State farmers in survival pattern, LSU agents say

Louisiana farmers are presently in a survival posture and could not make any money without some type of government support program, two LSU extension service officials said during an interview with The Advertiser.

Dr. Earl Sanders of Baton Rouge and Lafayette Parish County Agent Warren Beaugh agreed on the contemporary plight of many of the state's farms. They were interviewed along with Steeve Linscombe during a school on agronomy held under the auspices of the Cooperative Extension Service at Girard Park Wednesday morning.

"If the farmer is not in some type of government support program, he can't survive," Sanders declared. "Currently, all agricultural businesses, with some minor exceptions, are completely totally dependent on federal programs, and that is not a good thing."

"Basically, we thrived on the free market system, but we no longer have one," Sanders added. "It is a time of survival for farmers, mills, gins, implement dealers all agricultural businesses.

Beaugh said, "If a farmer is in a program now and he can make a living, but he is totally at the mercy of the federal government."

There is constant change in the state's agricultural landscape. Economic conditions and market entities force the farmers into new crop patterns, Linscombe, Sanders and Beaugh reported. Sanders said that Louisiana had 360,000 acres of farmland in 1980, which was down to 400,000 acres in 1986.

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Linscombe was at the school to discuss milo (grain sorghum) with growers from Lafayette, Iberia and St. Martin parishes.

He said that Louisiana had 360,000 acres of farmland in 1980, which was down to 400,000 acres in 1986. He added that the ethanol industry is another potential market. Without the government support programs the farmer cannot make a profit at $0.70 a bushel, said Linscombe.

Beaugh estimated that income of $2 to $2.50 per bushel was needed to land in the profit margin.

The Lafayette county agent reported that an analysis is presently being made in the Church Point area that may bring about a change to sugarcane production.

Sanders, who addressed the farm meeting on weed control, said, "Weeds have continued to be a problem." He added that only by using a combination of herbicides can weeds be controlled. The problem is that the farmer can't afford the herbicides at $40 an acre. "But there has been a dramatic price reduction of about 40 percent in the last 30 days," he said.

This is good news for the farmers.

The United States manufactures about 50 percent of the herbicides, Sanders stated, of which a lot comes from Europe. Much of the technology and ingredients come from Europe. Sanders said, "The agricultural chemical market has always been influenced by Europeans, and recently by the Japanese."

Sanders said the agricultural industry continues research for new crop utilization and new markets. He cited corn as a case in point. Coca-Cola as an example of a development that was not around 15 years ago. Sanders stated, "The corn industry is diversifying beyond the requirements of stock and chemical producers."

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Linscombe said that the Louisiana soybean crop is down more than a million acres since 1983. Corn and grain sorghum have shown an increase. In 1982 Louisiana farmers planted 80,000 acres of grain sorghum but by 1986 that figure increased to 35,000. Corn has also shown a dramatic upward going from 50,000 acres in 1982 to 35,000 acres last year.

Morrison advised the farmers to have a good root system and to plan for the future and for the weather. He said that the weather was critical for success.

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