

# Ag policy must be geared to food tech

WASHINGTON, D.C. — America's future agricultural policy must be geared to the entire food system, not just to the three percent of our population who are farmers, according to Tom Urban, president of Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Inc., a major seed research firm.

In an address this week before the National Governor's Association Committee on Agriculture, Urban pointed out that America's food system is a "high tech" industry involving 23 million people. Of these, only a small percentage are responsible for most of our farm production.

Future government policy, he said, must be developed from this perspective and not from tradition.

"The largest single cost in your food bill is now off-farm labor; that is, labor that takes place after the food has left the farm. Economic policies which affect the long-term cost and productivity of U.S. labor have a great deal more to do with the cost of food than do farm price support programs," Urban said.

"Almost 85 percent of farm output is now produced by only 700,000 farmers. Other agricultural tasks are still there; they have simply shifted up or down the food chain. We need to begin to talk

about the total food system today, not about farming, per se.

"Let me suggest that the time has come to reposition food and agricultural support programs; to reshape the image of our American food system. We have traditionally related program costs to the farming segment of the food system. A more proper analysis should related food and agricultural support programs to the entire food system, a system which accounted for one-fifth of our \$3.4 trillion gross national product," Urban said.

The U.S. has moved well beyond the production of food solely for

self and is committed to world markets, according to Urban. About 40% of the land in this country produced for exports in 1981.

"The cost to producers, lenders, suppliers and buyers of reducing the size of the U.S. food supply system to solely meet internal consumption — to ignore the world market — would bankrupt a significant segment of our industry and require quite unacceptable subsidies from the non-food sector of our economy. Such downsizing is simply not an acceptable alternative," Urban said.

He also told the governors that

the U.S. food system has quietly become the largest "high tech" business in America. Researchers are now working to combine classical genetics with biotechnology to significantly improve agricultural productivity. In addition, Urban said, microbiologists are beginning to learn about the mutually beneficial relationships between microbes, animals and plants in order to manipulate those microbes for further productivity gains.

"Farmers are rapidly adopting new technologies. They're now buying computers to control their

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