Farming

CONTINUED FROM PG 1G

Plains dust storms in the United States. Jackson argues for a "sustainable" agriculture and says conservation, however well intentioned, has not stopped the erosion of topsoil.

Anderso said, "Farmers were the original environmentalists."

Today, farmers remain committed to the land, he said. It is emotionalism, rather than fact and data, that has split farmers and environmentalists.

Farmers are as concerned about food safety and water quality as anyone, Anderson said, but giving up pesticides and chemical fertilizers - as some individuals and organizations advocate - would mean lower production on farms and higher prices to consumers. Many Grodner, pesticide safety specialist with the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, said she expects more restrictions on pesticide use. In addition, the government is going to require more worker protection and training in the use of the chemicals, and protecting endangered species of animals and plants will be considered if pesticide use threatens them.

"We're apt to see tighter restrictions in the use of pesticides," Grodner said.

Included in the agricultural environmental movement is LISA where "input" usually means using fewer chemicals. But one of the U.S. Department of Agriculture officials in charge of the new program said LISA involves much more.

"Frequently, people don't understand the foundation of what it is. They think we're going back to the 1930s, and that's not true," said Dixon Hubbard, coordinator of competitiveness and profitability of American agriculture in a USDA section.

LISA is a systems approach to farming, he said. When farming went into crisis in the 1980s, it was found a lot of farmers were not aware of the return on their inputs, Hubbard said. "They found they could reduce inputs substantially and still maintain a profit level equal to or better than before. They had overinvested in a lot of things."

Low input does not mean no input, Hubbard said.

Activating LISA has just begun. Southern University is the only Louisiana institution to receive LISA funds so far. LSU is in the process of seeking grants.

At one time farmers needed little or no training to use pesticides, the weed and grass killing chemicals and insect and fungus poisons. Now farmers must be certified as handlers and users of restricted use pesticides, and their certification entitles them to supervise workers who handle pesticides. In the future, Grodner said, it is likely supervised workers who handle and use pesticides will have to be trained, also.

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