

IAA co-sponsored New Directions conferences

Two regional conferences on new directions for rural areas were co-sponsored by the IAA in the fall of 1987 in Bozeman, Montana, and Memphis, Tennessee. "New Directions for Rural Communities," organized by the National Center for Appropriate Technology, addressed practical alternatives for sustaining farms and towns.

American Journal of Alternative Agriculture Editorial Board members contributing talks at the Bozeman meeting were R. James Cook, who spoke on biological pest control, and Lloyd Elliott, who examined the physical and biological characteristics of low-input farming systems. At the Memphis meeting, Charles Francis presented an overview of sustainable farming practices, while Patrick Madden examined the business aspects of alternative agriculture. Jim Lukens, President of the IAA, gave the conference overview at the Memphis meeting. IAA Executive Director, Garth Youngberg, spoke on new directions in research and technology transfer.

The meetings attracted Extension personnel, agricultural researchers, and farmers. In addition to the formal presentations during these two-day events, the face-to-face exchange of information and individual and group interaction were considered to be positive aspects of both conferences.

\$3.9 million federal funding gained for low-input agriculture

As the result of a multi-year effort supported by the IAA and other agricultural/conservation groups, the 1988 federal budget allocated \$3.9 million to fund low-input agricultural research and education programs. Dr.

Patrick Madden, an agricultural economist from Pennsylvania State University and a member of the editorial board of this journal, has been named national program manager for the new USDA "low-input farming systems research and education" initiative. His office is located within the Cooperative State Research Service Office of Grants and Program Systems.

The program is designed to "enhance the sustainability, profitability, and competitiveness" of American agriculture, the February 3 USDA program announcement said. It will target methods which reduce water pollution and the hazards to human health associated with excessive use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers. Research and education will feature farming systems which involve legume-based crop rotations, the application of animal manure and municipal sludge, and the substitution of biological controls for some synthetic chemical pesticides and herbicides.

Efforts by private organizations as well as public universities and agencies will be eligible for funding, Madden says. Indeed, "this program presents a tremendous challenge to the land grant universities to learn ways of cooperating across disciplines and agency lines as well as with the private sector."

Grants for research and education projects will be administered within four CSRS regions: the Northeast, South, North Central, and Western. Madden is developing overall guidelines for the grant process in cooperation with the Cooperative Extension Service. Regional contact points will be designated by early spring of 1988, and proposals for funding will be received and processed by the regional contacts. "The principal operating level for this program will be at the regional level," Madden has emphasized.

In his announcement, USDA Assistant Secretary for Science and Education Orville Bentley called the

program an "idea whose time has come." Advocates of low-input approaches which lower the use of synthetic chemical pesticides and fertilizers have been working for this funding for over six years, points out IAA Executive Director Garth Youngberg. Youngberg and other officials associated with the IAA have testified in favor of funding before both House and Senate committees numerous times over the past few years, and IAA members have supported the action.

The coalition supporting the idea had first asked for up to \$30 million in funding. The Congressional pressure to cut budgets resulted in a final Senate recommendation of \$9 million and a House vote for \$2.6 million in funding. The \$3.9 million level was agreed upon by the House-Senate conference committee in late December. "Even this level of funding is highly significant in a year which saw major efforts to reduce spending in every way possible," commented Senate staffer Chris Coffin. "The action reflects the broad appeal of these new research directions."

Chesapeake Bay agreement calls for reduction of nitrogen, phosphorus

Nitrogen and phosphorus in the Chesapeake Bay must be reduced by 40 percent by the year 2000, says an agreement signed on December 14, 1987, by the governors of Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, the District of Columbia, and the federal government. Because agricultural runoff of the two chemicals has been cited as a major source of Bay pollution by federal reports, efforts to control runoff and strategies to more efficiently target farm chemicals will be part of the solution, experts say. A strategy for achieving the goal is due by July, 1988.