



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Soil
Conservation
Service

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Subject: SOI - Operations - National Standard

Date: March 10, 1993

To: C. Steven Holzhey
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File Code: 430-14-5

At the management walk-through, the national standard team and yourself requested that the National Leaders comment on the "why and what" of a national standard not the "how." I have been involved in discussions about something called the national standard for about 3 years now. It represents many things to many people and I do not envy the national standard team in their task of defining it. Several of the National Leaders had asked for my opinion on the national standard because until then I had hoped to stay out of the discussions and let the team define it.

After giving it considerable thought I concluded that a national standard served no purpose and was not needed. I explained that I thought the idea of a national standard was the wrong approach. The fundamental "why" of a national standard and many other discussions of late is related to a fear on the part of some of the National Leaders that we will lose control of the coordination of soil data across geopolitical boundaries. That is impossible. Our national controls and structure are such that no matter how NASIS is designed we will have as much coordination as we now do and the way the national MUR is shaping up we will have the ability to compare, coordinate, and really evaluate series, series concepts, map units and map unit concepts. Ray and Jim want to try to use the national standard to impose a kind of control we never have had. We have a patchwork of data quality not because of lack of controls, but because of the age of surveys, changing standards such as changes in interpretation criteria, and because we assign ultimate responsibility to a state soil scientist who has no incentive to join across a state line. In fact the strong controls under some correlators in the old regional setting added to the state line faults by not agreeing with adjoining correlators, so stronger control is not the answer. We will always have to draw a line that separates one series from another and if we cannot agree where that line should be then I believe that a MLRA boundary is a better line than a state line. I believe the single most important thing we as a soil survey can do to insure coordination across geopolitical boundaries is to assign state soil scientist inventory responsibilities across these lines.

I do see the need for a means to compare a soil profile developed at the field level to the Official Series Description for classification and naming purposes. I still have questions as to whether it should be in a relational data base, which is the current direction it is headed, or whether it should be automated at all beyond where it already is. I do not think calling it a national standard adds anything. On the contrary it misrepresents it. If however, the national standard committee decides to call this a comparison with the "national standard" instead of comparison with the OSD, that's fine.

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USDA:SCS:DJLytle:cf:03/10/93

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