

Agriculture by Marcia Merry

Food cartel takes over research

Agriculture Department research is shifting from science to superstition, and has prioritized study of low-tech farming.

Even before the signing of a new five-year farm law, changes have been announced by U.S. Department of Agriculture officials for farm research priorities that reflect the disastrous modern trend toward superstition and away from science in farm policy.

This shift was ushered in by the expiring 1985 "National Food Security Act," which contained unprecedented measures to promote "alternative" foods and farming. Now, the Bush administration, staffed by a cohort of servants of the big food cartel companies (Cargill, Continental, Louis Dreyfus, Archer Daniels Midland, and others) such as Agriculture Secretary Clayton Yeutter and Environmental Protection Agency head William K. Reilly, is accelerating the shift.

These interests want farm production to be transformed away from high-technology agriculture into low-technology, low-cost farming methods.

The USDA issued a silly press release July 23 that announced many of the changes at the USDA's flagship research unit, the 7,200-acre Beltsville, Maryland Agriculture Research Center near Washington, D.C.

The release began, "Pesticide Road is history; Biocontrol Road has arrived," referring to a new road sign installed at the Agricultural Research Center, to denote that research priorities will forsake electromagnetic, nuclear, and biochemical research, in favor of glorified investigations of "natural enemies" of pests. While this latter focus has a useful history—for example, using marigolds and lady-

bugs in your garden to ward off predators of food plants—the elevation of useful practices as advanced research priorities is bunk.

Essex E. Finney Jr., director of the Beltsville center, the largest facility of the USDA's Agricultural Research Service, said, "Biocontrol Road symbolizes our shift, made gradually over the last 20 years, towards finding natural alternative to chemical pesticides, such as good bugs that eat weeds or bad bugs. But changing the name makes sense because biocontrol research in labs along that road since the 1970s is again being strengthened."

Pesticide Road had become a misnomer, Finney said. He announced a new alignment of the center's Plant Sciences Institute. This summer, the institute's former 21 labs are being consolidated into 16. The center's total of 373 scientists and 1,087 other personnel remains the same. "We will focus more of our talent and resources on some of the highest priorities, especially biological control of plant pests, plant genetic resources, long-term sustainability of farm production and national resources, insect neurobiology, and global climate change," Finney said.

The few old-timers at the once-respected USDA research facilities have joked over the past few years that the new, "bio" fanatics are so extreme, that, for example, one top official tried to eat so much "natural fiber" in his diet, that he got a dreadful case of shingles as a result.

The same nutty shifts are reflected at the National Agricultural Library—

the largest such library in the world. Run by the USDA, the NAL is one of only three federal libraries; the others are the Library of Congress and the National Institutes of Health library.

The NAL has traditionally specialized in the collection of information on agriculture and subjects supporting agriculture research—soil science, veterinary medicine, nutrition, and so forth.

Today, the library is shifting resources into providing information on "alternative" agriculture, meaning low-technology, low-energy input farming.

Aiding and abetting this shift is a newly reorganized support group called the Associates of the National Agricultural Library. In the past, the group was composed of retired staff, friends of the library, historians, and researchers who wanted to honor and assist the library and the rich tradition of agricultural progress in the United States.

Within the last two years, the Associates group has been revamped. There is now a slick organizational chart which boasts a Senior Executive Board, on which are figures from the most infamous of the very food cartel companies currently underpaying farmers and undermining the food supply. It is these interests who are pushing "natural," low-tech farming as an excuse for robbing the farm family of the income with which to capitalize sound agricultural practices.

On the new board sit Dwayne Andreas of Archer Daniels Midland Co., William Louis Dreyfus of Louis Dreyfus, the grain mega-company, Donald L. Staheli, of Continental Grain Co., Charles Michael Harper of ConAgra, Inc., David H. Swanson of Central Soya Co., a subsidiary of the Ferruzzi group based in Italy, and Julia Peterson of the Cargill Information Center.