WATER LEVELING — A rice field shown above is being leveled in water. Shallow water over the field permits the operator to see high spots which are then eliminated. This method of leveling land has been tried for the past few years and looks promising.

**Water Leveling Makes Host Of Friends On Area Farms**

According to Donald Landry, Work Unit Conservationist with the local Soil Conservation Service office, a simple conservation practice in Vermilion parish has made a host of friends.

It is called "water leveling," because the work is done while water is on the land. Rice farmers use the practice to give them better use of water, eliminate some of the levees, and make harvesting easier.

Workers at the Rice Experiment Station at Crowley developed the practice several years ago. Soil Conservation Service technicians assisting the soil and water conservation districts have helped rice farmers apply the practice. The local parish ASCS committee has approved cost-sharing of $5 per acre on land not previously land leveled and $2 per acre on land which $3 per acre of cost-sharing was paid for land leveling.

First they remove every other levee, or two of every three. They then realign the remaining levees so they are straight or have gentle curves in them. Cuts between levees should not exceed 600 feet down slope or 1 foot between cut, this eliminates excessive work and removal of too much top soil. The land between the levees is plowed and disked.

Next the field is flooded with water to a shallow depth. High places will show above water, and with tractors and blades they pull these highs into lows. Water and soil mixed makes a slurry that settles into low places, helping with the job done by machinery. All this is done in water, hence the name "water leveling."

After the leveling is done the water is drained off and the land allowed to dry. The final operation is smoothing with a land plane, to complete the job.

A 46 acre field in the rice section of the state had 4.6 percent of the land taken up by levees before water leveling, and only 1.2 percent after the job was done. On another 24 acre field the figures were 4.7 percent before and 1.7 percent after. These are typical examples of the reduction in land occupied by levees.

One rice farmer figures he uses 25 percent less water to grow his rice, and has a much better distribution of water over the entire field.

"It is the greatest thing to come to the rice areas since the combine," he said.

Landry stated that engineering personnel have recently checked out water leveling jobs for Russel and Mire, Theodule Noel and Eldes Dubois.