

Agriculture by Marcia Merry

A lot of manure

That's the best way to sum up the latest "New Age" scheme, known as "sustainable agriculture."

Over the last two years, the "sustainable agriculture" perspective has moved from a back-burner issue into what you are supposed to believe is the leading edge of modern farming. The last session of Congress appropriated \$3.9 million—forget the budget deficit—to set up four regional research committees to prove the merits of sustainable agriculture.

Land grant universities in almost every leading farm state are now in the process of hosting conferences on sustainable agriculture. For example, in Columbus, Ohio on Sept. 19-23, 1988, an elaborate conference was held, organized by a group including Ohio State, Penn State, and North Carolina State universities, by a gaggle of private organic farming advocacy groups, by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and by the World Bank.

The participation of that last entity is a giveaway to the whole swindle. It has been the policy of the world food cartel interests, and related banking agencies (the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the mega-New York and European banks and family trusts) to attempt to restructure national economies—farm sectors, industry, local banking, health, and vital services—in ways to temporarily back up unpayable debts, by imposing ever more severe austerity.

In attempts to prevent effective opposition to these austerity policies, think tanks in the service of the banking and food cartel interests have concocted "thought control" campaigns to confuse and demoralize farmers,

industrial workers, businessmen, and others, to get them to submit to more and more austerity.

For the Third World, the euphemism of "appropriate agriculture" was promoted by World Bank circles, beginning at least 15 years ago, to rationalize the idea that so-called Third World farmers should use primitive farming methods, and engage in "traditional" back-breaking labor. They should not have modern technology—which the World Bank did not want them to have credit to build or obtain.

Similarly, the concept of sustainable agriculture was coined for use against farmers and the public in the "advanced economies." Sustainable agriculture is a pseudo-scientific justification for the practice of using little or no chemical fertilizers, modern equipment, and other high-technology farm methods, under the rationalization that low-input agriculture will be better for the soil, and the farm in general, in the long run.

The additional hook for the farmer, is that the sustainable agriculture rhetoric covers for the fact he or she no longer has the income to afford scientific farm management. The World Bank and IMF do not want U.S. farmers to politically demand the right to high-technology farming and decent incomes.

The think tanks promoting "alternative" and sustainable agriculture include the Washington-based Conservation Foundation, the New York Council on Foreign Relations, the Twentieth Century Fund—all part of the service industry for the interna-

tional food cartel interests.

The "appropriate agriculture" and "sustainable agriculture" hoaxes may rank among the most cynical mass snake-oil sales jobs ever to go down in history. Their purpose is to get farmers to "adjust" to the backwardness that is supposed to be their lot in life.

Taken on its own terms, "Low Input Sustainable Agriculture" (LISA) is absurd. Look at the fertilizer question. It is part of LISA dogma that crop growing should strive to reduce and eliminate the use of pesticides, herbicides, and chemical fertilizers, and to replace these energy inputs with higher inputs of labor, and "natural" organic minerals. Those who advocate this method assert it will reduce production costs, control soil erosion, and eliminate perceived pollution of underground water and food by chemicals.

In fact, the amount of nutrients taken up from the soil by crops must be replaced, or soil fertility will decline. But there is no net gain of nutrients when "organic sources" are used. Manure use merely transfers the minerals from one field to another, or one farm to another. Any exports of products from the farm deplete soil nutrients. The world's best organic recycling experts, the Chinese, have severe potash and phosphate deficiencies, because of long-term net export of nutrients from the Chinese farm.

The basic soil nutrients are nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium. For U.S. farms to "go organic," manure would have to be spread several inches to a foot deep in most fields. The national odor would be impressive. The national dairy, beef, and hog numbers would have to increase 20-30 times their present size to provide enough droppings. Hauling these around alone would be a formidable task and would require a new transportation system.