

Co-op Council voices concern over fuel decontrol

WASHINGTON, D C — The National Council of Farmer Cooperatives today voiced grave concern over President Reagan's sudden move to decontrol crude oil and petroleum products

Council President Keith D Naden said, "we are particularly worried about the impact of decontrol on farm fuel supplies"

Although fuel supplies appear adequate for spring planting, said the co-op leader, shortages could develop quickly if the Iran-Iraq war persists

"By terminating the Emergency Buy/Sell Program," he added, "the Administration has removed the only means of dealing with crude oil shortages in a timely fashion"

Naden indicated serious crude oil disparities are present now in the international market A nine-dollar range in crude oil prices remains unsolved, he declared, and co-ops are facing costs at the upper end of that range

This means that American farmers are being forced to pay a disproportionate share of higher fuel prices, and it threatens the viability of the rural petroleum system " Higher food prices ultimately result

Noting that cooperatives supply about 45 percent of all on-farm fuel, Naden urged the Administration to retain the Emergency Buy/Sell Program until it can be replaced by new legislation He also urged that the program be modified to deal with serious economic inequities

For the longer term, Naden urged adoption of a policy to maintain effective standby programs which ensure fuel supply for agriculture and provide timely access to crude oil at competitive prices for cooperatives and other efficient refiners

Naden pointed out the vulnerability of the co-op supply system to disruptions

He recalled in the spring of 1979, when Iranian crude oil stopped flowing, co-op refiners were forced to run at 50 percent of capacity while the industry average was 85 percent

"Farmers were extremely fortunate to get their crops planted in the midst of sharp fuel shortages," he said, "and after some delays co-op refiners got additional

crude oil under the Buy/Sell Program"

The co-op leader also noted that in 1980, co-ops experienced crude oil cost inequities approaching \$400 million, with the burden falling on the farmer-owner

He said the federal government recently recognized this situation as a serious access problem in granting emergency relief under the Buy/Sell Program to co-ops and other independent refiners during December and January

Additionally, said Naden, Senate Energy Committee Chairman James A McClure indicated last week that new steps may be considered to protect farmers and refiners from immediate decontrol

Senator McClure, he said, was particularly concerned that

consumers at the tail end of the petroleum supply system could face severe shortages.

Naden noted recent Department of Energy actions and statements by Hill energy leaders had led co-op refiners to believe that policymakers recognized the seriousness of farm energy supply needs and the importance of dealing with them

"The stark reality is that the cooperative petroleum is deteriorating because of the serious problems which it is experiencing," Naden asserted

"In view of these circumstances, we fail to understand the Administration's action Unfortunately, farmers, our U S food system, and ultimately consumers stand to lose if this game fails"

Plant solid-seeded soybeans early

LANCASTER — Farmers planting narrow-row soybeans this season should first study the management skills necessary for a successful narrow row program, says Charles Laible

"For best performance, I would recommend earlier planting of solid seeded beans," he says "Also, good seedbed preparation and a relatively accurate planting depth are necessary for good stand establishment and to prevent lodging."

Laible, a Funk Seeds breeder, says soybean seed size varies from variety to variety

"When you talk about planting pounds of seeds per acres, one variety may have 1800 seeds per pound and the next may have 3000 seeds. I think it's very important to plant seeds per acre, not pounds."

For 30-inch rows, Laible recommends planting about 10 seeds per foot of row, or 170,500 seeds per acre. Seven-inch rows should get three seeds per foot of row, or 225,500 seeds per acre

New data just released by Laible confirms the yield advantages of solid seeded or narrow-row beans

Three years of research testing compared performance of soybeans in 30-inch rows, 7-inch rows, and bi-equidistant 4-inch by 4-inch plantings

"We saw an average yield increase of 10 percent in the 7-inch rows over the 30-inch rows," Laible reports. "The 4-inch by 4-inch planting outyielded the 7-inch planting by another 10 to 20 percent."

"The data demonstrates a significant yield advantage in bi-equidistant soybean planting," he says, "but farmers are not able to implement this system with available equipment."

In his trials, a conventional plateless planter was used to plant the 30-inch rows, 7-inch rows were drilled, and the 4-inch bi-equidistant plantings were made by hand. This spring, however, the company hopes to have a specifically for 4-inch plantings to enhance their research capabilities and prove the system's potential

"The movement to narrow-row soybeans has been gaining

momentum over the past several years," says Laible In areas where farmers have a good handle on weed control, with pre- and post-emergent herbicides, I certainly expect to see more of them go to solid seeding It pays—in both yield performance and profit"

Close plantings mean higher plant populations Canopy closure occurs sooner, available sunlight is intercepted rather than allowed to be absorbed or reflected by the soil, and shade keeps weed problems down and lowers soil temperature significantly

"Some scientists say a soil temperature that is too high will slow down microbial nitrogen-fixing activity," says Dr Laible "If you can keep the soil and roots cooler, the plants will perform better"

When choosing a variety of narrow-row planting, however, Laible cautions not all are suitable

There are certain varieties that do not respond to the solid seeding environment Regardless of management practices, some varieties will yield the same or less

when planted in narrow rows as when planted in conventional row widths Williams, for example, will not perform better when solid seeded," he adds

Laible says all of his proprietary soybeans on the market perform well in narrow rows

"In addition, all of the material in our advance trials is tested under both conventional and narrow row widths This way we can identify specific varieties that respond well to solid seeding management"

Narrow-row planting saves fuel and harvest equipment wear and tear because the ridges formed by cultivation are eliminated However, costs must be added for herbicides, extra seed and the rent or purchase of a grain drill.

A significant reduction in soil erosion is also a benefit of the solid seeding system

"Even so," Laible stresses, "with beans currently in the \$8 bushel range, a modest increase in yield of three to six bushels an acre could mean a \$25 to \$50 per acre increases in income."

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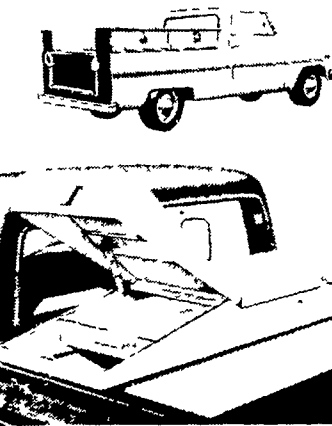
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