

Section 3.—Agricultural Irrigation and Land Conservation

Subsection 1.—Federal Projects*

PRAIRIE FARM REHABILITATION ACT

The Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act (R.S.C. 1952, c. 213) is a rehabilitation program conceived by Parliament in 1935 to meet the problems of drought and soil drifting adversely affecting agriculture on the Canadian prairies. Existing agencies of the Government of Canada were assisted, with PFRA funds, to expand their activities in providing leadership in the immediate drought problems. In particular cultural investigations were carried out by the Experimental Farms Service to ensure the most economic use of the limited supply of soil moisture for crop production and the prevention of soil drifting farm lands that were a menace to surrounding good land. A program of water conservation to meet immediate needs was also initiated in 1935. Other services, such as the Economics Division, were assisted where special knowledge was required for rehabilitation measures.

The major activities of the PFRA Administration, with Headquarters at Regina, Sask., include the construction for the Government of Canada of all projects concerned with water conservation and land utilization in the Prairie Provinces. The five principal phases of investigational study in the field of engineering include surveys (exploration), soil mechanics, drainage, hydrology and design. These studies are undertaken by PFRA to gather the fundamental groundwork of technical and other basic information that is required before construction of any project is undertaken.

Water Conservation

Individual and Community Projects.—PFRA provides engineering and financial assistance to farmers in the construction of water conservation works as a rehabilitation measure within drought areas of the three Prairie Provinces. The amount of financial assistance awarded is largely dependent upon the type and size of the project contemplated. At all times PFRA policy is to provide assistance to farmers to rehabilitate themselves. Authority to proceed with construction is secured through the respective provincial water rights departments. Water conservation projects in this category are classified either as "individual farm projects" or as "community projects" undertaken by a group of farmers.

Individual Farm Projects.—During 20 years of operation PFRA has provided assistance to farmers to construct 51,691 individual farm projects in the form of dugouts and small dams, many of which are suitable for irrigation. The objective is to provide adequate water storage facilities where water shortages exist and to assure dependable water supplies through irrigation for domestic requirements, for stock watering and for the production of livestock feed.

The construction of these projects has extended the benefits of water widely throughout the dry areas: as a result a much larger number of farmers have been rehabilitated than would have been possible through the construction of large schemes on well defined watersheds and without the movement of settlers from their present holdings. The maintenance of valuable livestock herds has been assured through dependable water supplies on farm stock watering projects and through the development of small irrigation schemes.

Community Projects.—The development of community projects is necessarily confined within the narrow reaches of well defined watersheds where sufficient water resources are available. Where a group of farmers organizes a water users' association or a rural municipality provides leadership in an irrigation or water storage project, PFRA co-operates with the local body. The usual procedure is for the Government of Canada to assume the capital cost of storage and connecting works and the provincial body to assume the responsibility for the distribution of water to the land or along the watershed. The local body also undertakes maintenance and operation.

* Prepared under the direction of Dr. J. G. Taggart, C.B.E., Deputy Minister of Agriculture, by G. J. Matte, Associate Director of Rehabilitation.