Plan to Save Soil Renews College Land

(Special to The Times-Picayune)

Grand Coteau, La. - Known for their agricultural skill, the Jesuit Fathers have left their imprint in the soil of St. Charles College at Grand Coteau.

Almost from the time the college was established in 1837, the fathers have planned and toiled to make the institution's 800-acre farm productive. For more than a century the farm has furnished the institution with food. It has also contributed to the financial support of the Jesuit organization, for the produce not needed by the college is sold.

The college farm has taken a new lease on life. Erosion, which had been eating away its vital topsoil, has been controlled and the farm is again producing large and high quality crops.

While erosion began soon after the land was put in cultivation and the farm declined gradually until recent years, the college had a history of ups and downs until it abandoned its academic curriculums to devote all its resources to the training of priests.

The Jesuit Fathers did not sit idly by and watch the topsoil wash down the sloping fields into the bayou while gullies grew wider and deeper. They took various steps to check the erosion, but they lacked the knowledge and experience since accumulated to understand the need of a coordinated soil conservation program that dovetails all the necessary practices into a general plan suitable for the individual farm.

Such a plan is based on the needs of the soil and the best use that can be made of each acre.

The college priests were among the first to offer their co-operation to the Grand Coteau Ridge Soil Conservation District when it began operations in 1940. In December 1940, the college signed an agreement with the district to apply a co-ordinated soil conservation program to the farm. The program was completed in 1944 and has since been on a maintenance basis.

Last year the college was awarded a certificate of merit by the Louisiana Bankers Association in recognition of its outstanding soil conservation work.

PRACTICES LINKED

Under its conservation program the college built almost five miles of terraces to keep the rain from dashing down the slopes, cutting gullies and washing topsoil away. The terraces ease the water into outlets covered with vegetation that protects the soil. Contour furrows on all the cultivated land and terraces support each other. Seeded to common lespediza and Bermuda grass, the terraces produce hay for the farm's live stock.

Other dovetailing practices in the conservation program included cover crops that help to maintain or increase fertility and protect the soil at a time of year when the land otherwise would be exposed to erosion; cutting the remains of harvested crops into the ground surface to return organic matter to the soil to help absorb moisture and resist erosion; seeding pastures to hasten the development of nutritious grasses; and stockpiling the pastures at a rate to avoid excessive grazing and to give good grasses and legumes a chance to grow and spread. Applying fertilizer as needed is also a continuing practice. Rotation of crops rounds out the program.

A century ago the crops were cattle, sugar cane and truck. Today they are sweet potatoes, corn, truck, hay, beef, milk and pecans. Figs and oranges add to the variety of the food raised for the college table. A cannery on the premises processes 3500 No. 10 cans of fruit and vegetables for college use.

LOUISIANA COTTON CROP 58 PER CENT NORMAL THIS YEAR

Baton Rouge, Aug. 9 (AP).-Louisiana's 1946 cotton crop as of Aug. 1 is 58 per cent of normal and 97,000 bales below production last year, the LSU-United States Department of Agriculture crop reporting service estimated today.

The service estimates this year's crop at 280,000 bales, compared to 387,000 bales last year. The figure is only 44 per cent of the average 10-year production.

Wet weather and boll weevil and