

Agriculture by Robert L. Baker

Urban farm boys push radical plans

Millions of dollars pour into think tanks like the AFT to misinform the public about farmers and food safety.

As the 1990 session of the 101st Congress began in Washington D.C. on Jan. 22, if you were watching the environmentalist lobby, you would have seen press conferences, news releases, and pseudo-science reports and studies coming out to feed the perception-hype needed to push their program into law.

At the National Press Club in Washington on Monday, Jan. 22, there was a 10:00 a.m. news conference by the Sierra Club to release its latest study on air pollution, an 11:00 a.m. news conference by the Environmental Protection Agency, and a 12:30 p.m. news conference by the American Farmland Trust, in which they released an environmentalist study on agriculture.

If you are involved in agriculture and farming, you would probably not be aware that most of the major proposals for the 1990 Farm Bill originate from front groups funded by the Eastern Establishment, whose policy is to slowly choke modern farming through environmental regulations.

A major front group being used by the Eastern Establishment is the American Farmland Trust (AFT). Set up in 1980 at the beginning of the environmentalist push, the AFT just released the latest of their many studies, entitled, "Agriculture and the Environment, A Study of Farmer Practices and Perceptions."

Released at the Jan. 22 press conference, the study, according to AFT president Ralph Grossi, indicates "that farmers will want to adopt new techniques because those new ways of producing food and fiber make sense

to the farmer who wants to maximize profits." This sounds as if farmers are waiting in line to have the government tell them it's okay to stop using fertilizer and chemicals, because this is causing farm bankruptcies. The truth is that this 24-page study covers up the real food problem, which is that farm commodity prices are being deliberately held below the cost of production by government policy, not high fertilizer and chemical costs.

Through news reporters with little if any knowledge of agriculture, urban farm-boy groups like the AFT can easily manipulate the perceptions of an unsuspecting public into thinking that farmers will make more profit by reducing the inputs necessary to produce high yields, while the real policy of the Eastern Establishment—to reduce food production and the number of self-supporting farms—is accomplished through environmentalist dictates.

Grossi announced at the press conference that "the survey gives us information about the extent to which the farmers are already using practices that could potentially substitute for chemical inputs or otherwise permit growers to reduce their use of chemicals."

What is the AFT going to do with this information? Grossi says, "We are going to make recommendations to Congress—recommendations that we hope will lead to provisions in the new farm bill." High on the list of items that AFT would like to see included in the 1990 Farm Bill would be a program to reduce the "use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides."

"We've put piles of paper on government desks—enough to choke a horse," says Bill Raven, vice president of sales for Des Plaines, Ill.-based Sandoz Crop Protection Corp., "But we're not communicating with the people who are affected by our products."

Millions of dollars pouring into urban farm boy think tanks, like the AFT, are being used to misinform and change the public's "perception" of farmers and food safety.

During the first week in January, after speaking to the Kansas State Board of Agriculture, Agriculture Secretary Clayton Yeutter essentially verified that farm prices are not a major concern in the farm bill debate. Yeutter told the press, "The administration and the Congress are likely to spend more time on environmental issues in the 1990 farm bill than they will on traditional price/income support issues."

In his speech Yeutter asserted, "Farmers are the leading environmentalists in this country." He added, "LISA, Low Input Sustainable Agriculture, which is the use of less fertilizer and pesticides, is a concept that needs more research and field trials before anyone should expect farmers to start abandoning agricultural chemicals."

Yeutter criticized people who push the food safety panic button after measuring chemical residues in parts per trillion. "There is too much hysteria in this whole issue today," he said.

Grossi says the AFT study shows that, "The LISA label is a dead end and should be eliminated from our discussions of agricultural production practices." Why? The reason is that most farmers do not use excess fertilizer or chemicals, thus they are already low input and sustainable. Farmers aren't buying into the tricky LISA terminology double-talk.