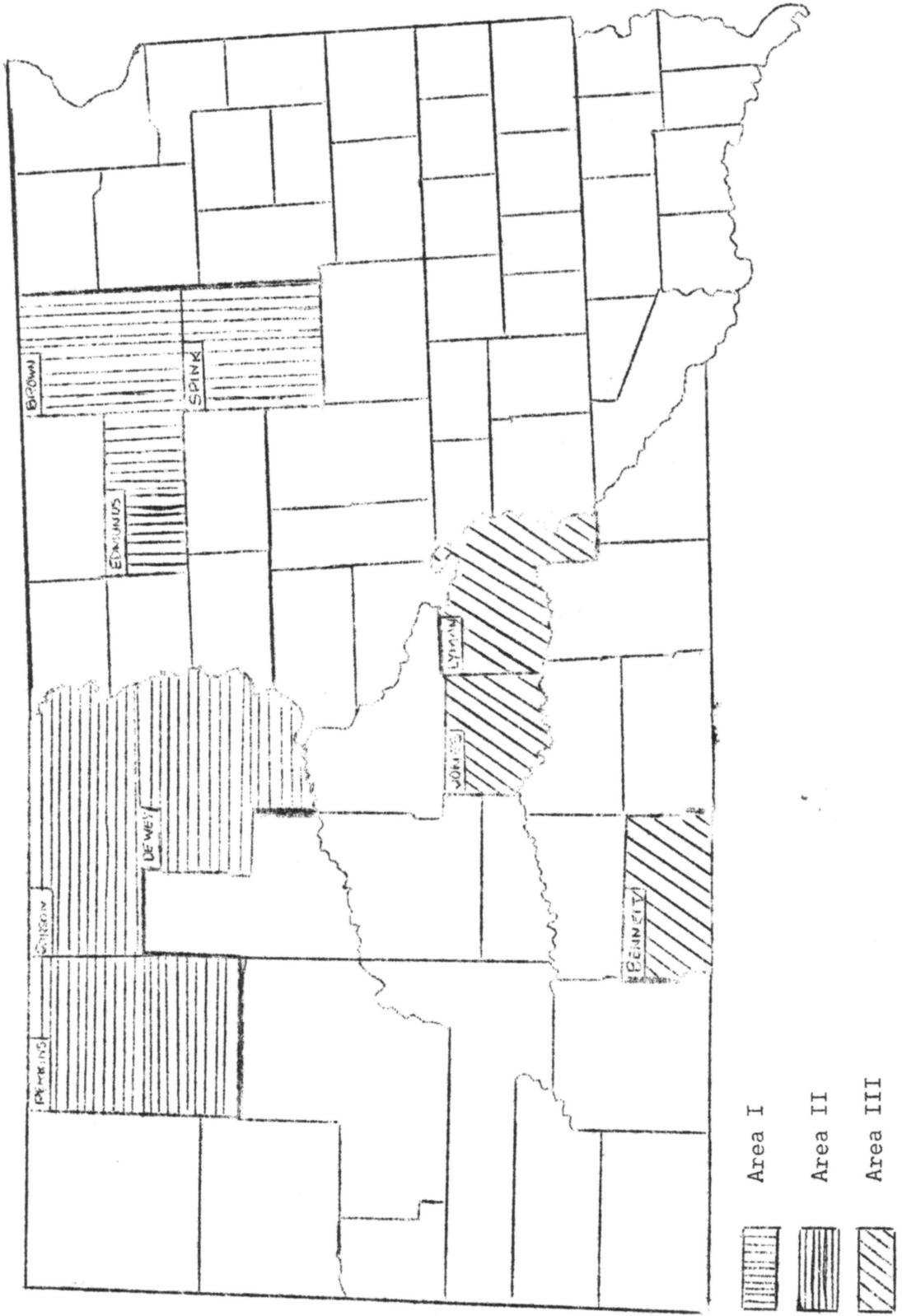


Figure 1. Location of Counties and Areas Included in Acreage Reserve Study, July, 1957.

fenced, an important factor affecting acreage reserve participation which will be discussed in Chapter IV. Because of the large number of tenanted farms, conflict between tenant and landlord regarding acreage reserve participation was a serious problem in this area.

#### Physical Factors: Climate, Topography and Soils

The climate in this northeastern spring wheat area varies from dry in the west to sub-humid in the east. Summers are rather short; winters often long and severe. The normal growing season ranges from 120 to 140 days, and annual precipitation is normally from 16 to 20 inches. Topographically, Brown and Spink Counties lie in the bed of glacial Lake Dakota and are relatively flat. The glacial plains of Edmunds County are generally undulating with slopes steep enough to discourage cultivation in the extreme west and parts of the north. The soils of Spink and Brown Counties are Chernozem, while in Edmunds they are primarily Chestnut. In general, the soils are clay and sandy loams, well adapted to small grains. In some isolated level areas drainage is poor, and this mixture of poorer with better soils creates a problem in measuring productivity of land for the acreage reserve program.

#### Area II (Corson, Dewey and Perkins Counties)

#### Economic Factors: Farm Land Utilization, Size and Tenancy

In this northwestern area, wheat covers the largest acreage, and spring wheat is a major type grown. Somewhat less diversified than Area I, farming in this area depends less upon cash grain crops and more upon livestock. Only about one-fourth of the land is cropland. Wild hay is the most important crop, but alfalfa and other tame hay crops have increased in importance recently. Summer fallow takes up roughly one-third of the cultivated land and has been increasing since 1950.

The average size of farms in this area is larger than in the other two, and ranges from 2,868 acres in Dewey County to 1,957 in Perkins. Tenancy is highest in Corson at 21.6 percent, and lowest in Perkins at 11.1 percent. Leasing of Indian land accounts for many of the farms having rented land. With this leased land there is no landlord-tenant problem in acreage reserve participation because the land is leased on a cash basis.

#### Physical Factors: Climate, Topography and Soils

The climate of this northwestern wheat area is dry except in the spring and summer months when three-fourths of the moisture falls. Normal annual precipitation runs from 14 to 16 inches, while the growing season usually is between 130 and 140 days. Along the Moreau and Grand Rivers the topography is undulating while in the divide between them it ranges from undulating to almost level. Most of the wheat is produced in the divide. Area II contains Chestnut soils, of which the Morton Association, soils developed in loam material, is the most productive of wheat. This soil is predominant in north Corson County and central Perkins County. In some areas the sandy and loamy soils are subject to wind erosion during winter months if not protected with a vegetative cover, and this served as an obstacle to acreage reserve participation.

#### Area III (Bennett, Jones and Lyman Counties)

#### Economic Factors: Farm Land Utilization, Size and Tenancy

Wheat is the largest of the cash grain crops in this central and southwestern area, and winter wheat is of the greatest importance. Wild hay occupies the largest acreage, but other cash grain crops, corn, oats and barley, are also important. Crop land varies from 40.4 percent in Lyman County to 29.9 percent in Bennett. Bennett also has the highest percentage (21.8) of summer fallow.



The average size of farms in this area falls between the other two. Jones County has the largest with 2,068 acres, and Lyman the smallest with 1,558 acres. The tenancy rate is highest in Bennett and Lyman Counties where about 75 percent of the farms have part ownership and tenancy.

#### Physical Factors: Climate, Topography and Soils

The climate is semi-arid with somewhat longer summers than Areas I and II. The normal growing season is also longer, ranging from 160 to 190 days. Rainfall averages from 16 to 18 inches annually. The topography in this area ranges from gently undulating to steeply rolling. In places the hills are occasionally broken by steep-sided buttes. Along the Bad and White Rivers the land is more rolling, while farther back it is more undulating. Ranching is dominant in the hilly areas, while field crops are grown on the level to undulating land. The soils in Lyman and Jones Counties are silty clay loam, silty clay, and clay. In Bennett County the soils are the more sandy Valentine and Rosebud Associations.

#### Acreage Reserve Participation in 1957

Of the nine counties included in this study, five counties were below the state average of 27.2 per cent of the wheat allotment in the acreage reserve while four were above the average (see Table I). Bennett County in the south central West River winter wheat Area III, was low with 3.6 per cent, while Dewey County, just as far west but in the north West River Area II, was high with 51.1 per cent of the county wheat allotment in the acreage reserve. By area, Areas I and III (in the northeast and south central) were below the state average and Area II was above with 40.9 per cent of total wheat allotment in acreage reserve. Area II was also highest in the number

Table I. A Comparison of 1957 Wheat Acreage Reserve Participation in Nine Selected Counties, By Area ✓

County and Area	Number of Wheat Farms	Per cent of Wheat Farms in Acreage Reserve	Number of Acreage Reserve Contracts	Per cent of Wheat Allotment in Acreage Reserve
Area I				
Brown	2616	34.2	894	24.7
Edmunds	1555	50.1	779	33.3
Spink	2475	36.1	894	20.7
Total Area I	6646	38.60	2567	25.0
Area II				
Corson	934	53.1	496	34.4
Dewey	502	60.9	306	51.1
Perkins	928	61.8	574	42.0
Total Area II	2364	58.2	1376	40.9
Area III				
Bennett	288	10.8	31	3.6
Jones	328	30.8	101	14.8
Lyman	535	50.4	270	19.9
Total Area III	1151	34.9	402	14.6

✓ United States Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Office, loc. cit.

of wheat farms participating in the acreage reserve with 58.2 per cent. Areas I and III had 38.6 per cent and 34.9 per cent, respectively. Of the wheat farms participating in the acreage reserve, Perkins County was highest with 61.8 per cent.

## CHAPTER IV

### OBSTACLES TO ACREAGE RESERVE PARTICIPATION IN NINE SELECTED WHEAT COUNTIES IN SOUTH DAKOTA AS VIEWED BY 27 COUNTY ASC COMMITTEEMEN

Many factors have tended to discourage farmers from participating in the wheat acreage reserve in the nine counties studied. Some of the major obstacles set forth in this study, as viewed by county ASC committeemen, are listed below. These obstacles are listed in general with the most important first and are as follows:

1. Farmers anticipated a greater return from cropping the land rather than participating in the acreage reserve due to the low normal yields assigned to their farms.
2. The high depreciation cost on machinery which stands idle or has only limited use is costly to the farmer and discourages participation in the acreage reserve.
3. Small allotments make it difficult for some small operators and diversified operators to participate in the acreage reserve.
4. Some farmers found it unprofitable to isolate, or fence off, land in order to qualify for acreage reserve participation.
5. Some farmers expressed a general feeling against a government program--the feeling that the government is gaining dominance over them, and a hesitation to accept a new farm program.
6. Tenants and landlords failed to reach acceptable agreements over division of payments and the terms of the acreage reserve contract.
7. Farmers were discouraged by uncertainty regarding what per cent of their allotment could be placed in the acreage reserve at the time of initial sign-up.

These obstacles are not separate and distinct. All the

problems dealt with under this group are interrelated. In some cases, the problems of acreage reserve participation bring out broader farm problems and the complexities of effective farm programs.

#### Farmers Anticipated a Greater Return from Cropping Land

The payment the farmer receives for diverting cropland to the acreage reserve is determined by a unit rate multiplied by the normal yield for his farm. The unit rate is about 60 per cent of the county support rate for wheat. This rate deducts 40 per cent for production expenses plus any additional expenses the farmer may incur by participation in the acreage reserve. The only required expense in the 1957 acreage reserve program was to isolate the land and control noxious weeds.

#### Acreage Reserve Unit Rate

Twenty-three committeemen thought that raising the unit rate by ten per cent would have increased participation. However, none of these committeemen considered the 60 per cent rate unsatisfactory or had ever heard any farmer state that the unit rate was too low.

The unit rate did not seem as important to the farmer as the normal yield in determining his payment. The farmer in general did not know how much his production expenses were for wheat; therefore, he accepted the rate as being satisfactory. The farmer felt, however, that he did know what his yields had been over the past years on different tracts of land. A more psychological feeling of being cheated was involved when the farmer received an assigned normal yield

below what his actual yield had been over the past few years.

Four committeemen felt that an increase in the rate by ten per cent would have had no effect on participation.

#### Normal Yields Defined

A normal yield per acre for wheat in each county is determined. The statutes state that:

The normal yield shall be the average yield per acre for such commodity during the ten calendar years immediately preceding the calendar year in which such yield is determined. If on account of drought, flood, insect pests, plant disease, or other uncontrollable natural causes, the yield in any year of such ten-year period is less than 75 per cent of the average (computed without regard to such year), such year shall be eliminated in calculating the normal yield per acre. 17/

Normal yields must also be adjusted for abnormal weather conditions and trends in yields. If in any year, the yield is above 75 per cent and below 90 per cent, such yield shall be raised to 90 per cent. Any year with a yield over 111 per cent of the ten-year average shall be lowered to 111 per cent. 18/

From the county normal yield, each township or district is assigned a normal yield based on the productivity of the area. The average of all normal yields assigned to a district or township must equal the county average. The township committeemen portion out the normal yield to the individual farmer and the average of all

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17/ United States Department of Agriculture, Commodity Stabilization Service, Compilation of Statutes, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., June 1957, p. 9.

18/ John Gray, State Agricultural Conservation and Stabilization Office, (Private Communication), Huron, South Dakota, July 1957.

normal yields must equal the township average.

#### Importance of Normal Yields

Low normal yields were considered obstacles to acreage reserve participation by the county committeemen interviewed. Many committeemen felt the success of the acreage reserve program rested on normal yields.

The normal yield becomes an important issue with the individual farmer when it serves as a variable in determining his payment. Not in all cases did the committeemen, personally, feel that the normal yields in the county were too low; however, the farmers in general felt that they were too low. When the normal yield is low in the farmer's estimation, he prefers to crop the land rather than participate in the acreage reserve. Twenty-six of the 27 committeemen felt that low normal yields had been a major obstacle in acreage reserve participation.

The estimates used in preparing the normal yield are compiled by the South Dakota Federal Crop and Livestock Reporting Service. The estimates are obtained by random sampling of South Dakota farmers and census data acquired annually by local tax assessors. This perhaps is one of the basic problems determining the success of the acreage reserve program as brought out in this study. Both ASC state and county officials expressed the opinion that farmers felt that the census data collected by the tax assessors was to be used for tax purposes. Thus, if this feeling existed, farmers probably did not report their actual yields and consequently, were penalized in the acreage reserve where the payment is based on normal yields.

### Variation of Normal Yields Between Farms, Townships and Counties

All 27 committeemen interviewed in the nine counties felt that normal yields were difficult to adjust to individual farms. The average of district normal yields must equal the average normal yield assigned to the county. (A district usually consists of two townships and has as committeemen a chairman, vice-chairman and one regular member.) The township committeemen estimate a normal yield for each farm. These estimates are to be based on community check yields, productivity of the wheat land on a particular farm, usual farm practices of the operator, past records, and abnormal conditions in the past that might distort yield histories. The average yield assigned to all farms must equal the district average assigned by the county. The assignment of normal yields to individual farms by the township committeemen seemed to be one of the most disputed situations in the acreage reserve program.

Some of the specific reasons why assigning normal yields caused non-participation in the wheat reserve, as viewed by 19 county committeemen, are given in Table II.

In many cases, the township committeemen did not have sufficient information to judge the individual farms and relied mostly on "good judgment." The common practice seemed to be that the better farms received three to five bushels above the average normal yield for the district, while poor farms received three to five bushels below the district average. The normal yields were kept as close to the average as possible to avoid controversy from the farmer. If the normal yield deviated too much from the average, the individual farmer felt cheated.



Table II. Specific Reasons Why 19 County Committeemen Considered the Assignment of Normal Yields to Individual Farms a Cause for Non-participation in the Acreage Reserve in Nine Selected Counties in South Dakota, 1957.\*

Reason	Committeemen expressing each reason**
Normal yields were not adjusted to individual farms to truly reflect the productivity of the land.	12
Farms across county and township and/or district boundaries received higher normal yields	6
Neighbor farms received higher normal yields.	5
Change in operatorship on farms in past few years caused low normal yield for present operator.	2

\*Eight committeemen considered the assignment of normal yields difficult; however, they felt it had not caused non-participation.

\*\* Some committeemen stated more than one reason.

A one or two bushel difference higher for a neighbor was considered unfair by the farmer receiving the lower normal yield. Five committeemen stated that higher normal yields assigned to some neighbors had caused non-participation in their county.

The township committeemen are active farmers living within their respective townships. Local pressure upon the committeemen becomes great if farmers feel there is too much spread in their normal yields. One township committeeman reported to the county committeeman that "If I set the normal yield right in my township, I couldn't live out there."

Two committeemen reported a situation where the township committeemen had set their own normal yields highest in the township and adjusted the remaining farms lower. This situation tended to cause antagonism towards the soil bank program and discouraged participation. This type of adjustment gave the farmer the feeling that his normal yield was what some administrative officer's intuition thought it should be and further upheld the farmer's opinion that his normal yield was too low.

In one county, changes of operators had affected a few farmers. New operators took over land where normal yields had been established in part by poorer operators. The township committeemen did have the authority to make the necessary adjustments but were reluctant to adjust more than to bring normal yields in line with neighboring farms.

Differences of normal yield across township and political boundaries also caused non-participation. Six committeemen stated this had prevented some farmers from participation in the reserve. This occurred particularly where counties bordered other states and where bordering counties had higher yields. One county obtained very little participation along one county boundary because across the county line, farms had a three to five bushel higher normal yield. The farmers, located in the county with the lower normal yields, considered this unfair and preferred not to participate in the reserve. This problem existed some between townships; however, the coordination between township and county committeemen generally adjusted this to an undisputable difference.

Nineteen out of 27 committeemen considered the assignment of normal yields as a major factor in preventing farmers from participating in the acreage reserve.

#### Farmers Willing to Take Chance

The counties studied in this survey are generally located in a high risk area, especially Area II and Area III. The committeemen stated that the farmers expect poor crop years but hope to "make it up" on the better years. This seemed to be an important factor connected with acreage reserve participation. As one committeeman stated, "The farmers expect bad years and good years and hope to make their profit in the good years. If the farmer weren't a gambler, he wouldn't be farming. He never knows when he will have a good year and has to take the chance." When the normal yields are low, the farmer becomes more reluctant to participate in the reserve and more willing to accept the risk of raising a wheat crop.

#### Favorable Crop Conditions in 1955-56 Crop Year Created Optimistic View

In general, all the areas studied suffered from drought in the crop year of 1955-1956. However, in some instances, favorable crop conditions in local areas during 1956 served as an obstacle to acreage reserve participation in 1957. Committeemen in two counties cited examples of certain areas within their counties where this had been a major factor.

A portion of two counties received sufficient moisture to have a normal crop. This portion had the same type of farming operations as the remaining area of the counties. However, the 1957 acreage

reserve participation in that moist area was the lowest in the counties. Bennett County, while suffering from drought during the entire 1956 crop year, received moisture in August of 1956. This moisture was sufficient to partially restore sub-soil moisture. In this county, participation was the lowest of any county surveyed, and only 31 acreage reserve contracts were signed with only 1,698 acres retired from production. This amounted to only 3.6 per cent of the county's wheat allotment placed in the acreage reserve. Under these conditions the farmer anticipated a greater return by cropping land than by participating in the acreage reserve.

#### High Depreciation Cost on Machinery

Farm machinery has increased as a cost to farmers in their farming operations. Next to land, farm machinery is the highest investment many farmers have in their operations. The high depreciation cost on farm machinery continues as one of the high costs of farming. With improved technology and larger farms, the farmer is required to have more equipment to carry on a profitable operation. The committeemen interviewed felt that most smaller units require and have more machinery than they economically can support under present prices. Several committeemen reported that farmers wanted additional land to utilize their machinery rather than to take land out of production by placing it in the acreage reserve.

In Area I, where more intensive and diversified farming exists, the high investment in machinery did not appear to be an important obstacle in preventing farmers from participating in the

acreage reserve. In this area the farmer could retire all or a portion of wheat in the reserve and still have other alternatives in non-allotment crops to raise. In Areas II and III, across the Missouri River to the west and south, the main cash crop is wheat and few other alternative crops are considered profitable. The farms in this area are larger and more costly and larger machinery is needed to perform the necessary operations. Thus, diverting wheat land to the acreage reserve caused much of the machinery to stand idle.

The committeemen in three counties located in Areas II and III considered the high investment in machinery a major obstacle to acreage reserve participation.

Small Allotments Make It Difficult for Some Small Operators  
and Diversified Operators to Participate

Small allotments on some farms were an obstacle to acreage reserve participation for two major reasons. First, the small farm units were affected and secondly, the committeemen stated that many diversified farmers had small allotments due to the increased use of feed crops in their rotation over the past years. This was especially true if the farmer had adopted these practices prior to the reestablishment of allotments in 1954.

All committeemen stated that the larger operators were tending to use the acreage reserve more; however, they listed some qualifications. First, the smaller wheat farmer with a 50 acre wheat allotment or less, had benefited by the 50 acre maximum provision. Secondly,

some larger operators found it prohibitive to participate due to the high investment in machinery. The committeemen further stated that the large operators participated in general with about 50 per cent of their allotment. The smaller operator ordinarily would place all his allotment in the acreage reserve or not participate at all. The wheat farmer with a 50 acre allotment or less could qualify for the 50 acre maximum provision. This provision stated that 50 acres or 50 per cent of the wheat allotment could be placed in the acreage reserve at the initial sign-up. <sup>19/</sup> Thus, the farmer with a 50 acre allotment or less could participate with all of his allotment if he so desired.

More than the exact size of the allotment, individual farm operations and other economic factors seemed to be important. Farmers with small allotments would participate if the financial position of the operator would allow him to accept the acreage reserve payments. Some committeemen, likewise, stated that farmers with smaller allotments were in general more in financial distress and had to take the chance of a favorable crop in order to continue farming. In certain areas, where severe drought had existed for the past few years, the size of the allotment became unimportant. The "sure" income in the acreage reserve was the most important consideration by the farmer.

Other factors that the committeemen stressed included:

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<sup>19/</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, Commodity Stabilization Service, County Acreage Reserve Handbook, op. cit., p. 4.

(1) the proportion of the allotment that could be placed in the acreage reserve, (2) the position of wheat in the crop rotation, and (3) plans for raising other small grain. If the wheat ground was located in an area where it could be isolated and the entire allotment could be designated, the farmer was in a more favorable position to participate. On the other hand, if less than 100 per cent of the allotment was retired and the land was difficult to isolate for compliance, the farmer preferred to raise wheat on the entire allotment.

Farm operators with small wheat allotments participated most where they could place all their allotment in the reserve and not have the inconvenience of raising wheat in 1957. This was most common in the northwest spring wheat Area I where more diversification in farming exists, and the average size of farms is smaller. Some farmers in this area qualified to place all of their allotment in the acreage reserve under the 50 acre maximum provision. The farmer's opinion of his normal yield would also influence the decision.

The diversified farmer, through the increased use of grasses and legumes and other feed crops, had already reduced the size of his wheat allotment. Some committeemen felt that the diversified farmer used wheat as a cash crop and preferred to raise wheat over participating in the reserve. This type of farmer had insurance features in his livestock and other non-allotment crops and preferred to take the risk on producing wheat. Other committeemen felt that the diversified farmer with small allotments participated more because

of the future use of hay crops which could be established on the acreage reserve land. (Regular ACP payments can be received for establishing vegetative cover on diverted land.) The small operator who depended on wheat for the major source of income did not have a future alternative use for hay.

#### Some Farmers Found It Unprofitable To Isolate Land

The acreage reserve regulations specify that designated land could not be grazed after December 31, 1956, or the date the agreement is filed, whichever was later, and prior to January 1, 1958. Exceptions were where consent to graze the acreage reserve was given by the Secretary of Agriculture because of natural disaster. The land could have been grazed if no vegetation existed on the designated area or if the only growth present for grazing was the remains of a 1956 crop. 20/

In Area II, the committeemen considered this as one of the major obstacles affecting acreage reserve sign-up. A considerable amount of sandy loam soils and light loamy soils is found in this area. These soils are subject to erosion when summer fallowed and carried through the winter with no vegetative cover. If the farmers participated in the acreage reserve, they desired to establish a vegetative cover to prevent erosion as well as increase soil productivity and tilth. With this vegetative cover on the reserve land,

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20/ United States Department of Agriculture, Commodity Stabilization Service, County Acreage Reserve Handbook, op. cit., p. 10.



the farmer would be obligated to protect the land from grazing.

The average size of farms in Area II is larger than the other two areas studied. The farms are characterized by a higher percentage of pasture than cropland. The area surrounding the cropland is generally used for grazing after the harvesting of the crop. Thus, the farmer was obligated to fence the acreage reserve land if he were to participate. The cost of fencing or isolating the land was considered prohibitive under the present acreage reserve payments.

In Area I, the situation was somewhat different. Here more diversified farming exists and the farmers desired to use the acreage reserve to establish grasses or legumes. The farms are smaller and most cropland is isolated by a fence from pasture land. On some farms, the problem of protecting acreage reserve land established to vegetative cover was encountered. Many farmers desired to graze their grain stubble, haylands and corn stalks in the fall when the harvest would be completed. In some cases to accomplish this, the farmer would have had to fence the diverted acres. The expense involved in fencing with no extra payment prevented farmers in this situation from participating.

In Area III summer fallowing has become a common practice in the farmers' rotation. The land designated in the acreage reserve could be summer fallowed; thus, grazing was permitted on the retired land as long as no vegetative growth appeared.

#### General Feeling Against A Government Program

One committeeman considered the opposition of farmers to

government programs in general a major obstacle to acreage reserve participation. Committeemen in two other counties ranked this second most important. In Area III, a distinct lack of interest was observed concerning the soil bank program. The committeemen felt that the previous farm programs of marketing quotas and acreage allotments had restricted many farmers more than they desired. With the addition of the acreage reserve, where contracts would restrict the use of the land for a year, the farmers declined to participate.

In one county in Area III, a committeeman believed this attitude was due to the relatively young settlement of the county. Many of the farmers who first settled in the county still resided there. These farmers had gambled with weather and prices all their lives and preferred to continue with as little government dominance as possible. In Area I, the opposite situation was observed. Here a general feeling prevailed that each farmer should take his part in reducing the production of wheat so as to increase the price in future years.

Another reason which six of the committeemen considered a factor in causing non-participation was the hesitation of farmers to accept a new farm program. These committeemen stated that in past agriculture programs it took a year for the farmers to fully accept the program. The majority of farmers preferred to wait and see what the effect and implications might be. As one committeeman mentioned, "We just got the farmers to understand marketing quotas, acreage allotments, ACP payments, etc., and now they change the thing. Most farmers like to wait and see how a program works before they jump into the thing."

In the acreage reserve the farmer must make the decision to commit a definite tract of land on a set deadline before the planting of wheat commences. Many farmers desired to wait until planting began to decide what their farming operations would be. Weather conditions before and during the planting season influenced the choice of crops and the place where they would be grown. For example, a farmer may have had both high and low ground eligible for the acreage reserve. Assuming a normal spring, he may designate the high ground to the acreage reserve; however, if the soil were wet during early planting operations, the low land would have been preferable.

#### Tenants and Landlords Failed to Reach Acceptable Agreements

Seventeen committeemen felt that tenants and landlords had been unable to reach acceptable agreements concerning participation in the acreage reserve. Ten committeemen felt it had no effect on sign-up.

The two main reasons considered by the seventeen committeemen as causing non-participation are as follows:

- (1) Tenants and landlords could not agree over the payment each should receive or the number of acres to be placed in the acreage reserve.
- (2) Some absentee landlords were unfamiliar with the soil bank program and preferred to raise crops as in previous years.

The amount of payment the tenant and landlord should receive seemed to be the biggest reason for preventing participation. By participating in the acreage reserve under the same crop share agreement as normal production, the tenant would ordinarily be over-compensated;

for the tenant would have no expenses of production except perhaps weed cutting. This was not considered satisfactory to the landlord, as he still had the fixed costs involved with the tract of land. Several committeemen stated that it was difficult to arrive at a payment which was fair and equitable and still acceptable by both parties. The tenant normally would have machinery necessary to farm the land. He would prefer to crop the land rather than give a greater percentage share than he normally received. On the other hand, the landlord could not afford to let the tenant have the normal crop share when very little expense was involved for him. Thus, in many cases the result was that the land would be farmed as in the past.

Some committeemen stated that tenants and landlords could not agree on the number of acres to be placed in the acreage reserve. The tenant may have wanted to participate with 100 per cent of his allotment while the landlord desired to participate with part and raise wheat on the remaining acres. The number of acres the tenant and landlord desired to enter in the acreage reserve would vary on the individual farm.

Many absentee landlords were unfamiliar with the acreage reserve and, when contacted concerning participation, preferred to farm the land. The regulations stated that the tenants could participate without the consent of the landlord; however, the committeemen felt that the tenants were reluctant to do so in this situation. As one committeeman stated, "If they don't do what the landlord wants, it might be their last year on the farm."

Tenant-landlord disagreements were reported in all counties surveyed; however, only four counties reported this as a major obstacle.

Uncertainty Regarding What Per Cent of Allotment  
Could Be Placed in Acreage Reserve

The regulations stated that each spring wheat producer was allowed to place 50 per cent of his allotment or 50 acres, whichever was larger, in the acreage reserve. The winter wheat producer was allowed to place 100 per cent of his allotment in the acreage reserve at the initial sign-up. However, due to the anticipated high participation, the winter wheat producers were also restricted to 50 per cent of their allotment. At the initial sign-up, the wheat farmer could indicate whether he desired to place additional acres in the acreage reserve over the established initial maximum if funds became available.

The initial sign-up for spring wheat was held on March 15, 1957, while the deadline for winter wheat participation was October 6, 1956. The additional requested acres were processed as soon as the county committee determined funds were available. A result of this situation was that the farmer did not know how much land could be placed in the acreage reserve when his initial commitment was made. With this doubt as to the portion of his allotment that could be diverted, some farmers decided not to participate at all.

At the initial sign-up the farmer wanted to know the amount of land that could be placed in the acreage reserve because of

the need to secure seed and make preparations for other planting operators. The per cent of allotment was also important, especially for the smaller operators. If all the allotment could be retired to the reserve, the farmer would not have to raise wheat at all in 1957. However, if 50 per cent was the maximum, it was still necessary to perform the operations requisite to planting the remaining portion of the allotment. This area would also be restricted until January 1, 1958, and rather than do this the farmer preferred to farm the entire allotment as long as he would be raising wheat anyway.

This fixed percentage, along with the uncertainty of obtaining additional acres, caused an inconvenience on many farms and tended to discourage participation. For example, a farmer may have had about a 60 acre field planned for wheat in 1957 and desired to place it in the acreage reserve. His allotment was 60 acres and with the initial guaranteed 50 acre maximum he could participate with only that amount. Ten acres would still have to be cropped. Where larger machinery was used the farmer considered it impracticable to break larger tracts into two separate fields.

Several committeemen in Area II and Area III considered this as an important factor affecting participation. In Area I, this was not considered an obstacle to acreage reserve participation.

In five counties in Areas II and III, where summer fallowing is increasing, another factor was reported which reduced participation in the acreage reserve. The committeemen in these counties stated that many strictly wheat farmers summer fallow about half of their cropland each year. With a fixed 50 per cent maximum of their

allotment at the first sign-up, these farmers could not utilize their summer fallow without changing the rotation or planting another crop besides wheat. The amount of summer fallow has increased in the last few years so the normal yield for the farm was largely determined from stubble grown wheat. <sup>21/</sup> Thus, the payment was considered low in comparison to what income might be received from planting wheat on fallow ground. A diversified farmer could utilize a feed crop on the surplus summer fallow; however, the farmer who depended on wheat for his major source of income considered this unprofitable.

A simple example of this would be a farmer who had 200 acres of cropland and his common rotation consisted of summer fallow and wheat. His wheat allotment was 100 acres and he could place 50 acres in the acreage reserve. The farmer would ordinarily summer fallow the other 100 acres and with 50 acres in the acreage reserve, he would still have 50 acres of summer fallow where no wheat could be planted.

As it turned out, all farmers could place additional land in the acreage reserve as requested at the initial sign-up. If the farmer could have been assured a specific number of acres at the initial sign-up, participation would have been higher. Six committeemen in Areas II and III expressed this opinion.

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<sup>21/</sup> According to a United State Department of Agriculture study, farmers have increased the amount of summer fallow because of the restriction on wheat planted due to acreage allotment. United States Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, op. cit., pp. 1-3.

## CHAPTER V

### SOME FACTORS ENCOURAGING 1957 ACREAGE RESERVE PARTICIPATION IN NINE WHEAT COUNTIES IN SOUTH DAKOTA

In some of the counties surveyed, a higher percentage of farmers participated in the acreage reserve than was anticipated. Some counties did not have sufficient funds to compensate all the requested contracts. In these counties, funds were transferred from lower participating counties to allow all farmers an opportunity to participate that desired. Area II, the northwest spring wheat producing area, had the highest participation with 58.2 per cent of the farms having some land designated in the acreage reserve. This area also ranked first with 40.9 per cent of the total wheat allotment placed in the acreage reserve (see Table I). Edmunds County in Area I and Lyman County in Area III, also had about 50 per cent of the wheat farmers participating in the acreage reserve. These two counties, however, did not place as high a percentage of total wheat allotment as the counties in Area II.

Some of the reasons which encouraged farmers to participate in the acreage reserve are set forth in this chapter.

#### Acreage Reserve as Guaranteed Income

All nine counties surveyed had, in general, poor crop conditions due to drought in the 1956 crop year. Some counties had suffered from this condition for three to five years. Most of the committeemen interviewed considered drought as a major factor in causing farmers to participate in the acreage reserve.



Many farms could not afford to face another year of crop failure. Some farmers placed enough land in the acreage reserve to cover the operating costs for the 1957 crop year. These farmers raised some wheat in hopes of normal rainfall; however, they still had some acreage reserve land for insurance. Other farmers, depending on their individual financial condition, put all of their allotment in the acreage reserve. Some farmers found off-farm employment where this was possible.

All counties surveyed received ample moisture after the deadline for participation and crop prospects were very favorable at the time this study was conducted. The majority of the committeemen stated that some farmers had inquired at the ASC office as to the possibility of withdrawing their contracts after ample soil moisture was received. In two counties, committeemen felt that rainfall had a decided effect on participation. In these counties, which bordered each other, a small area received more rainfall than the remaining parts of the county prior to the deadline for sign-up. As a result, the participation in this area, which was located in the southeast part of Perkins and southwest part of Dewey County, was the lowest in these two counties. Bennett County, located in the winter wheat area, received three to four inches of rain prior to sign-up deadline for winter wheat in the fall of 1956. This county had the lowest participation of any county surveyed and placed only 1,698 acres in the acreage reserve.

In general, the guaranteed income features of the acreage reserve attracted many farmers. The preliminary acreage reserve

program in 1956 had also aided farmers which were stricken by drought. With the continued dim prospects for 1957, the committeemen felt that farmers again looked to the acreage reserve as a source of financial help.

#### Acreage Reserve Allowed Farmers to Begin Summer Fallowing

In Area II and to some extent in Area III, the acreage reserve served as a convenience for some farmers. The committeemen in these two areas listed three ways in which the acreage reserve had benefited the farmer: (1) It afforded many farmers an opportunity to begin summer fallowing. (2) The acreage reserve allowed farmers already fallowing to adjust the number of acres for a better rotation. (3) Where spring and winter wheat were planted, the farmer could place the amount underplanted in winter wheat into the acreage reserve under a spring wheat agreement.

The farmers in Areas II and III felt that more wheat could be raised on half as much land when land was fallowed, and also that less risk was involved due to the conserved moisture. In general, the committeemen stated that the larger operators were the ones that had successfully used summer fallowing. Many smaller operators felt they could not spare the land necessary to begin a fallow rotation.

Through the acreage reserve, farmers who had not started fallow could receive compensation for doing so. This soil conserving practice was further encouraged by the dry condition of their land. The fallow would be more favorable for wheat next year and at the same

time the farmer could have a guaranteed income.

Other farmers, who had some fallow established, desired to increase the amount in relation to wheat planted. A farmer may have been summer fallowing about 30 per cent of his land and preferred to have 50 per cent. With the acreage reserve, he could be compensated for increasing the amount of land fallowed.

In Area III, where winter wheat consists of about 75 per cent of all wheat grown, some farmers were still eligible to raise spring wheat due to their cropping history. In planting winter wheat, the farmer generally planted as near to his allotment as possible; however, he preferred to underplant rather than overplant. If an overplanting existed, the farmer would have to destroy the excess amount or pay a penalty on the wheat grown on the excess acres. Compliance for winter wheat was checked during the winter months. When any farmer was under his allotment with winter wheat, he could place the difference in the acreage reserve under a spring wheat agreement which could be filed later.

#### Sense of Duty Caused Some Farmers to Participate

Committeemen in three counties stated that some farmers participated in the soil bank to do their part in reducing surpluses. Most farmers were concerned over the future price of wheat if production was not curtailed in some manner. In these counties, there seemed to exist a strong moral and political pressure for every farmer to do his share in the farm program. Farm organizations were active and the farmers were more concerned over public affairs.

Acreage Reserve Used to Take Out Poor Land and Kill Weeds

The productivity of each tract of land designated as acreage reserve was to be determined by the normal yield on the farm. Any factors affecting the yield which differed significantly from the average land on the farm devoted to wheat were adjusted. The committeemen felt that adjusting the productivity on individual farms was often difficult and more time-consuming than the ASC staff could allow. However, a general rule was that if the land was normally devoted to wheat on the farm, it was eligible for compensation based on the average farm normal yield.

This allowed some differences in productivity for the land placed in the acreage reserve at the same normal yield. The farmers would tend to put the poorer eligible land which needed soil building practices into the acreage reserve. The regular ACP practices were eligible to be used on acreage reserve land; thus, the farmer could receive assistance in establishing a soil conserving practice. In Area I, more total land area is in cropland and a greater difference in quality of land within farms exists due to the topography of this area, thus allowing the less productive land on each farm to be placed in the acreage reserve. In Areas II and III, no committeeman viewed this as a major reason. The acreage reserve here was used mostly for summer fallowing and often consisted of the best land on the farm. The committeemen, however, did mention several cases in which they felt the acreage reserve had been used in this way.

The acreage reserve also allowed farmers to receive compensation for controlling noxious weeds. This control was accomplished through summer fallowing, spraying, or planting the infected area to a grass or legume and at the same time farmers could receive the acreage reserve payment. The majority of the committeemen agreed that farmers were using the acreage reserve to control weeds on their farms where this opportunity existed. In Area I, seven out of the nine committeemen, considered the control of weeds through the acreage reserve as a definite factor in encouraging farmers to participate. In Areas II and III, where summer fallowing is more common, weed control through the acreage reserve was not viewed as an important factor. The committeemen knew of no specific cases where weed infected land had been designated; however, they felt that farmers would automatically retire such land if the opportunity existed on their farm.

## CHAPTER VI

### OTHER FACTORS AFFECTING WHEAT ACREAGE RESERVE PARTICIPATION

This chapter is concerned with some other factors not previously discussed which affected wheat acreage reserve participation as viewed by 27 committeemen in nine selected counties in South Dakota.

#### Difficult for Farmers to Understand Acreage Reserve Program

All the interviewed committeemen thought that explaining the soil bank to farmers was a difficult task. Most farmers had a general idea of how the total soil bank program functions. The difficulty was in getting the farmers to understand the difference between the acreage reserve, conservation reserve, and previous government programs. Marketing quotas, acreage allotments, and price-supports, which are tied closely to the administration of the soil bank, added further confusion for the farmer. Only one committeeman reported that participation in the acreage reserve had been directly affected by farmers' inability to fully understand the provisions. Eight committeemen stated it had some effect on participation while eighteen committeemen believed it had no effect on participation. The majority of these committeemen further stated that participation was less in the conservation reserve due to its complex nature; however, they considered the acreage reserve as relatively simple to administer.

What was important to the farmer was the payment he could

receive from the acreage reserve, rather than knowing the restrictions that would be required of him to comply. As one committeeman stated, "The problem is that the farmers participate whether they understand the program or not!" The unusual interest shown over the payment was believed to be due to the drought conditions that occupied most of the area studied prior to the deadline for participation.

Confusion existed for some farmers on what was required of them. Some farmers participated believing that they could receive the acreage reserve payment for establishing regular ACP practices. Other farmers participated with the same line of thinking as in previous agricultural programs, where a violation would mean only suspending the payment. Actually, if an acreage reserve contract was violated, the farmer would be subject to a penalty in addition to receiving no payment.

Most committeemen felt that they would not know how well the farmer actually understood the acreage reserve program until each designated tract of land was checked for compliance. If too many violations were found for the 1957 program, the committeemen feared the acreage reserve would become a "government trap" to farmers in the 1958 program.

#### Quality of Land in Acreage Reserve

The committeemen interviewed felt that the acreage reserve program in 1957 had attracted farm units with all grades of land due to widespread drought in the crop year of 1956. All grades of land had participated some in the 1957 acreage reserve for insurance aspects.

The committeemen's response to whether farms with better or poorer quality land were participating in the acreage reserve are shown in Table

Table III. Responses of 27 Committeemen as to Whether Farms with Better or Poorer Quality of land Were Participating in the 1957 Acreage Reserve, by Area, July 1957.

Response	Number of Comitteemen Expressing Each in		
	Area I	Area II	Area III
Farmers with better quality land participated more.	4	---	---
Farms with poorer quality land participated more.	2	4	6
Farms with both poorer and better quality of land participated about the same.	3	5	1
Did not know.	---	---	2
Total	9	9	9

The general concensus of the committeemen was that the better quality of land was not diverted to the acreage reserve. However, in Area I, four committeemen felt that farms with better quality land were participating more. Two of these committeemen further stated that the farms of better quality land had participated in the 1957 acreage reserve due to drought conditions prior to the deadline of participation.

If the farm normal yield was accurately assigned to the farms on basis of productivity, no discrimination should exist regarding the quality of land going into the acreage reserve. The payment demanded



on better quality land would be higher while poorer land would receive a lower payment. This factor may have influenced the decisions the committeemen made concerning the quality of land. In counties where normal yields were carefully assigned to farms according to productivity, more of the better land, perhaps, was attracted to the acreage reserve.

The normal yield assigned to the individual farm unit serves as an important criterion in determining the quality of land attracted to the acreage reserve. As previously mentioned in Chapter IV, the committeemen considered the assignment of normal yields to individual farms one of their most difficult problems in administering the acreage reserve. In many cases, the township committeemen assigned normal yields to avoid controversy by local farmers. The normal yields were assigned to reflect the productivity of the land as much as local pressure would allow. Consequently, some productive land in each township did not receive an acreage reserve payment sufficient to be attracted to the program. The less productive land received a correspondingly higher payment because the normal yield on this land tended to approach the average normal yield for the township.

#### Both Poor and Good Operators Participated

The committeemen were asked whether they considered any particular type of farm operators participated in the acreage reserve. Nineteen of the 27 committeemen felt that poorer operators had participated more in the acreage reserve than better operators. Seven committeemen stated that both types of operators had participated

about the same. Three of these seven committeemen felt, however, that fewer of the better operators would participate in future years which were preceded by normal crop years.

The committeemen again considered normal yields as the general contributing factor to this type of participation. Different qualities of land and varying abilities of operators presented the same type of problem in assigning normal yields. Some farms with poorer operators received higher normal yields in relation to past yields than did farmers with better farming practices. Several committeemen stated this was true where an individual farmer, who was using improved farming practices and obtaining greater yields, was located among inferior operators. The normal yield usually only varied one or two bushels between farmers. Then the normal yield on a farm with a better operator would tend to be lowered by the normal yield on his neighbor's farm. Local pressure by the farmers also had some influence. As one committeeman stated, "All farmers think they are good farmers and it's awfully hard to put some of those poor operator's normal yields where they belong."

#### Age of Farmers Participating in Acreage Reserve

All the committeemen stated that no particular age group had participated more than another only in the acreage reserve. Of the farmers that signed only acreage reserve contracts, a good cross section of all ages participated. Twenty committeemen stated that a definite number of older farmers had participated in the conservation reserve, and acreage reserve-conservation reserve combined.

Some older farmers (over 65) found the soil bank a way for retirement by putting all eligible land on their farms into the Soil Bank. Four committeemen also stated that a few farmers who were approaching 65 years of age had participated in both programs to assure them of a fixed income for establishing a retirement base under the Social Security Act. Two committeemen felt that this had discouraged this age group from participating in both programs because a greater income could be obtained by cropping land. However, in the acreage reserve alone, the contracts signed consisted of more older farmers.

#### Shortage of Farm Labor

The shortage of farm labor was an important factor in encouraging farmers to participate in some counties. In Area I, six out of nine committeemen definitely felt this had been a factor. This seemed to be somewhat related to the age of farmers participating. Older farmers, who normally depended on some labor, desired to retire land in the acreage reserve rather than rent out part of their farm. A shortage of labor also encouraged some larger farm units that ordinarily depended on hired labor to participate.

In Area II and III the committeemen considered the shortage of labor had no effect on participation.

#### Farmers Believe that "Land Should Be Cropped"

The soil bank is the first farm program, since the Agricultural Act of 1933, designed to reduce the total acreage of crops harvested. Some committeemen reported that farmers did not want to take land out

of production by placing it in the acreage reserve. Two committeemen listed this a major obstacle to participation. The farmer's attitude was that he had chosen farming as his occupation and was on the farm to utilize the productive capacities of the land. Other farmers reported to the committeemen that the acreage reserve was a "lazy man's" program and refused to participate.

Some farmers did not participate in hopes of taking advantage of a surplus reduction in wheat. Their theory was that if the acreage reserve accomplished its objectives, there would be some increase in the price of wheat. Thus, by staying out of the acreage reserve and planting the full allotment, they would be in a more favorable position. Two committeemen reported this as a reason why farmers had not participated in the acreage reserve.

## CHAPTER VII

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### Summary

The main objectives of this study were (1) to identify the obstacles to 1957 acreage reserve participation in the South Dakota wheat area and (2) to identify the factors which encouraged farmers to participate in the 1957 acreage reserve in the South Dakota wheat area.

Two spring wheat producing areas and one winter wheat area were surveyed. Three counties in each area were surveyed. Three county ASC officials were interviewed in each county to ascertain their reactions to factors affecting acreage reserve participation.

#### Obstacles to 1957 Acreage Reserve Participation

The obstacles to participation in the 1957 wheat acreage reserve differed throughout the nine counties studied. Some of the important obstacles, according to the ASC committeemen, were as follows:

1. The farmers considered the 60 per cent unit rate as satisfactory for retiring land to the acreage reserve; however, they felt that the normal yields assigned to their farms were too low. Consequently, the farmers preferred to farm the land rather than participate in the acreage reserve. Several factors contributed to non-participation by the individual farmer.

#### (a) Farmer's anticipations

1. Some farmers preferred to take the risk of raising a crop despite the present or future crop outlook.
2. Favorable weather conditions in some areas in 1955-1956 made farmers optimistic for the crop year 1957.

3. In some cases, individual farmers decreased participation because of personal prejudices against other farmers receiving higher normal yields.
4. The uncertainty as to the exact number of acres that could be placed in the acreage reserve at the initial sign-up discouraged some farmers from participating.

(b) Additional Costs Involved

1. Small allotments on some farms discouraged farmers from participating because a greater return could be obtained by farming the land. However, some small spring wheat producers benefited by the 50 acre maximum provision in the acreage reserve regulation.
2. In Areas II and III (Figure 1, page 14), the depreciation costs for some farmers with a large investment in machinery were too high to permit them to accept the acreage reserve payment.
3. In Area II, and some in Area III, the farmers were required to isolate or fence their wheat fields in order to qualify for participation in the acreage reserve.

2. Other Factors

- (a) A lack of interest by some farmers in government farm programs was reported in all three areas studied.
- (b) Some tenants and landlords could not reach acceptable agreements over the divisions of the acreage reserve payments. Absentee landlords in general preferred not to participate in the acreage reserve.
- (c) The soil bank was considered complicated legislation by the farmers and it was difficult for some to understand the provisions.
- (d) Some farmers held the belief that every acre of cropland should be cropped.

The assignment of normal yields by township committeemen was considered one of the most "touchy" features connected with administering the acreage reserve program. Equality in assigning yields in relation to the productivity of land on individual farms was often

difficult to achieve due to community pressure. The normal yields were assigned as near the township average as possible in order to keep a feeling of equality among the farmers in a given township. This same problem existed in assigning normal yields to different types of farm operators. The poorer farm operators tended to receive correspondingly higher normal yields than did better operators located on a comparable quality of land. This situation made some farmers with better quality land and better farm operations reluctant to participate in the acreage reserve.

#### Factors Encouraging Participation

The national goal established by the Secretary of Agriculture was 15 million acres to be retired to the acreage reserve. This would be 27 per cent of the national wheat allotment of 55 million acres. The South Dakota state average, for wheat allotment diverted to acreage reserve, was 27.2 per cent. Of the nine counties surveyed, five counties were below this average while four counties placed more than 27.2 per cent of their allotment in the acreage reserve. Area I and III were below the state average and Area II was above (see Table I).

The factors which encouraged farmers to participate were as follows:

1. Poor planting conditions in the fall of 1956 and spring of 1957 caused many farmers to participate in the acreage reserve. Previous dry years also influenced the farmers to look to the acreage reserve payments as "sure" income in 1957.
2. In Area III and to some extent in Area II, the acreage reserve served as a convenience for some farmers. The acreage reserve encouraged participation in three ways:  
(a) It afforded many farmers an opportunity to begin summer fallowing. (b) The acreage reserve allowed farmers

already fallowing to increase the number of acres for a better rotation and (c) In areas where both spring and winter wheat were planted, the farmer could place the acreage underplanted in winter wheat into the acreage reserve under a spring wheat agreement.

3. Three other less important factors which attracted farmers to the acreage reserve, as viewed by the county committeemen, were: (a) the soil bank program served as a way of retirement for some older farmers; (b) some farmers participated because of a desire to aid the national effort to reduce the supply of wheat; (c) a shortage of good farm labor in Area I caused farmers to participate.

### Conclusions

The factors affecting acreage reserve participation are diverse and complex. Each farmer is affected somewhat differently depending upon his farming operations. Likewise, individual counties and different farming areas have unique problems caused by such factors as topography, soils, percentage of tenancy, and different farming practices and operations. Thus, equality to individual farmers and an equal distribution of participation is difficult to obtain from a farm program applied over a broad area as is the acreage reserve.

The most apparent obstacle to acreage reserve participation was the low payment received by the wheat farmer. The payment could be increased either by increasing the unit rate or the normal yields, or a combination of both.

The farmers considered the unit rate satisfactory for taking land out of production. However, they did feel that the normal yields assigned to their farms were too low. The method of determining the normal yield for the individual counties is a statistical technique and no evaluation shall be made of this method. This study does



indicate, however, that the farmers considered the normal yields assigned to their farms too low. One cause of this may be that farmers do not accurately report their yields to data-gathering officials.

The uncertainty of a normal crop in 1957 caused many farmers to participate in the acreage reserve. All grades of land and qualities of operators were attracted to the program because of this feature. If a favorable crop outlook exists for the 1958 crop year, participation may be considerably less. The better operator, as well as better quality of land, will be discouraged under the present system of assigning normal yields. If the productivity of the land and capabilities of the operator were more truly reflected in the assignment of normal yield, a shift in participation would occur. More acres will be attracted to the acreage reserve under the present method of determining the payment. If the acreage reserve payment were increased for the better grades of land and better farm operators, a greater reduction should occur in total bushels of wheat produced.

In Areas II and III, the acreage reserve encourage farmers to participate because of the opportunity to begin summer fallowing or increase the amount of fallow on their farms. This situation will not attract many farmers to the program after the first year or two of implementation. Most farmers made the switch or adjustment during 1957 and will prefer to raise a crop on the land in 1958. It is doubtful whether the increased amount of fallow will have any effect on the total number of bushels of wheat marketed. An increase in yields can be expected off the summer fallowed land planted to wheat.

The depreciation cost of a large investment in farm machinery

discouraged some farmers from participating. If the acreage reserve program continues in future years, this obstacle may be alleviated somewhat. If the farmer plans to participate, it may be possible for him to reduce his inventory in high-cost machinery.

Opportunity costs will prevent many diversified farms and farms with small allotments from participating in the acreage reserve.

The attitude of the county committeemen toward the soil bank program is an important element to successful administration at the farmer level. Participation was generally higher where the county ASC officials or county extension agents took an active interest in the soil bank program. Some committeemen and county agents organized extra educational meetings, explained the provisions individually to the farmers as much as time permitted, and promoted general farmer interest toward the soil bank program. In other counties, where participation was lower, the committeemen seemed to serve only as approving officials.

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APPENDIX A

July 1957

South Dakota State College  
Agricultural Experiment Station  
Agricultural Economics Department

County ASC Committeemen's Reactions to the Acreage Reserve Program

The information obtained in this questionnaire is to be used for research purposes only. The names of persons cooperating in this survey will not be made public.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ County \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Township \_\_\_\_\_

This questionnaire pertains only to the Acreage Reserve part of the soil bank. Please answer each question by stating what you think the situation is in your county.

1. In general, how do the farmers feel about the soil bank, particularly the acreage reserve? \_\_\_\_\_.
2. In your opinion, what have been the main reasons why farmers have not signed up for the acreage reserve in your county? \_\_\_\_\_.
3. What would you say have been the main problems facing you as a county committee in administering the acreage reserve? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Do you think that disagreements between tenants and landlords have prevented any non-participation in your county? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Do you think the farmers used the soil bank for insurance aspects in your county? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What effect did crop conditions have on acreage reserve participation? \_\_\_\_\_
7. How have the diversified farms been participating in the acreage reserve in comparison to the more intensive wheat farmer? \_\_\_\_\_
8. How is the farmer who follows a regular rotation and keeps a high percentage of his farm in grasses and legumes affected by the acreage reserve? \_\_\_\_\_
9. How does the size of the farm unit affect acreage reserve participation? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Were the farmers in your county generally satisfied with the "normal yields" they received from the ASC committeemen?\_\_\_\_\_
- 10a. Do you think that the affected acreage reserve sign-up?\_\_\_\_\_
11. To what extent has explaining the soil bank and getting the farmers to understand the provisions been a problem in your county?\_\_\_\_\_
- 11a. Do you think some farmers did not use the acreage reserve due to lack of understanding?\_\_\_\_\_
12. In your opinion, do farms with better land sign up for the acreage reserve about the same as ones of poorer grades?\_\_\_\_\_
13. Are "good farmers" or "poor farmers" signing up the most in the acreage reserve?\_\_\_\_\_
14. Does there seem to be any difference in age of the farmers signing up in the acreage reserve?\_\_\_\_\_
15. Other comments\_\_\_\_\_

	Strongly Agree	Partially Agree	Dis- agree	Don't Know
1. Tenant and landlords being unable to reach acceptable agreements has caused much non-participation in the acreage reserve.	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. Poor prospects for a good crop at time of sign-up will cause many farmers to participate.	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. Generally, the farms with the best soils are the ones that sign up for the acreage reserve.	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. Raising the acreage reserve payments 10% would cause most farmers to participate some.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5. The fact that neighbor farmers received higher "normal yields" from ASC committeemen prevents many farmers from participating.	_____	_____	_____	_____
6. The soil bank being hard to understand caused some farmers to stay out of the acreage reserve.	_____	_____	_____	_____
7. Farm units with small allotments do not participate in the acreage reserve.	_____	_____	_____	_____
8. Some farmers have not signed up in the acreage reserve because they feel it is not a solution to the farm problem.	_____	_____	_____	_____
9. The soil bank acreage reserve has been difficult to administer and because of this sign-up has been low.	_____	_____	_____	_____
10. The farmers are not using the acreage reserve because they can get price supports on allotment crops.	_____	_____	_____	_____

- |     |   |       |       |       |       |
|-----|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 11. | A lot of older farmers use the acreage reserve as a way of retirement.  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 12. | Grain farmers are the big users of the acreage reserve.   | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 13. | Farmers can make more money farming land than putting it in the acreage reserve.  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 14. | The poor operator cannot afford to put his land in the acreage reserve.   | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 15. | The farmer who in the past has cropped all his land uses the acreage reserve more.  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 16. | Being unable to get and keep farm labor has caused many farmers to put their land in acreage reserve.                             | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 17. | Large farmers use the acreage reserve the most.   | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 18. | Diversified farms can not participate in the acreage reserve.   | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 19. | The acreage reserve part of the soil bank is in conflict with previous agriculture programs and this has prevented participation. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 20. | The farms of poorer soil are going into the acreage reserve.  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 21. | The farmers who are participating in the acreage reserve are using it to kill weeds and take out poor land.                       | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |



In summary, would you give me the reason that has been most important in preventing farmers from participating in the acreage reserve? Would you rate second, third-----.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Table II. Value of Farm Products Sold: All Crops Sold and All Livestock and Livestock Products As a Per Cent of All Farm Products Sold, by County and Area, 1954<sup>1</sup>

COUNTY AND AREA	VALUE OF ALL CROP SOLD	VALUE OF ALL LIVESTOCK AND LIVESTOCK PRODUCTS
AREA I		
Brown	55.2	44.8
Edmunds	49.2	50.8
Spink	61.4	38.6
Average Area I	56.8	43.2
AREA II		
Corson	45.4	54.6
Dewey	34.6	65.4
Perkins	47.5	52.5
Average Area II	43.8	56.2
AREA III		
Bennett	52.5	47.5
Jones	39.8	60.2
Lyman	46.8	53.2
Average Area III	47.3	52.7

<sup>1</sup>  
Computed from 1954 Agricultural Census data, United States Bureau of Census, op. cit., pp. 248-249.

Table III. Number of Farms, Average Size of Farms, Tenancy and Land Utilization for Nine Selected Counties in South Dakota, by Area, 1954.<sup>1</sup>

County and Area	Number of Farms	Average size of farms in area	Per cent of Tenancy	Per cent of farms with part ownership and tenancy	Per cent of crop-land in county	Per cent of pas-ture in county	Per cent of other land in county	Per cent of crop-land in fallow
Area I								
Brown	1,846	580	22.8	66.0	76.8	21.2	2.0	3.6
Edmunds	978	723	26.6	80.5	65.2	32	2.8	3.8
Spink	1,557	599	30.1	74.1	77.0	20.5	2.5	4.3
Area II								
Corson	777	1953	21.6	85.5	25.4	73.5	1.1	7.3
Dewey	494	2868	15.4	75.9	18.0	82.9	.9 <sup>2</sup>	6.0
Perkins	856	1957	11.1	66.7	26.0	74.0	.2	9.8
Area III								
Bennett	386	1833	20.5	76.9	29.2	69.8	1.0	21.8
Jones	289	2068	18.7	70.9	32.4	67.9	.4 <sup>2</sup>	8.0
Lyman	636	1558	21.2	75.6	40.4	58.8	.8	6.4

<sup>1</sup> Computed from 1954 Agricultural Census data, op. cit., pp. 226-240.

<sup>2</sup> The land area is over 100 per cent because land outside of county was included where headquarters were located in county.

APPENDIX B

Table I. Major Crops: Classified as to Per Cent of Total Cropland Harvested in Acres by Counties, 1954<sup>1</sup>

COUNTY AND AREA	WINTER WHEAT <sup>2</sup>	ALL		CORN	SORGHUM <sup>2</sup>	OATS	BARLEY	FLAXSEED <sup>2</sup>	WILD HAY	TAME HAY	MISC. CROPS	
		WHEAT	SPRING									
AREA I												
Brown	---	23.7	17.9	---	20.4	5.3	10.0	8.6	11.0	3.1		
Edmunds	---	30.7	10.6	---	21.4	2.1	6.5	20.7	6.0	2.0		
Spink	---	35.7	17.9	---	17.2	4.4	2.5	9.2	8.5	4.6		
AREA II												
Corson	---	34.1	8.8	---	8.3	2.6	15.3	17.6	11.0	2.3		
Dewey	1.4	27.7	7.2	---	8.4	3.0	5.5	35.5	11.3	2.0		
Perkins	1.7	37.2	7.4	---	6.9	2.6	6.5	20.2	16.0	1.5		
AREA III												
Bennett	26.4	3.3	7.8	---	7.5	5.0	---	32.6	14.9	2.5		
Jones	16.4	11.8	9.4	3.0	8.2	3.4	1.6	32.6	13.2	.4		
Lyman	10.2	13.5	11.1	5.4	11.8	2.8	1.9	34.6	8.0	.6		

<sup>1</sup> Computed from 1954 Agricultural Census data, United States Bureau of Census, Vol. I, Counties and State Economic Areas, Part II, Census of Agriculture, 1954, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., 1956, pp. 280-302.

<sup>2</sup> If less than one per cent, the crop was included under miscellaneous crops.