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New bill would fund study of natural soil methods

WASHINGTON — The House Agriculture Committee has approved a bill (H.R. 1383) authorizing the use of research and Extension education on soil and energy-conserving and organic farming systems which could cut farm production costs and conserve natural resources.

The bill was approved by a roll call vote of 25 to 15, Committee Chairman Kika de la Garza, D-Tex., announced.

The legislation was sponsored by Rep. Jim Weaver, D-Ore., and 42 other House members and is similar to a measure which passed the House last year but was not acted on in the Senate. The bill would direct the Agriculture Department to establish—with the cooperation of willing farmers and/or state and federal research stations—research projects needed to obtain data on production systems which can improve productivity while protecting the land and conserving energy.

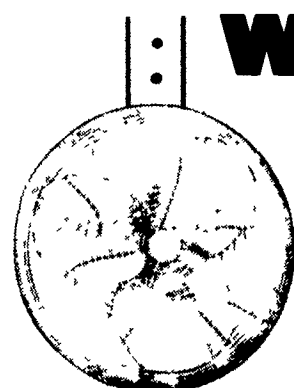
These projects would collect and analyze information on what happens when various types of farm switch from energy-intensive farming to systems relying on legumes and other sod-based crop rotations, the use of crop residues and natural manures, and production practices such as conservation tillage and non-chemical pest controls.

Other provisions of the bill include a directive to the Secretary of Agriculture to make the information drawn from the new studies available to the public. The bill notes that in order to evaluate a production system, "it is recognized that a minimum of 12 projects and associated component studies are needed."

Funding for the federal costs involved in the studies would be determined by Congress at a later date. Weaver said rough estimates from Agriculture Department experts put the cost of the programs at \$7.2 million over five years.

Weaver said the research and extension programs authorized under his bill would be designed to help find "workable solutions" to cut farm costs and help restore farm profits while controlling erosion. He said the programs "do not single out one particular kind of farming; rather they examine a broad range of technologies which will benefit all farmers."

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