

## Agriculture by Marcia Merry

### Too scared to take emergency actions

*Legislatures in the key farm states have been paralyzed by the environmentalism virus.*

**F**arm state legislatures traditionally convene during the winter months, for the convenience of farmer legislators. As of the end of January, the early indications show that many of the lawmakers are aware of the emergency condition of farming such as farm finance and drought, but they are too stupefied to take needed emergency actions.

There have been intense operations in state capitals by the environmentalist lobby, and by the "mega-banking" lobby which desire the demise of the independent family farmer. These lobbies have put forward diversionary draft legislation, and worse, proposals to facilitate the loss of independent family farms.

The immediate problem confronting lawmakers in both Washington, D.C. and state capitals is that the 1988 killer drought is still here in 1989. The shortage of rainfall in the summer months was not made up last fall or this winter in large parts of the grain-belt—particularly the Northern Plains, and parts of the western Kansas and Oklahoma winter wheat belt.

This poses a crisis, both for the farmer in terms of his costs and financial problems, and for the nation—and for the Western alliance's food supply.

Neither the Congress nor the U.S. Department of Agriculture is even acknowledging the problem right now. Patrick Collins, press spokesman for the Senate Agriculture Committee, said Jan. 30, that the committee is collecting about 20 farm state news clippings a day on the drought, and that

"in early February, there will be a staff meeting" to pool information. That's it.

The USDA continues to assert that grain stocks, beef, and other foods may be tight, but there is no need for compensatory action.

The USDA agency doing the most damage at the state level is the CSRS—the Cooperative State Research Service. They are pumping out money and disinformation about environment protection as the USDA priorities—not food output, not farm preservation. (See article, page 9).

Typical of the looniness taking over is the move in the Iowa legislature last month to outlaw petroleum-based plastic shopping bags in the state; only corn-based biodegradable bags will be allowed. This is part of the New Age "alternative agriculture" movement supported by both Dukakis and Bush.

The new Food for Peace movement is circulating draft bills taken from the 1930s, the war era, and previous food-crisis periods in the nation, for use as models for legislation today. The measures include: 1) a stay on farm foreclosures; 2) parity pricing for farmers; 3) sliding tax rates on farmland to benefit independent family farmers, and penalize foreign and non-family, corporate-owned farmland.

In Virginia, a memorial resolution (not legislation) was prepared for submission to the legislature, and withdrawn at the last minute under pressure. The text stated:

"Whereas, the combination of worsening drought conditions, con-

tinued declining market prices paid to farmers relative to the increasing cost of production, and climbing interest rates have contributed to a devastating loss of family farms both nationally and at the rate of 1,000 per year in the Commonwealth of Virginia; and

"Whereas, the federal government is now carrying out the largest mass foreclosure of family farms in United States history, including initiating 'delinquency procedures,' against several thousand Virginia farmers;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Commonwealth of Virginia hereby calls upon the Congress of the United States and the Secretary of Agriculture to enact the following emergency measures."

The four measures specified were increased crop planting this spring, a reallocation of scarce U.S. food for use at home and by allies, and an end to shipments to the Soviet Union; the establishment of not less than 90% of parity prices for farm commodities, and an indefinite stay on Farmers Home Administration foreclosures and the provision of new credit at 1% interest to guarantee "a successful production year in 1989."

In Iowa, Gov. Terry Branstad has a stay on foreclosures of farms in place, by an executive order issued in 1985. The state legislature extended it for one year, but now the order is due to expire March 30, and no action has been taken to extend it further. When Branstad issued the resolution, a stay was already in place nationally on orders from a federal court in North Dakota, where farmers had brought a class action suit against the FmHA. In 1987, Congress passed rules on how foreclosures should be handled "fairly" in order to satisfy the court (Agriculture Credit Act), and, unless a new court or federal order comes up, foreclosures will start.