Organic Weed Control, a 30-minute video, is available from Natural Organic Farmers Association, RFD #2, Barre, MA 01005. A list of 50 other videos is also available from NOFA.

Alternative methods can greatly reduce pesticide use, says report

Alternative farming techniques could reduce pesticide applications between 25 and 80 percent on nine crops grown in California and Iowa, according to "Harvest of Hope," a new report by the Natural Resources Defense Council. Those reductions can be achieved with available technologies, many of which have been implemented on farms without reducing crop yields or raising production costs.

The report documents the extent of water contamination by agricultural chemicals and identifies crop-specific alternative farming methods that could dramatically reduce the use of pesticides. Also examined are many of the policy barriers farmers face in adopting alternative practices, including the lack of federally supported research for alternative farming systems, and the federal farm programs' penalizing of crop rotation, an effective way to reduce chemical inputs and increase crop yields. Federal and state marketing policies and grade standards also place a premium on the cosmetic qualities of produce that can most easily be achieved with high chemical use.

"Pesticide contamination of the food supply, farmworker illness, ecosystem degradation, and now water pollution have all resulted from agricultural pesticide use, much of which can be eliminated with alternative farming practices," said Lawrie Mott, an NRDC scientist and co-author of the report. For more information, contact NRDC, (415) 777-0220.

INSTITUTE NEWS

Institute inaugurates Visiting Scholar Program

The IAA's new Visiting Scholar Program was inaugurated in June with the arrival of David Watt, an Associate Professor of Agricultural Economics at North Dakota State University in Fargo, North Dakota. He is spending ten weeks at the IAA studying the responses and contributions to agricultural sustainability of institutions such as the USDA and the EPA. Watt is one of the nation's leading farm management professionals, particularly in strategic planning and financial risk management. He is the Executive Secretary of the Northwest Farm Managers Association, which brings together farmers, university staff, and business leaders to support the state's agriculture. Raised on an Iowa farm, Watt studied at the University of Missouri, earned a Ph.D. degree in agricultural economics from Michigan State University, and worked for the USDA's Economic Research Service before moving to North Dakota.

In the early fall, the IAA expects to invite people interested in being Visiting Scholars to submit proposals for 3-6 month projects dealing with the effects of national and state policies on adoption of sustainable agriculture, conceptual issues, sustainable agriculture curriculum development, international dimensions of sustainability, and institutional issues.

IAA report examines research on likely impacts of sustainable agriculture

A new IAA publication reports that little research has been done on the likely impacts of widespread adoption of a sustainable agriculture and that what has been done tends to have serious limitations. The publication, *An Agenda for Research on the Impacts of Sustainable Agriculture,* Occasional Paper Series Number 2, released July 1991, says that contemporary research is basically incompatible with the meaning and nature of sustainable agriculture as it is commonly defined.

Those are the findings of a panel of eight leading social scientists, as interpreted and summarized by Neill Schaller, IAA's Associate Director and panel moderator. The group, including agricultural economists and rural sociologists, was convened by IAA in early 1991 to examine the state of research on the implications of sustainable farming in the U.S. and to recommend ways to overcome its limitations.

The panel members were: Frederick H. Buttel, Cornell University; Paul Faeth, World Resources Institute; William D. Heffernan, University of Missouri; Glenn A. Helmers, University of Nebraska; Stanley R. Johnson, Iowa State University; Linda K. Lee, University of Connecticut; Kent D. Olson, University of Minnesota; Katherine Reichelderfer, Resources for the Future; Neill Schaller, IAA (moderator).

The report identifies three ways in which contemporary research is ill-suited to the task of estimating the impacts of sustainable agriculture:

The "indicators" used by researchers to describe the impacts of sustainable farming overemphasize agricultural performance--through measures such as production, exports, and food prices--and fail to depict the range and the interplay of environmental, health, and socioeconomic impacts of interest to the public. Indicators simply do not exist to characterize impacts such as the effects of chemical-intensive farming practices on farmers' health.

Current research methods and assumptions typically overlook or fail to describe realistically the full meaning of sustainability and the holistic nature and complexity of sustainable farming approaches.

The research community's lack of familiarity with sustainable farming systems often leads to unrealistically low estimates of crop yields on farms adopting sustainable practices.

The panel report urges the agricultural research establishment--especially agricultural economists and rural sociologists--to create new indicators that will effectively portray the range of public interests in sustainable agriculture; to develop innovative research methods and assumptions that will be compatible with sustainable farming and adequately describe and measure its impacts; and to design and test new ways of estimating the yields that can be expected when farmers shift to sustainable farming practices.

As limitations of contemporary research are due both to the way contemporary research has been carried out and to shortcomings in the analytical tool kit, the report says that "what is needed first and foremost is a fundamental change in the philosophy and mindset of those who administer and conduct the Nation's agricultural research."

Copies of *An Agenda for Research on the Impacts of Sustainable Agriculture* are available free from the Institute for Alternative Agriculture, 9200 Edmonston Road, Greenbelt, Maryland 20770 (phone 301/441-8777).

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR INVITED

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