

Most Farmers Likely To Comply With Provisions

WASHINGTON, D.C. — American Farmland Trust reported that a nationwide survey of farmers with conservation compliance plans shows the majority (53 percent) expected to have completed most of their implementation work by the start of this year, two years ahead of the 1995 deadline.

AFT said the survey also found most producers believe soil erosion will decrease and their earnings will remain the same or rise as a result of their plans. In addition, it noted that most farmers believe that those who do not implement their plans will be discovered and have their farm program benefits eliminated.

AFT, a national farmland conservation group based in Washington, D.C., characterized its findings as encouraging. "The survey results show that the conservation provisions of the 1985 Farm Bill are working," said AFT President Ralph E. Grossi. "They demonstrate that the idea of conservation compliance has been broadly accepted in the farming community.

"While we're gratified, we also recognize that nearly half (47 percent) of the surveyed farmers indicate they will not fully implement their plans until this year or next. It also appears as many as 14 percent of producers do not intend to

implement their plans at all. We believe the USDA must do whatever is necessary to ensure all plans are fully and satisfactorily implemented."

Grossi called on the Clinton Administration to establish a public-private task force of producers, USDA representatives, and conservationists to determine what steps must be taken to ensure full compliance. "While our results indicate that many of the non-starters may have had plans that do not require much effort before 1993 or 1994 and others may be confused about when to begin, we still are concerned that we have such a large number of non-compliers this close to the 1995 deadline."

Under the 1985 Farm Bill, producers with highly erodible farmland must completely implement conservation compliance plans by Jan. 1, 1995 to remain eligible for federal farm program payments. Through 1991, more than 1.2 million farmers had written conservation plans for 135 million acres. An additional six million acres requiring another 200,000 plans were added in 1992.

AFT actively participated in the development of the conservation title of the 1985 Farm Bill. Conservation compliance was one of the bill's key provisions. AFT has consistently worked to link farm program benefits to good steward-

ship of the land and undertook the survey to see how well the compliance provisions are being implemented. Through its newly created Center for Agriculture in the Environment, AFT contracted with J. Dixon Esseks, professor of public administration at Northern Illinois University, and Steven E. Kraft, professor of agribusiness economics at Southern Illinois University, for the survey. Their past research has focused on soil conservation and other natural resource issues.

The two professors surveyed some 1,000 farmers in 100 counties in 32 states. Names were drawn randomly from a list of all producers with conservation compliance plans. Virtually all were farmer operators with highly erodible tracts of land. The survey, which showed no regional bias, consisted of telephone interviews averaging 18 minutes. Nearly 80 percent of the sampled farmers responded to the survey, which took place from Aug. 29 to Nov. 15, 1992. Subsequently, their responses were cross-checked for accuracy.

AFT said the survey uncovered these additional findings:

- Compliance plans tend to be complex (Three or more practices) and represent a substantial portion of producers' farmland. Most common practices are, in order, residue management, crop rotations, grassed waterways, contour farming and terraces.

- The majority of farmers (71 percent) do not want to change their plans. Those who do have added new land or found practices too difficult or uneconomical. Residue management has created the strongest dissatisfaction.

- Farmers are fairly optimistic about the financial impact of their plans. One-third anticipate increased earnings, 39 percent anticipate no change in earnings, and

only one-fifth expect to lose money. Those producers with most of their plan implementation efforts completed are more likely to expect to make — or at least not to lose — money.

- Most farmers think producers who do not enact their plans will be caught and have their eligibility for benefits cut off. But the vast majority — 86 percent — believe producers in their county will fully implement their plans by January 1995.

- Most producers think soil erosion in their counties will decrease as a result of their compliance plans.

- Most producers consider the Soil Conservation Service the best source for technical assistance.

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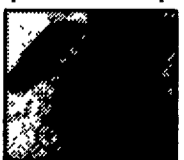
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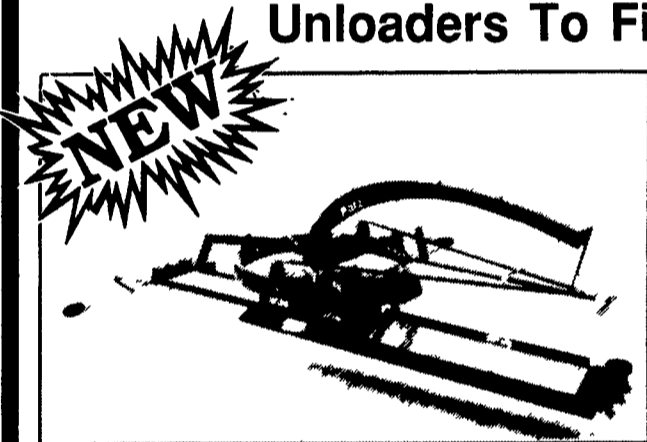
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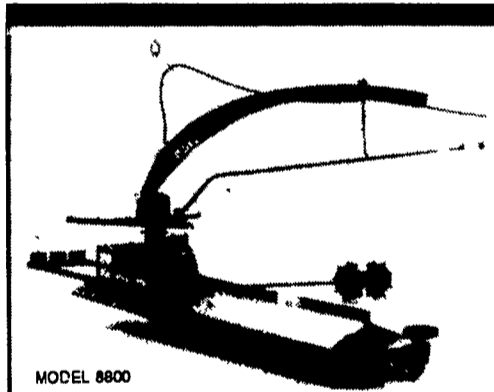
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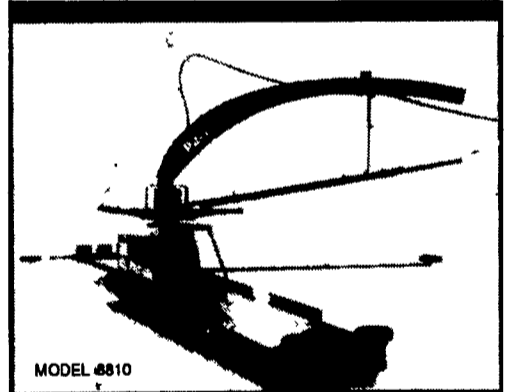
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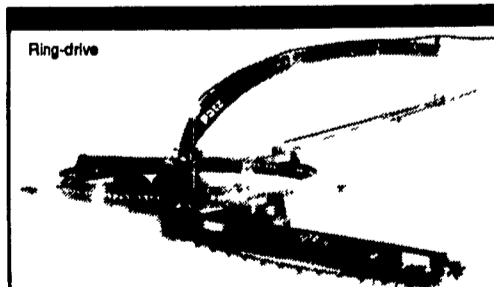


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