

From the President's desk

By Roger Samson

I would like to extend a big welcome to the many new members who have joined REAP-Canada in the last year. There is much work to be done as we sail into the 1990's. We must be prepared because storm clouds are on the horizon which could threaten the livelihood of large numbers of Canadian farmers. A comment by George Stock (one of our members) sums this up best: "There may be no such thing as a sustainable' farmer in today's political and economic environment". The fear is not just that of losing market protection or the threat of cheap imports from the U.S. and Europe. It is the possibility that support programs will be cut back. This will be made much easier to justify as the economy worsens in the early 1990's.

What should we do?

1. Spend time fighting the battle up on the hill in Ottawa. Farmers deserve the right to make a decent income and shouldn't be sold out to pave the way for better trade opportunities in other sectors. Considering the amount of good farmland that has been paved over in this country, the Federal and Provincial governments deserve an earful about their priorities.

2. RESOURCE EFFICIENT AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

There is a lot of potential for enhancing productivity and competitiveness in agriculture by doing a better job with what we already have. Harry Wilhelm tells me that he can compete in any market. This may be due to his better than average yields combined with low input costs and very low machinery investment. I hear some farmers say that they

are tired of being told that they should be more efficient, yet they are over equipped, have no planned cropping or marketing strategy and beat up their soil. In the 70's, efficiency meant expansion, in the 90's it will mean using your resources wisely. By enhancing the resource base of the farm, through practices such as planned crop rotations and better manure management, improvement will be seen in productivity and production costs. These enhancements have a positive influence on the environment as well as on product quality.

Louis Bromfield writes that healthy soil produces healthy food which produces healthy people. There is a growing market for guaranteed high quality products. The idea that use of chemical inputs produces as nutritious a product as that which is organically grown needs to be shown for the fallacy it is. Low levels of nitrate and high vitamin C levels

have been observed in many 'organically grown crops. For some crops, such as potatoes, there is a conflict between maximum yield and optimal product quality.

Michel Pagé, Quebec's minister of agriculture, calls biological farming the third agricultural revolution of the century, following those of machinery and chemicals. Statements like that, give hope that this may be the turnaround decade. However, a cautious approach should be taken to governmental statements. The federal government vision is one of sustainable growth. Sustainable growth is not sustainable. Take a look at the Atlantic fishing industry as an example of what sustained growth can do: The increased harvesting surpassed the regenerative capacity of the fish stock. Growth is then translated into resource depletion, economic hardship and community despair.

What we need is growth in terms of sustainability - people in greater numbers using sustainable approaches to the way they farm and live. Only then will we have the good ship Earth headed towards safe waters.

Welcome to the turn-around decade.

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