

Pest Control

as an example of how community and neighborhood land problems can be tackled successfully when city and country people work together.



By **HERB BODDY**

This water-laden area is fast being turned into crop and pasture land.

CHANGING a mosquito haven to lush forage and cash cropland, is a pretty big order. That's the story of an old Moro Cajo Slough at the hands of an aroused community.

"Skeeters," hiding out in the big marsh, north of Castroville, Calif., have long preyed on town and country people for miles around. Few, indeed, kept calm when the pesky, buzzing insects were about.

But today the mosquitoes are on their way out. Their ouster from Moro Cajo Slough through draining of their breeding ground affords relief to farmers who share ownership of some 1,200 acres of the marsh. It means that wet land which has bogged down tillage work season after season is now ready for development by conservation farming.

Draining the wet acres was not easy. It took a lot of planning, teamwork and experience. Landowners had to be brought into agreement, the aid of interested groups enlisted, and engineering lined up. Wildlife values had to be considered.

Those who joined in the successful project are being hailed today for a job well done.

Directors of the Elkhorn Soil Conservation District, the coordinators, describe the project

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When representatives of agriculture, industry, business and government work side by side on soil and water conservation work as in this instance, we see one of the newer trends that are hastening land improvements the country over.

Six interested groups and ten landowners helped to put over the Moro Cajo job. Participating agencies included the Northern Salinas Valley Mosquito Abatement District, the Elkhorn Soil Conservation District, Monterey County, the State of California, the Kaiser Aluminum Company, and the Soil Conservation Service. Cooperating farmers included the G. W. Lyons estate, B. Lyons, the California Artichoke and Vegetable Growers Association, the California Ranch and Packing Co., J. P. Dolan and Son, V. D. Sella, John Mansera, Rena Whittington, Margaret A. Collins, and J. Sandholdt.

The marshes of Moro Cajo are well known to many Monterey County residents. They're on State Highway No. 1, two miles north of Castroville. As a haven for roving swarms of mosquitoes, the watery bog is made to order. In fact, Howard Greenfield, manager of the Northern Salinas Valley Mosquito Abatement District, had the area tabbed as one of the county's most troublesome breeding spots.

Landowners often wished they could use the slough. A thousand acres or so, tilled and

farmed the conservation way, would produce a lot of good pasture and row crops. But as things were, the land was good for only a little grazing.

It wasn't that the farmers hadn't tried to put their land in shape for peak production. They laid out a lot of ditches over the years. But, lacking a good outlet for waste water, the slough stayed wet.

Late in 1951, farmers asked directors of the Elkhorn district for some help. And the district governing board invoked the assistance of technicians of the Watsonville headquarters of the Soil Conservation Service.

The technicians mapped out a drainage plan which drew support from both farmers and district directors. The plan called for lowering the outlet channel at Moss Landing Harbor, replacement at a lower elevation of tide gates and

culverts at the county road, and removal of goose-necks on culverts at State Highway No. 1. In addition, a pattern of "feeder" ditches, connecting up to the main outlet channel, were to be laid out by individual landowners.

Such a plan was needed to stop the inflow of tidal waters at high tide and provide good drainage of flood waters from the lands above tide gates. Temporary flooding of slough lands would occur during periods of heavy winter rains, but adequate drainage through the normal growing season would be assured.

With the technique laid out, directors began contacting interested parties, lining up easements for ditching and operating funds.

The Northern Salinas Valley Mosquito Abatement District voted a sum of \$2,500 to cover its

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Studying the Moro Cajo problem: Randy O. Barsotti, G. W. Lyons, Robert Blohm, president of the Elkhorn Soil Conservation District, and Merrill A. Wood, of SCS.

removal of this debris had cost taxpayers \$300 to \$500 annually. Now there is none to shovel and truck away. Likewise, he interested the town in replacing a 4-inch culvert with one measuring 18 inches. Now, however, with the strips, diversions, and other practices on Joe's farm, the original 4-inch pipe would be too large.

The personal work that Joe Sena has done with them, and what they have seen happening in production on his farm, have been highly important in convincing many farmers that Joe is on the right track. From a handful of farmers that belonged to the Hampshire Soil Conservation District in 1947, membership has grown to 600 farmers representing 55,000 acres. When you ask Joe about this district progress he modestly says, "A lot of farmers have seen the light; some hard-shells, who could see only harm coming out of it, have softened up." And, he notes that farmers who swung to solid grassland are now reestablishing it in contour strips.

Joe needs a good farm pond for fire protection and for spraying his potatoes. He tried to obtain one, on his own, by selecting a site and hiring a bulldozer operator to build it. Along came a hard storm and out went the dike. "Shucks," says Joe, "it cost me \$210—money foolishly spent. I'll try again soon, but this time the SCS technicians will select the site, plan the pond, and supervise its construction, and I'm sure I'll get a sound job."

Because he believes his potatoes are equal to any that come out of Maine, or "Little Maines," Joe is anxious to become a producer of certified seed potatoes. Since there is no State regulation, he intends to stimulate the establishment of standards. With good seed and good land fresh out of sod after 2 years of rest, he believes he can meet any requirement.

Joe and Esther Sena have two daughters, Sandra 11, and Cynthia 3, and one son, Tim, who is 1 year old. Sandra already is following in her dad's 4-H steps. She recently won a silver trophy at the Cummington Fair with three pure-bred Shropshires that she developed in 4-H Club work. "Best in the show," the judges said. "Joe was as happy as Sandra, when the results were announced," Mrs. Sena observed. "Glad we are back in the farm show business," Joe exclaims.

In the cozy farm home, which, like the barn and other buildings was built from lumber cut from the farm woods, you'll find a bit of canvas, maybe a landscaping or still life, in oils, hanging against the knotty-pine paneling. Joe says, "I couldn't draw a nail. Esther did it and I think it's a swell job. If it were not for her, I wouldn't be as far along as I am now."

Occasionally Joe goes out and does auctioneering, or custom work for other farmers. But he is most interested in doing the best possible job on the home acres. He practices what he preaches. He won the State conservation award for Hampshire County in 1951. The Senas' big idea is summed up by Esther when she says: "It's our way of life; not just something we do. All our aims, ambitions, plans, and living fit into it. It keeps us helpful and happy."

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share of drainage work and the Kaiser Aluminum Co. underwrote its share of channel improvement. Cost of culvert work was borne by county and state highway departments. Farmers agreed to pay for lateral ditches.

The task of scientifically mopping up the spongy old bog was accomplished early this year without fanfare. Farmers and interested groups liked what they saw. Slough water flowed steadily into Monterey Bay. Ponds began drying and waterlogged acres became tillable for the first time.

Moro Cajo Slough is still a bit wet in places, and you'll need hip boots to cross some of the swales. But the day isn't far off when farmers figure they can say goodbye to their wet lands.

This fall, farmers plan to have some 200 acres of the slough seeded to selected grasses and legumes like birdsfoot trefoil and alta fescue. More new seedlings are on the way. After a spell in pasture, fields will go into artichokes, then back to hay and forage again in line with the best principles of complete soil conservation planning.

With a good share of its mosquito population rubbed out and a big piece of new farmland added to its agriculture, Monterey County is proud of the headway its farmer-conservationists are making under the good land use banner.