

Agriculture by Robert L. Baker

Land trusts grab foreclosed farmland

The Trilateral Commission "ecologists" are making a new bid for farmland that has gone out of production.

As 1989 came to a close, the Resolution Trust Corporation, set up to handle the national savings and loan disaster, was poised to dump 30,000 repossessed properties in a "fire sale" attempt to generate badly needed cash. There are thousands of acres of farmland in this inventory, and so-called conservation groups are on the move to usher in neo-feudalist land-control systems, in the name of "preserving soils," "protecting swamps," and what have you.

These outfits—connected to the Eastern Establishment and to transatlantic oligarchical families—have a battery of mechanisms to do this, including debt-for-nature swaps and Purchased Development Rights (PDRs).

PDRs are becoming the latest new tool for environmentalist organizations to use to shut down real economic development. Typically, these programs pay farmers and other landholders for their development rights by placing use-restrictions on the real estate deed, which are binding on the land for all successive owners.

The American Farmland Trust's 1988 annual report boasted, "We've laid the groundwork for PDR programs." AFT staff taught state legislators and thousands of local grassroots activists in Pennsylvania, New York, Vermont, North Carolina, Connecticut, and 17 other states how to set up PDR programs. Now, more than 22 states have set up PDR programs.

The American Farmland Trust was set up by the Conservation Foundation; on its board sit such Establishment figures as Trilateral Commission member Dwayne O. Andreas, chief

executive of the food cartel giant Archer Daniels Midland Co.; Mrs. David Rockefeller, whose husband is chairman of the Trilateral Commission; and Robert B. Anderson, the son of Trilateral member Robert O. Anderson, who is the owner of Atlantic Richfield Co.

The Conservation Fund, whose president, Patrick F. Noonan, is the chairman of the board of the World Wildlife Fund and the Conservation Foundation, is eyeing the potential of Purchase Development Rights on an unprecedented scale.

In the Conservation Fund's first newsletter of 1990, it points out that the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. (FDIC) and the Resolution Trust Corp. (RTC) are the newest recruits to the big leagues of land ownership. They are expected to handle about \$200 billion in real estate over the next few years, amounting to more than a million acres of land.

Rick Lowerre, of the Texas Center for Policy Studies, cites the sale last year by the Federal Savings and Loan Insurance Corporation (FSLIC) of 63 acres to the Florida Keys Land Trust as a model package. "Hopefully the Resolution Trust Corp. will use the inventory to market properties to public and private conservation buyers," he says.

Certain criteria will determine whether the conservation stakes in the bailout will grow larger. If the FDIC and RTC are considered "federal agencies" or "instrumentalities" of the government, then they and the property they repossess will be subject to the executive orders and environmental laws that will force several hundred

thousand acres of land into restricted conservation uses. Officials of the RTC are currently meeting with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service to explore these issues.

Precedent exists for such Purchase Development Rights. During the debt crisis with farmland, the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) repossessed 1.5 million acres from coast to coast. Congress prohibited the lease or sale of the properties unless wetlands and historic sites within them were protected.

The Fish and Wildlife Service inventoried the lands for the FmHA and recommended nearly a thousand conservation easements, forever locking 100,000 acres into conservation uses, to which the FmHA agreed. For each succeeding owner of these properties, the easement use-restrictions will be forever attached.

The Massachusetts-based Trust for Reservations (TFR), the oldest land trust in America, whose director, Frederic Winthrop, Jr., is a board member of the American Farmland Trust, exemplifies the extremes to which PDRs can be promoted. The TFR set up the Massachusetts Farm and Conservation Lands Trust (MFCLT), as a supporting foundation that now specializes in buying farmland, selling off the development rights, attaching use-restrictions to the land deed, and then reselling the land with "production restrictions" forever attached to deed. Since 1980, the MFCLT has purchased and resold 20 farm parcels totaling 1,800 acres.

This is now the blueprint that is being developed in thousands of communities across the nation, as groups like the American Farmland Trust teach local environmentalist groups to establish and fund programs to restrict the use of agricultural land.