April 10, 1996

POLICY STATEMENT NO. PS-6

Negative Prime-Farmland Determinations

WHEREAS:

Recognizing that prime farmlands are defined by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (N.R.C.S., formerly the Soil Conservation Service) by the following general definition (Soil Survey Staff, 1993).

> Prime farmland is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and that is also available for these uses (the land could be cropland, pasture land, rangeland, forest land, or other land but not urban or built-up land or water areas). It has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields of crops in an economic manner when treated and managed, including water, according to acceptable farming methods. In general, prime farmlands have an adequate and dependable water supply from precipitation or irrigation, a favorable temperature and growing season, acceptable levels of acidity or alkalinity, an acceptable content of salt and sodium, and few or no rocks. They have soils that are permeable to water and air. Prime farmland is not excessively erodible or saturated with water for a long period of time, and it either does not flood frequently or is protected from flooding.

Also, recognizing that §2539.B of Statewide Order 29-O-1, the Louisiana Surface Mining Regulations, allows for the existence of factors which may affect a soil's classification as prime farmland.

THEREFORE:

It is hereby declared to be the Policy of the Office that when pre-mining baseline studies identify lands that meet one or more of the following criteria, those lands shall not be considered prime farmland:

1. The soils have an aquic or udic moisture regime, but the available water holding capacity of layers that constitutes 50% or more of the thickness within a depth of 40 inches (1 meter), or within the root zone, whichever is shallower is insufficient without irrigation to produce the commonly grown cultivated crops. For Louisiana, this would include: a. layers with an average sand content greater than 85%, and b. layers with an average clay content greater than 60%. This variance is not applicable if the crop is peanuts or rice.

2. The soils have a pH less than 4.5 or greater than 8.2 for all horizons from the surface to a depth of 40 inches (1 meter) or within the root zone, if the root zone is less than 40 inches thick.

3. The soils have a layer at least 6 inches (15 cm) thick within 40 inches (1 meter) of the soil surface that has a saturated extract conductivity 4.0 mmhos/cm or greater, or the exchangeable sodium percentage (ESP) is greater than 15.

4. The soils are flooded 2 or more times, 7 out of 10 years, or ponded for 5 or more days during the growing season unless the crop is rice.

5. The product of K (erodibility factor) x percent slope is 2 or more, and the product of I (soils erodibility factor) x C (climatic factor) exceeds 60.

6. The soils have an infiltration rate less than 0.06 inches (0.15 cm) per hour for the upper 20 inches (50 cm) unless the crop is rice.

7. The saturated hydraulic conductivity is 0.01417 in/hr (0.1 µm/s) or less for any layer at least 4.0 inches (10 cm) thick within 40 inches (1 meter) of the soil surface, unless the crop is rice.

8. The soil has 10 percent or more coarse fragments 3 inches (7.6 cm) in diameter within the upper 6 inches (15 cm).

Any such negative determination shall only be made after consultation with and concurrence by the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Reference

Soil Survey Staff. 1993. National Soil Survey Handbook. USDA-SCS. Gov. Printing Off., Washington, DC.

This Policy Statement adequately reflects the policy of the Office with respect to surface mining of coal and lignite, and this Policy Statement is hereby included in the approved Louisiana Regulatory Program.

Issued this 10th day of April, 1996 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.