

## Agriculture by Marcia Merry

### An attack on mechanization

*The California decision in favor of "small farms" is an attack on the American system of high-technology farming.*

On Nov. 18, 1987, a court in California attempted to "reinterpret" standing federal law in a manner designed to assist the demise of the modern family farm, and to lend support to the New Age, "alternative-technology" dirt farm. Although only a state court judgment—albeit in the most important U.S. agriculture state—the spurious reasoning in the case should be made known and denounced to deter the spread of this outlook.

The remarkable decision equates mechanization with a threat to the economy.

Judge Raymond Marsh of the Alameda County Superior Court in ruled that the University of California was in violation of the 1887 Hatch Act, mandating federally funded programs for agricultural experimentation at land grant colleges, because the university was said to be favoring large, mechanized farms over small, labor-intensive farms. The judge ordered the university to produce a different research perspective by mid-February of this year.

Judge Marsh announced his intention to review the new program, and to monitor compliance over the next five years.

The decision culminates eight years of litigation, in which the central issue was the university's involvement in developing mechanical harvesting equipment for fruits and vegetables, especially the tomato, for large-scale agricultural operations.

The focus of the trial proceedings was the use of federal funds by the

university to develop labor-saving devices. The suit against the university contended that the very development of the equipment constitutes the cause of the increasing market domination by a few large grower-processors, and also caused the unemployment of tomato pickers. Data presented by the plaintiffs reported that tomato harvest-time jobs fell from 50,000 in California in 1964, to 18,000 in 1970. There was no material presented on the simultaneous decline in the general economy, which therefore prevented farmworkers and other unemployed, from finding better, and higher-paying jobs.

The suit was originally filed as the centerpiece of the farm wing of the "greenie" movement in the United States, paralleling certain attacks on advanced crop and animal husbandry in Western Europe over the last decade.

It is the case that food brokering and processing are increasingly becoming concentrated in the hands of a few cartel companies in the United States and abroad, but not because of technological innovations. The monopoly concentration comes about as a result of government-protected buy-out and trust practices of such individuals and cartel firms as Armand Hammer (IBP—Iowa Beef Processors), Dwayne Andreas (ADM—Archer Daniels Midland), Nestlé's, Cargill, Continental, Bunge, André, Louis Dreyfus, and the rest.

This worldwide concentration of food control has been conspicuously

ignored by the originators of the California anti-machinery suit, who receive funding and support from foundations connected to the financial interests that have sought to break the back of the independent family farm. The suit was filed on behalf of 15 farmers by the California Rural Legal Assistance Group, and the California Agrarian Action Project of Davis. Such groups are part of a network of activist fronts, which in turn receive funding from such Eastern Establishment foundations as the Ford Foundation, and the Field and Stern Foundations.

A notorious part of this Luddite campaign against technology and land grant university research was the "Agriculture Accountability Project," created in the 1970s by persons linked to the radical Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C. The AAP produced a book, under the byline of Jim Hightower, now Texas agriculture commissioner, called *Hard Tomatoes, Hard Times*. The thesis of the book, like the California case, is that mechanization is bad because jobs are lost.

Speaking defensively on the issue of job loss, Elizabeth Martin, former executive director of the California Action Network that took over the Agrarian Action Project at Davis, told the press after the Nov. 18 decision, "We were not saying the tomato harvester should not have been developed. We said that it should not have been developed with Hatch Act money. Not a penny was spent to study the implications of mechanization on jobs, on farm size, on prices, on the environment."

University officials announced that they are appealing the decision. University attorney Gary Morrison said that the University "has procedures to ensure that sound and quality research is conducted for the benefit of all mankind, including small farmers."