



## HUGH HAMMOND BENNETT: SOIL CONSERVATION'S FOUNDING FATHER

Born near Wadesboro, NC, on April 15, 1881, Hugh Hammond Bennett graduated from the University of North Carolina and began his career as a soil surveyor with the USDA.

Through his work on soil surveys and investigation of declining crop yields, Bennett became convinced that soil erosion is a problem not only for farmers, but for the economies of rural areas and the nation overall.

In 1909, Bennett began supervising soil surveys in the southern United States and studying soils abroad and in U.S. territories. He worked in Costa Rica and Panama (1909), Alaska (1914), and Cuba (1925-1926) and served on the Guatemala-Honduras Boundary Commission (1919).

Bennett's writings include the highly influential *Soil Erosion: A National Menace*, a USDA bulletin which he co-authored in 1928. His articles about soil erosion have been published in popular and scientific journals, including *Country Gentleman* and *Scientific Monthly*.

Largely in response to Bennett's campaign for soil conservation, U.S. Rep. James P. Buchanan of Texas attached an amendment to the 1930 appropriations bill authorizing USDA to establish a series of soil erosion experiment stations. The first large-scale demonstration project for erosion control was in Coon Creek, Wisconsin.



Dr. and Mrs. Hugh Hammond Bennett visit a farm in Coon Valley, Wisconsin. 1946



A picnic for tenants of Duke Power Company near Mooresville, NC. Dr. Hugh Hammond Bennett (left) first Chief of the Soil Conservation Service and Mr. Roach Stewart (Duke Power Co.).



Wind erosion carries topsoil from farmland during the Dust Bowl.

Bennett helped establish the Soil Erosion Service in the Department of the Interior to work with farmers to demonstrate soil conservation methods in watershed-based demonstrations. He became its director in September 1933.

Bennett's speeches have been an inspiration to conservationists around the country, whether at farm-field demonstrations, scholarly gatherings, or in the Congress.

His testimony before a Congressional committee during the height of the Dust Bowl resulted in the Soil Conservation Act of April 27, 1935, which created the Soil Conservation Service at USDA.

Photos courtesy of USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

1937

North Carolina  
Soil & Water Conservation Districts

2007

Celebrating 70 years of working lands conservation

Throughout 2007, the NC Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts and Division of Soil and Water Conservation will celebrate this milestone through special events and education outreach.