

USDA to tackle rural transportation

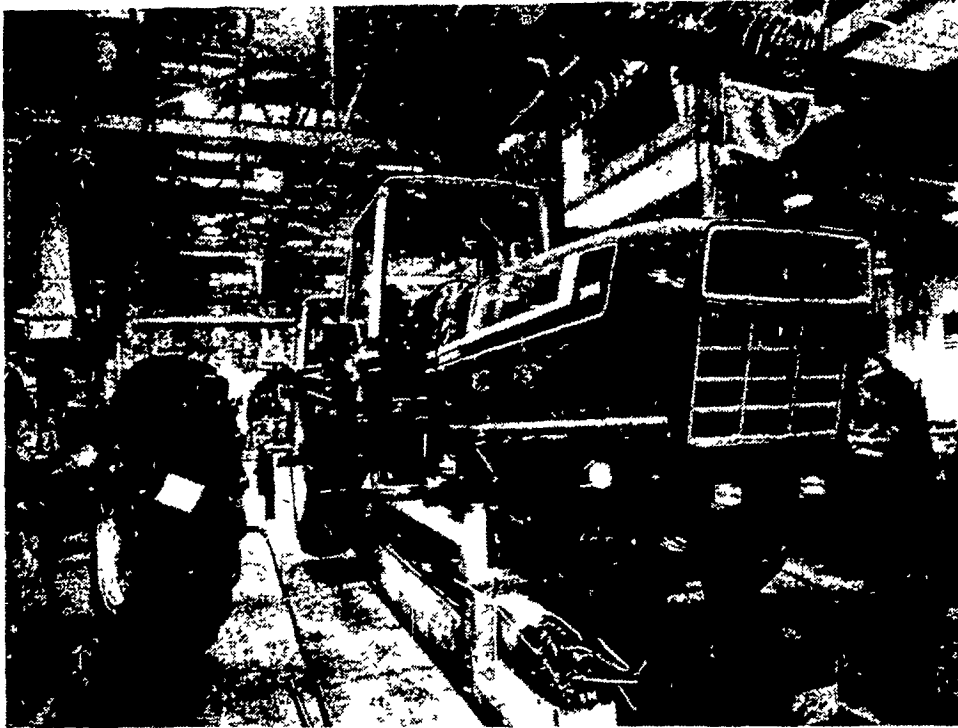
LANCASTER — Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland last Thursday announced a U.S. Department of Agriculture pilot program to test whether rural transportation services can be improved by forming transportation cooperatives. The program may form the basis for a creating a rural transportation administration, Bergland said. "This approach was used successfully 45 years ago to establish the Rural Electrification Administration," he said. "Through the demonstrations, the concept of a transportation cooperative

will be tested in practical application, such as cooperative ownership local railroad branch lines, trucking equipment, freight handling and transfer facilities or vehicles for transporting rural people," Bergland said. USDA will seek project proposals from state governments interested in experimenting with transportation cooperatives. Technical and financial support through low-interest loans and loan guarantees will be made available for the demonstration projects, according to Bergland. "We'd like to improve the

transportation in rural areas adversely affected by recent closings of railroad branch lines," Bergland said. A Rural Transportation Cooperative Task Force, appointed by Bergland August 29, developed the rural transportation cooperative concept, which has been endorsed by President Carter. This concept is a banding together of interested individuals or organizations in a geographic area—local governments, farmers, existing co-ops and businesses—to form a self-help transportation cooperative.

If the demonstration projects are successful, Bergland said, they could lead to the creation of a "Rural Transportation Administration." The formation of such an agency has been suggested by Bergland, the Cooperative League of the U.S.A. and several members of Congress. Congress must, however, approve the formation of such an agency, Bergland said.

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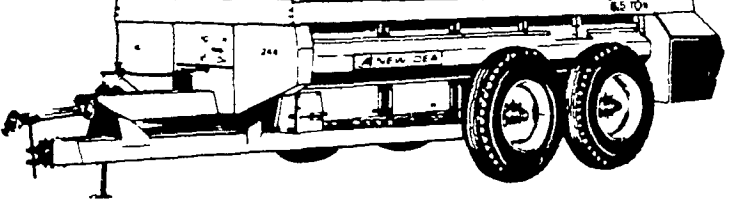
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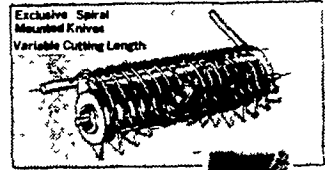
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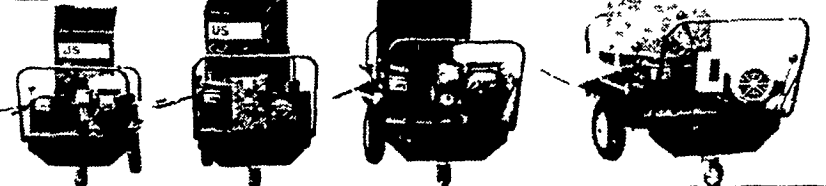
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