

## Worksheet

### “The Nation that Destroys its Soil...” a Letter from the President

My Dear Governor:

February 26, 1937

The dust storms and floods of the last few years have underscored the importance of programs to control soil erosion. I need not emphasize to you the seriousness of the problem and the desirability of our taking effective action, as a Nation and in the several States, to conserve the soil as our basic asset. The Nation that destroys its soil destroys itself.

In the Act of Congress approved April 27, 1935 (Public No. 46 of the 74th Congress), the Federal Government, through the Soil Conservation Service of the Department of Agriculture, initiated a broad program for the control of soil erosion. Demonstration work has been undertaken but much remains to be done. The conduct of isolated demonstration projects cannot control erosion adequately. Such work can only point the way.

The problem is further complicated by the fact that the failure to control erosion on some lands (particularly if such eroding lands are situated strategically at the heads of valleys or watersheds) can cause a washing and blowing of soil onto other lands, and make the control of erosion anywhere in the valley or watershed all the more difficult. We are confronted with the fact that, for the problem to be adequately dealt with, the erodible land in every watershed must be brought under some form of control.

To supplement the Federal programs, and safeguard their results, State legislation is needed. At the request of representatives from a number of States, and in cooperation with them, the Department of Agriculture has prepared a standard form of suitable State legislation for this purpose, generally referred to as the Standard State Soil Conservation Districts Law. The Act provides for the organization of “soil conservation districts” as governmental subdivisions of the State to carry on projects for erosion control, and to enact into law land-use regulations concerning soil erosion after such regulations have been approved in a referendum. Such legislation is imperative to enable farmers to take the necessary cooperative action.



I am sending to you several copies of the Standard State Soil Conservation Districts Law, with a memorandum summarizing its basic provisions. I hope that you will see fit to make the adoption of legislation along the lines of the Standard Act part of the agricultural program for your State.

Very sincerely yours,  
Franklin D. Roosevelt

**Please answer the following questions:**

1. At the time that this letter was written, what do you think the structure of the soil was like in the areas that were suffering from dust storms and flooding—more like bread or flour? Were the soils well-aggregated or poorly aggregated?
2. President Roosevelt seems to be implying that humans created this situation, and that humans can improve it. Many of the problematic areas used to be native grasslands (prairies, plains) that were plowed up and turned into farmland. What do you think that did to the structure of the soil, and to the living ecology of the soil. How do you think it contributed to the dust storms?
3. Can you name at least one place where dust storms still happen these days?
4. What sorts of problems are recent dust storms causing?
5. Why do you think FDR meant when he wrote “The Nation that destroys its soils destroys itself?”
6. Why is healthy, living, well aggregated soil (the soil carbon sponge) so important?

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