Small farm forum

Leading horticulturist outlines research needs

Small farms always have been important to U.S. agriculture, according to a leading American horticulturist.

"There can be no question that the small farm is an economically viable unit," said Sylvan Wittwer, director of Michigan State University's Agricultural Experiment Station and an internationally recognized authority on agriculture in the U.S. and abroad.

"The world is full of such farms," Wittwer told a gathering of agricultural scientists meeting at the USDA symposium.

Emphasizing the importance of small-scale horticultural farms—which are particularly important in his home state and throughout the Northeast—Wittwer traced the development of small farms throughout the world and highlighted changes in such operations in the U.S. over the past decade.

'The developing world, in particular, is a world of smallness, characterized by numerous small farms—tiny by comparison to large operations in America but similar in many ways to small-scale horticultural operations in the U.S.," Wittwer said

These tarms, while small in land and capital, require relatively large labor forces. Even in the U S the majority of farm falls into the rategory of small-scale operations, and the current trend is toward even more small and part-time units."

These small farms, Wittwer noted, offer unique advantages for American and world agriculture.

Insect control

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scientist that a toxin produced by another variety of the B.t. bacterium has been used to control the Colorado potato beetle in the U.S.S.R. since 1972.

"Such labor-intensive operations," he said, "may signal employment opportunities that previously have not been noticed, recognized or taken advantage of. TANKS

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"The challenge of this symposium," Wittwer told the conference, "is to design a research agenda that will promote the productivity of small farms. At stake are the future welfare and economic viability of the many small farms throughout the U.S., other industrialized nations and developing world.

Wittwer's recommendations for research for small farms covered the following areas:

Develop integrated energy efficient production and marketing systems that maximize production over a wide marketing period. Both high production and quality are essential.

Design tlexible energy efficient tillage, cultural, harvest, and storage equipment. The challenge is to downsize and adapt. The approach is to use many equipment components as attachments on a main drive or power unit.

Seek new approaches for pest control Integrated pest management systems will become essential for the survival of most small scale enterprises. These systems will need to insure the health and safety not only of the applicator but the proximal communities and consumers.

Provide guidelines for site assessments as to soil, water, climate, and human resources These are important both for meeting production needs and the markets to be served.

Arrive at new and innovative schemes for financing, including long-term contracts. Interest rates and operational costs are rising percepituously. Long-term investments are necessary for fruit and nursery establishments.

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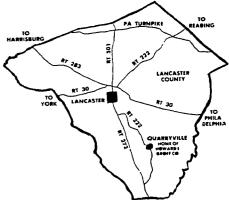
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