

Total payments made, including prepayments and refunds, amounted to 99 percent of the principal amount due. Cooperative borrowers have a similar record.

In another highly successful operation OEO had delegated to our Forest Service authority for operating 47 rural job corps conservation centers to make young Americans more employable through education and vocational training. There are approximately 8,000 male youth 16 to 21 years of age in these centers.

The young men are proud of not only what they have accomplished, but also of the skills they have obtained in carpentry, masonry, heavy equipment, operation, and landscaping.

Such skills will help them to break the bonds of poverty and become fully self-supporting members of society. To date, the young Americans in the Job Corps have been very predominantly urban. Through the TAP's we are making a strong effort to recruit more rural youth.

For boxed in men who are older and therefore ineligible for the Job Corps' Operation Mainstream, Nelson amendment, projects are providing both jobs and training in new skills. Funding is by the Department of Labor through community action agencies. Projects presently operating are providing conservation and development work and training for 150 men in the Jefferson National Forest of Virginia—48 men in Holly Springs National Forest in Mississippi—84 men in the Kisatchie National Forest, La.—and 30 men in the Pisgah National Forest of North Carolina. Negotiations are underway for projects in National Forests in Kentucky and New Mexico and an additional project in Louisiana.

All in all, the record of progress in rural America is good. That needs to be recognized. But we must also recognize that the job ahead, if we are to meet the problems of rural America, will be difficult and long.

No one agency can solve these problems. They can only be solved intimately by local people with the help of Federal and State resources. They require a coordinated attack. Rural America needs the joint effort and experience that OEO is providing. We in USDA look forward to even closer and more fruitful cooperation with OEO in revitalizing rural America.

For example, one of the joint programs we are contemplating is a two pronged reclamation project—reclamation of land and reclamation of people. The specific area is 6,000 acres of land in Mississippi seriously damaged by sediment eroded from surrounding hillsides.

Much of this acreage belongs to low-income farmers. This is a part of the Southeast delta resources conservation and development project which was authorized last September. Flood-prevention dams and other sediment-control structures have already been built, the hillsides have been revegetated, and the erosion is largely stopped.

Now the problem is to make the land fully usable again.

The plan is to spread the sediment evenly and then by deep plowing to incorporate it into the soil. Technical and cost-sharing assistance will be provided by USDA conservation agencies, and OEO will assist in funding the project.