

## Nat'l leaders meet to discuss farmland protection

WHEELING, W.Va. — Conservation and protection of farmland are among the top three priorities of Secretary of Agriculture John Block and the Reagan administration farm program, delegates to the Northeast meeting of the National Association of Conservation Districts were told here recently.

In separate addresses, the national president of NACD, Lyle Bauer of Harper, Kan., and the national chief of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Soil Conservation Service, Norman Berg said Secretary Block's top goals are increased sales of agricultural products abroad, improvements in agricultural research and efforts to control soil erosion and to reduce the loss of farmland.

Berg and other speakers also indicated the Agriculture Department may encourage more initiative and decision-making on conservation at the local and state levels, with continued federal support in the forms of technical and financial assistance.

The SCS chief said the department will offer three alternatives for the future later this year, as part of the preparation for a five-year national conservation plan under the Resources Conservation Act of 1977. One choice will be continuation of present programs, a second will be redirection of Agriculture Department programs to solve several pressing resource problems, and the third will be the second alternative with increased roles—including policy-making—for local people and state governments.

Tom Barlow, senior project staff for the Natural Resources Defense Council, made a similar recommendation in his role as representative of a private group interested in preservation of natural resources. He proposed local boards of farmers to decide which conservation practices should be used by farmers and at what rate they should be incorporated into farm plans.

Barlow said, "We have suggested that these local boards have the authority at some future point to order a withholding of federal financial assistance to those farmers not applying these simple practices."

Howard Tankersly, director of the SCS Land Use Division, said he saw local controls already at work in the efforts to prevent loss of 3 million acres of farmland per year to other uses, mostly urban. He was on a panel with spokesmen discussing farmland preservation programs and the results of the National Agricultural Lands Study.

"The most exciting thing I've heard here today is all of this going on to retain agricultural land and you'll notice not one dime of it is coming out of the federal government," Tankersly said. "But what they're doing in New Jersey and what they're doing in Maryland and in 48 other states, the county and state governments and municipal governments are doing it on their own."

"In fact, right now in phenomenon which is in large measure initiated and supported by conservation districts is driving

the federal government ag land retention efforts."

NACD President Bauer told the delegates he has heard few objections to the new farm bill despite the many planned budget cuts in most departments of government. He said he does not believe conservation will be cut as badly this year as it was in the 1970s through depletion of the dollar by inflation.

West Virginia Agriculture Commissioner Gus R. Douglass urged the Northeast leaders to make their conservation districts accountable to the public through competitive elections and also accountable in uniform, careful bookkeeping.

In workshops, delegates learned the following news:

Research—Jerry Jung, director of the U.S. Pasture Research Lab at University Park, said his agency (Agricultural Research Service) is working with university experiment stations and SCS in developing new pasture forages.

They are using native grass varieties selected by SCS, he said, for marginal farmlands—hilly, acid, droughty or poorly drained. Such species as big bluestem and switchgrass grow in the Midwest, he said, but added, "If we bought seed out of the Great Plains, we would not have varieties as good as the ones SCS has selected." The native grasses produced excellent forage crops under adverse soil conditions and are "very efficient utilizers of fertilizers," Jung said.

He reported trying two brassicas imported from Europe and New Zealand, forage rape and forage

turnip, as annual grazing crops. Seeded by no-till in existing pastures in August, they produce up to four tons per acre of high quality forage for October, November, and December. The existing pastures can be used again the following year.

Barton Parker of West Virginia University reported on the Allegheny Highlands Program. For 10 years WVU specialists made special efforts to deliver to farmers new technology on crops and livestock, in forms acceptable to the farmers. Continued study during the program and for the last two years showed the farmers

changed methods, had more and better products and made more money, he said.

Water Resources—Lou Kirkaldie, SCS engineering geologist from Broomall, said 40,000 uncontrolled waste disposal areas in the country are leaking into water supplies that \$40 billion would be needed to clean them up.

Resource Conservation and Development—There are now 194 RC&D areas, and they are having their best year ever, solving all kinds of resource problems, according to Assistant SCS Chief Richard Deusterhaus.

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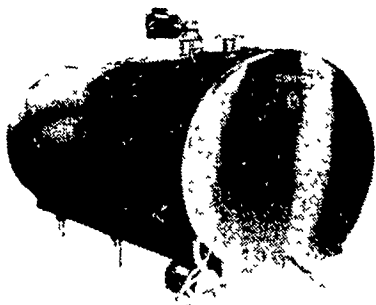
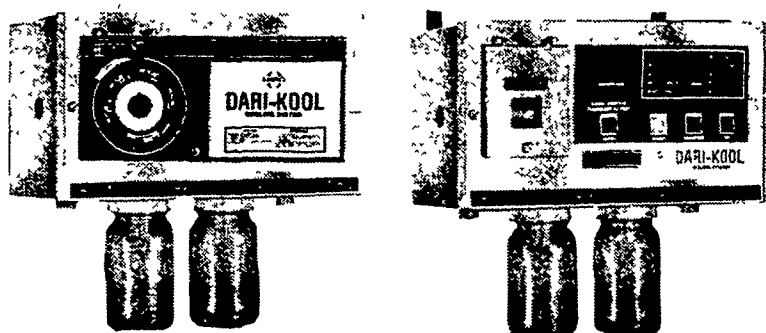
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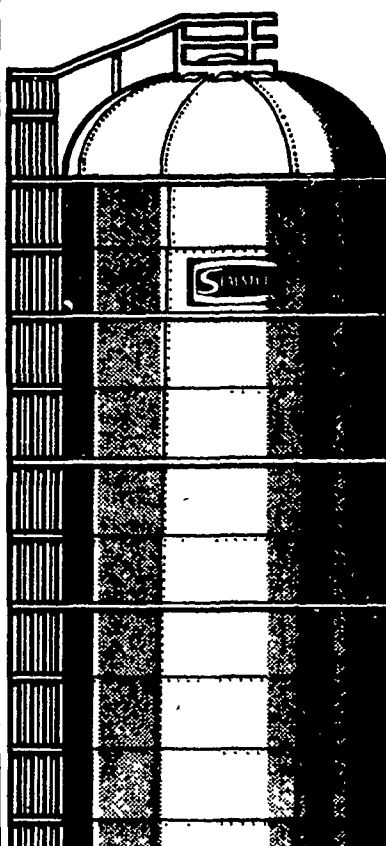
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