

Agriculture by Cynthia Parsons

Organic farming: a pile of manure

"Exporting food is exporting U.S. soil," says the Aspen Institute, and the USDA is listening.

Organic farming, now being touted by Walter Orr Roberts of the National Center for Atmospheric Research, which is linked to one of the major funders of the environmentalist movement in the United States, the Aspen Institute, is also being incorporated into U.S. agricultural policy making.

Two bills are now before the Congress calling for the U.S. Department of Agriculture to set up programs to disseminate information on organic farming methods, to be financed by USDA research extension grants. And when the dung-worshipping Rodale Press and Organic Farms Inc. testified on the "Organic Farming Act of 1982" now before the House, the Administrator of the USDA's Agricultural Research Service, the one-time catalytic agency for making U.S. agriculture the most advanced in the world, declared, "There obviously are situations where the required inputs and production outputs are such that organic farming would be the preferred method."

Organic farming is defined by the USDA as "a production system that avoids or largely excludes the use of synthetically compounded fertilizers, pesticides, growth regulators, and livestock feed additives. To the maximum extent feasible, organic systems rely on crop rotation, crop residues, animal manures . . . off-farm organic wastes, and aspects of biological pest control."

Aides to Rep. James Weaver (D-Pa.) who is sponsoring the House bill, readily admit that organic farming is

more labor-intensive and that "for a time" output would be significantly reduced. The USDA's first report in 1980 cites studies showing that if a total shift to organic farming were to occur, domestic food needs could still be met, but concedes that farm exports would fall short.

The Senate has similar legislation under consideration. Both bills call on the USDA to set up programs whereby 1) information on organic farming is gathered and disseminated by the federal government; 2) volunteers work under USDA's farm cooperative extension systems around the country; and 3) six organic model farms are set up. Funding for this promotion would come from the already skin-and-bones budget for cooperative extension research.

The USDA reflects the mounting influence on farm policy of the Aspen Institute, which is already responsible for wrecking American energy development. Walter Orr Roberts, of the National Center for Atmospheric Research, is tinkering with proposals for how "to do right by the soil" or "living humus," and is planning a project to look into the economic, political, and "ethical" effects if U.S. grain production were to be cut by 50 percent and prices doubled! Although Roberts claimed that he was concerned not to cause utter hardship, he has already run this scenario through a computer model, and found that it would result in 300,000 deaths outside the United States.

Roberts has also thought about

promoting sheep and goat grazing under trees, a practice which he indicated would solve soil-erosion problems and increase the agro-forestry business; he said this works very well in Khazakhstan. And marginal land should be taken out of irrigation in order to stop depleting aquifers. Too much incentive is being given farmers to produce, causing surpluses which then have to be exported. For Roberts, "sustainability" is the key: producing only enough for the minimum needs of the current U.S. population. "Every time you export U.S. grain, you are exporting U.S. soil."

Organic farming, the method that keeps communist China in a state of constant famine, needs a 30 percent participation by farmers to produce the desired 10 percent decrease in food production, Roberts estimates. Organic farming certainly will produce the desired lower yields, and "if done at a lower price and cheaper inputs, it's a plus," he says.

No matter what the USDA does, the majority of American farmers, who use all methods to increase efficiency, will not accept organic farming. But the USDA is not the only influence. Sky-high interest rates, falling crop and land prices, and rising fertilizer costs all tend to force the farmer into cutting back on something. Family farmers are the target of the organicists. Their economic situation is the worst; they will look for ways to reduce costs; they will do almost anything to stay on the farm. Back in 1906, "Fertilizer Almanac" wrote, "To properly handle a field of 50 acres, the farmer would have to haul about 7,500 loads of manure. If he hauled 100 loads a day, it would take 75 working days to cover the 50 acres." The organicists expect the family farmers to be compelled to resort to some approximation of that degraded life.