

Agriculture by Marcia Merry

Food or 'alternative agriculture'?

While cartel interests get ready to seize farmers' land, they're promoting a fairy-tale diversion.

While questions of what to do about mass bankruptcies of U.S. and European farmers should be foremost for every citizen, there is a diversion game being played by the media, and by food cartel policy circles: "alternative agriculture."

You hear stories about how financially-pressed farmers from coast to coast should "adjust" to the "new marketing" opportunities of the "changing diet," and produce specialty, gourmet foods. A front-page *Wall Street Journal* article featured this theme June 24, under the banner, "Surviving Farmers: To Remain in Business Requires Cultivating Crops and Ingenuity; Corngrower Tries Asparagus; Natural Beef Is a Godsend to a Colorado Cattleman."

What are presented are a few fairy tales of special crop diversification and marketing, as if this could produce the nation's daily requirements for bread, meat, and milk.

The real condition of our agriculture and food supply is disastrous, from the bankrupt farmer to collapsing farm infrastructure—machinery, independent seed stocks, fertilizer.

Meanwhile, the most intense attention in Washington, D.C. is focused on food trade war with our allies abroad.

What is needed is to force a fast change in state, local, and federal policies in order to guarantee the basic food supply. Emergency economic measures are needed to preserve and advance the traditional family farm, to increase food output of staples and

world food flows under equitable terms of trade for all involved.

In addition, anti-trust actions are required to end the domination of national and international food supply by a few cartel companies—Cargill, Continental, André, Bunge, Louis Dreyfus, Nestlé, Unilever, W. R. Grace, and the Armand Hammer beef and fertilizer group.

Through intermediary think tanks and lobby groups, they are the ones promoting the myth of "alternative agriculture" to divert both farmer and the public.

Such intermediate channels include the Washington-based Institute for Policy Studies, the Conservation Foundation (and its off-shoot, the American Farmland Trust), and others. These say, vast amounts of cropland should be taken out of production anyway, for "conservation" reasons. Of course, the cartel interests will then acquire the lands or place them in public "trust" to their advantage.

Cropland foreclosed from bankrupt farmers is being "warehoused" by the Farm Credit System "Capital Corp." By the end of this year, it is estimated that the Farmers Home Administration (the government lender of last resort) will possess 20,000 foreclosed farms—up from merely 283 only three years ago.

The cartel and bank interests after the land recommend that farmers can switch over to "pick-your-own" fruit and vegetable operations, homemade "sheep to shawl" woolens, no-chemical produce and meats, and raw cheese

and milk. For those few farms near centers with some purchasing power left, this may keep them in operation a while longer. Not so in Iowa.

The "alternative agriculture" advocates are frequently fanatics. On yuppie-catering menus, you may now see "free range chickens." Such offerings may increase the likelihood of salmonella and other barnyard diseases.

In its most extreme form, "alternative agriculture," has run to outright terrorism and anarchy. On May 4, in Delaware, a group calling itself the "Farm Freedom Fighters," removed 25 hens from an egg house at Sydel Egg Farm, claiming it was an act of animal liberation, and painting graffiti on the walls: "chicken Auschwitz."

State agriculture extension representatives are going along with the tide, advising farmers to "switch over" to special crops. Texas Agriculture Commissioner Jim Hightower, who was the "shadow" agriculture secretary choice of Walter Mondale (i.e., the Minneapolis cartel crowd), calls for a massive shift to "direct marketing" of crops—like watermelons along freeway ramps and other loony proposals.

Hightower was trained at the Institute for Policy Studies, and wrote part of the book, *Hard Tomatoes, Hard Times*, which is anti-technology.

In May, Hightower and others hosted a national conference pushing alternative agriculture approaches, an event of the "New Populist Forum." Present was Robert Rodale, of the Pennsylvania-based anti-technology publishing company, Rodale Press, which advocates the "Cornucopia Project." Rodale has done plans for autonomous, state-level food "security" measures. He says that "spiritual" gains should govern the "new farmer."