

IAA symposium outlines components, needs of sustainable farming

Sustainable farming systems involve “physical, economic, institutional, and social components,” keynote speaker Dennis Keeney, Director of Iowa’s Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, told the February 28 IAA symposium in Washington, DC. Crop rotations and integration of livestock are essential elements to consider, but off-season work for farm families, new roles for farm industry, and wildlife habitat are also components.

Describing a sustainable system in practice, North Dakota organic farmer Fred Kirschenmann told the audience that crop rotations had helped his soils build drought resistance. “Our 1988 rainfall was just over one inch,” he said, “but our wheat crop was 80 percent of normal.”

Commodity programs tend to push farmers into production of the “big four” crops—wheat, corn, cotton, and soybeans, Douglas Young of Washington State University told the symposium audience. Those crops also receive a majority of agrichemicals, with corn alone receiving 51 percent of all herbicides. Projecting the consequences of a “less distorted” commodity program, John E. Lee of the USDA Economic Research Service speculated that “the people who’ll be squeezed out [of farming] are those who are doing the most damage to the environment.”

In the final panel, Ken Cook of the Conservation Foundation suggested that waste of nutrients and soil on farms leads to pollution but also points to “inefficient use of inputs.” The 1990 farm bill “could establish goals for farm waste reduction,” he said.

Note: The symposium proceedings will be published in a forthcoming issue of the American Journal of Alternative Agriculture.

IAA Board elects Jean Douglas President, seats new members

Mrs. Jean Wallace Douglas, a long-standing supporter of resource-conserving, environmentally sound farming systems, was elected President of the Institute’s Board of Directors at its March 1 meeting in Washington, DC. Mrs. Douglas has been a member of the IAA Board since 1984. Jay Harris of Berwyn, Pennsylvania, was re-elected Vice President. Jerry DeWitt, Associate Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University, Ames, was elected Secretary; and Maureen Hinkle of the National Audubon Society was re-elected Treasurer. New Directors William Liebhardt, of the University of California-Davis, Jim Bender, farmer from Weeping Water, Nebraska, Per Bye Ohrstrom, owner of two Illinois organic product companies, and Gordon Watkins, owner of the Rivendell Gardens in Arkansas, were officially seated at the meeting.

The Board decided that innovative methods for moving sustainable farming information would be the topic for the Spring 1990 IAA symposium.

IAA participated in national low-input meeting

The March 8-10 Soil and Water Conservation Society meeting in Omaha on “The Promise of Low-Input Agriculture,” co-sponsored by the Institute, provided an overview of low-input issues nationally. Keynote speaker Neill Schaller, Program Director of the USDA LISA program, commented that low-input sustainability is a “way of thinking, not a specific method,” and pointed to the multiplicity of ideas involved.

The Soil and Water Conservation

Society will publish a special issue on “The Promise of Low-Input Agriculture” in its November/December 1989 issue. Submissions of papers are welcome until August 31, 1989. Contact the Editor, *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation*, 7515 Northeast Ankeny Road, Ankeny, IA 50021-9764.

National organic/sustainable agriculture conference

The March 16-17 national conference on organic and sustainable agriculture, sponsored by the Center for Science in the Public Interest and co-sponsored by the Institute, brought participants from every aspect of the food system together in Washington to consider the status and needs of organic farm and food systems. Panel discussions covered research and information, marketing, organic certification programs, financing for alternative ventures, and national policy needs.

IAA active in working group to support LISA funding in FY1990

The Institute is actively supporting continued funding for the USDA low-input sustainable agriculture program (LISA) in FY1990. Staff will provide testimony to both Senate and House appropriations committees and work cooperatively with a Washington-based coalition formed to gain that funding. The Administration budget for FY1990 does not include the program, although LISA has had strong support from researchers, educators, farmers, and both the public and private sector groups involved. In 1988, Congress overrode the Administration zero-budget and provided \$4.45 million for the program.