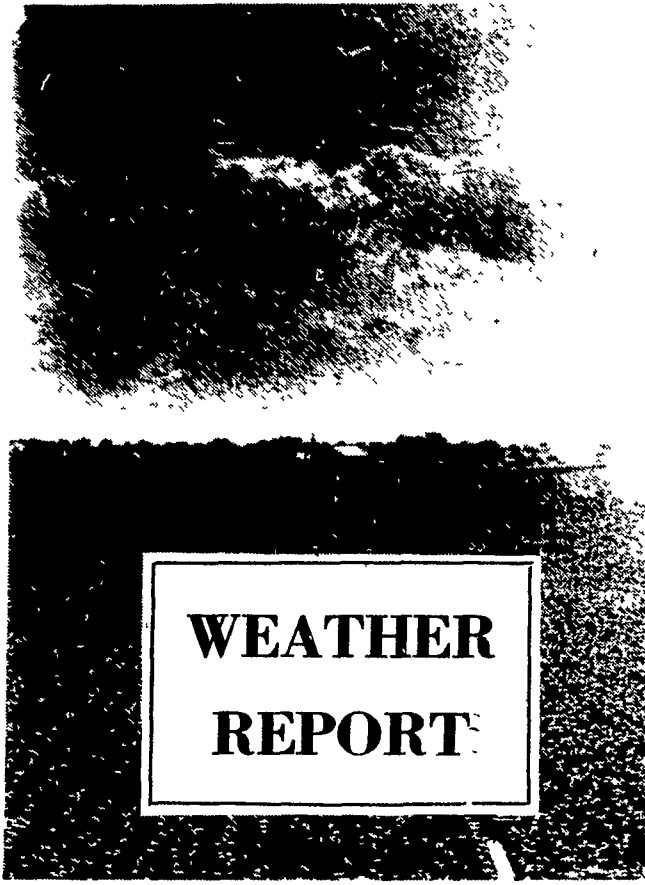


Man's 'playing' with the weather



**WEATHER
REPORT**

By DIETER KRIEG

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the 12th article in a continuing series on the forces which shape our weather, how we are affected by it, and what is done to forecast and-or alter its patterns.

Excluding drought, the weather is blamed for annual crop losses amounting to 2 million dollars per year. With drought losses added on to that, the figures become even more astronomical and it's no wonder, then, that some groups have begun "tampering" with the weather in order to produce more desirable patterns.

While weather modification is practically ruled out in Pennsylvania because of (1) it's really not needed due to favorable weather most of the time, and (2) state regulations are very rigid, the practice is rather widely accepted throughout the rest of the United States.

More than 30 states recognize "cloud-seeding" as a legitimate business. Some of these don't even require a license or permit to have it done. Neighboring Maryland, on the other hand, bans the practice altogether.

Weather modification is done primarily to produce rain. In those parts of the country where rain is a critical factor, artificially produced participation is generally well accepted by the public. Farmers as well as other businessmen in such areas realize that if the crop is poor, the entire regional economy will have to soak in gloom. Drought increases the cost of living, it is said, and for areas such as the Great Plains States, that's very true. Realizing this, Kansas Senator James B. Pearson earlier this year introduced a bill on Capitol Hill which would establish a national policy on weather modification. Presently there are no federal regulations on private cloud seeding, a term which derives its name from the procedure of "seeding" clouds with chemicals which causes moisture to assimilate and eventually drop as rain.

Supporters of cloud seeding claim that the practice is valid and of great value to saving drought-stricken crops. They say that moisture is in the air - all that has to be done is remove it in the form of rain. Simple as that may sound, the "art" isn't nearly that easy. Not every cloud will respond to seeding. Conditions have to be "ripe." Many weather modifiers and quite a few more farmers have been disappointed with cloud seeding results.

Nevertheless, the practice is anything but dormant. Last year there were 72 known attempts in the United States to make rain artificially. It's expensive when one looks at the figure without the background. A price of \$50,000 is common. Divided on a per acre basis by farmers in a given area, the cost is often just a couple dollars per acre, however. Accordingly, farmers are eager to take part in the adventure whenever they see their crops threatened by drought. The returns are supposedly far greater than the cost of either the program or potential losses.

Adding to the concern over drought and its results on U.S. food supplies are reports by the Central Intelligence Agency and various scientists both here and abroad. In a nutshell, the CIA sees potential food shortages as being capable of igniting nuclear war. Various other groups - the Kettering Foundation among them - agree and therefore readily endorse programs aimed at minimizing the drastic effects weather could have on food production.

Some portions of the United States have brought the weather modification issue to the ballot box. Oftentimes it has passed by overwhelming margins. A bill for a national program is pending. Knowledgeable persons on either side of the argument claim that the future of weather modification will depend not so much on science, but on the public's willingness to have it.

To be sure, some people don't want it. A couple in Missouri, for example, have a suit in court to the tune of \$150,000, claiming that a weather modification project more than 300 miles away damaged their property.

Such issues and related topics will be the subject of the next article in this continuing series.

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