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One Last Note: The North Country Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign has asked if they might use our membership list for mailings, etc. I think this is something that the group as a whole needs to decide. So think about it and let me know what you think (265-5732) or talk about it at the meeting in Rossie.

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## Organic Farming Bill Gets New Life

The Organic Farming Bill has a new name and another chance. The measure was defeated in the House by a slim margin (198 to 189) last session in Washington. But there are lots of new faces in both the House and Senate this year, so the bill is being revised and reintroduced—this time called the Agricultural Productivity Improvement Act of 1983.

"The new bill will focus on research and extension studies to develop reliable information about farming systems that will reduce production costs, conserve energy and water, and control soil erosion," says U.S. Rep. James Weaver, D-Ore., author of the measure. "It sets up 12 on-farm studies to collect and analyze data about the effects of a transition from industrial farming practices to systems which enhance productivity (as measured by output per unit of input) and conserve soil, energy and water resources."

Additional studies would be done on 12 established (at least five years) organic farms across the nation.

The bill would also start a program to assist farmers who use intercropping farming systems to maintain an erosion-controlling, nitrogen-fixing vegetative cover.

Finally, it directs the USDA to inventory and assess existing research and extension materials and to recommend new research that will help farmers understand and implement low-input farming practices. The bill would set aside \$3.5 million of the USDA's \$430 million annual research budget for this work.

"We're getting a lot of positive response and we're optimistic about the bill's passage," says Kevin Kirchner, Weaver's aide. "Letters from you to your representative or senator can really help push this bill through," he adds. Please write as soon as possible to: Your Representative, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515. The Senate address is: U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510.

Studies will focus on farms which rely on crop rotation, crop residues, animal manures, off-farm organic waste, mineral-bearing rocks, conservation tillage, conservation irrigation (including low pressure systems and irrigation scheduling), and biological pest control. The USDA is to select farms which have the widest possible variations in soil, land, and climatic conditions.

Information gathered as a result of the measure will be made available through state cooperative extension services and other sources.

Besides calling for this type of research, the bill points out some of the problems with the present agricultural system. "The annual irretrievable loss of billions of tons of precious topsoil through wind and water erosion reduces agricultural productivity and raises the spectre of another dust bowl," the bill states. "Modern, energy-intensive agricultural practices are dangerously dependent on limited global reserves of oil and natural gas. Such practices trap American farmers in a cost-price squeeze which threatens the viability of America's agricultural production." □

from New Farm  
May-June 1983

