

AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

Land Grants Covetted

by our Washington Correspondent

A LAW suit with important implications for many colleges and universities throughout the United States has now been filed in the US Court for the District of Columbia. The suit charges the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare with misapplying agricultural research funds which go to land grant colleges and universities. The allegation is that the funds have been used chiefly for research which benefits large corporations and harms small farmers, farm workers and consumers—the very people who are supposed to benefit from the land grant institutions. The suit asks for all such research money to be withheld until guidelines are drawn up to ensure that the entire rural community will benefit from it. And, for good measure, it is alleged that the land grant programmes have been operated in violation of the Civil Rights Act.

The land grant colleges and universities were set up by an act of Congress in 1862 and they are funded jointly by the federal government, the states and private sources. The research institutions associated with them are, according to an amendment passed by Congress in 1955, designed to “promote the efficient production, marketing, distribution and utilization of the products of the farm as essential to the health and welfare of our peoples and to promote a sound and prosperous agriculture and rural life as indispensable to the maintenance of maximum employment and national prosperity and security”. The suit suggests that Congress therefore intends the research conducted at land grant institutions to benefit “consumers, owner-operated family farms, the rural home and rural life”.

But, according to the Migrant Legal Action Program Inc. and several other farm workers' and consumer organizations who have brought the suit, the bulk of the research supported by the land grant funds goes towards development of mechanization, pesticides and other programmes which chiefly benefit agricultural industry and which contribute to the growing unemployment in rural areas. The suit singles out the development of tomato harvesters and tobacco harvesters as two projects carried out by universities and colleges with land grant money which have led to much unemployment.

A central complaint about this research is that in spite of the large investment in research designed to mechanize farm production, land grant institutions have not been willing to spend money on research into the

effects of labour-saving devices on the rural population, and that other research programmes that may benefit small farmers are also being ignored. The suit therefore asks that guidelines be drawn up to ensure that “an equal amount of funds appropriated be spent on human, job training and job placement are spent on developing labour-saving devices, mechanization or pesticides whose express or resultant purpose is to replace labor”. To help draw up such guidelines, the suit asks for an advisory committee to be established, with majority representation by consumers, small farm owners, farm-workers and others who are alleged to have been shortchanged by the land grant programme in the past.

As for consumers, the suit charges that land grant money has been used to develop such commodities as DES, coatings on fruit and vegetables to make them look more appetizing and devices for ripening produce after it has been harvested which are of dubious value in increasing the nutritional content of the produce. The plaintiffs therefore also suggest that consumers have missed their benefits from land grant institutions.

If successful, the suit would have a major impact on agricultural research in the United States, for according to the plaintiffs, in 1970 some \$306 million in federal, state and private funds was spent on research at land grant institutions. Clearly, the land grant research programme, according to the suit, “represents the public's primary investment of intellectual and scientific resources in rural America”. The law suit is also another graphic example of the fact that the courts are increasingly having to settle broad social issues in the United States.

NIH

Nixon Wields the Axe

FOR the second time this year, President Nixon has vetoed the appropriations bill for the Departments of Labor and Health, Education and Welfare. This means that the National Institutes of Health must be content, at least until February next year, with the same level of funding that they received in the 1972 fiscal year (which ended on July 1). Ironically, many projects that have been touted by the Administration during the election campaign—the crusades against cancer and diseases of the heart, lungs and blood vessels, for example—will be hampered because of lack of money.

Nixon vetoed the bill because it would have entailed some \$530 million more than he had requested, and it is a casualty of his election-year promise to hold down taxes. He had already vetoed an earlier version of the Labor-HEW ap-

propriations bill which budgeted some \$1,800 million more than he asked for, but Congress sent him back the scaled-down version in the hope that Nixon would find it more palatable. There is also no chance that Congress can override the veto because it came after Congress adjourned.

Because Congress had already passed a bill which allows federal departments and agencies whose budgets have not been settled to receive the same amount of money that they were budgeted last year, the research institutes of the National Institutes of Health must be content with \$1,476 million instead of the \$1,580 million that the Administration had wanted to give them, or the \$1,700 million that the vetoed bill contained. They will continue to be funded at last year's level until Congress passes a new appropriations bill which is signed by the President—it is unlikely that such a bill will be ready before February, after the 1974 budget request has been sent to Congress. Hardest hit will be the National Cancer Institute which will have to wait for the \$90 million budget increase that the Administration had earmarked for it, and the National Heart and Lung Institute which would have had an increase of some \$22 million.

Short Notes**Slimming at New York University**

Faced with a huge financial deficit, New York University, a private university with more than 40,000 students, has been forced to lay off or retire 217 members of its faculty. Hardest hit is the School of Engineering and Science, which will lose more than 100 of its staff members. The moves have come after New York University last year ended up with a deficit of \$14 million, chiefly because of declining enrolments, cutbacks in government support and rising costs. James Hester, the university's president, hopes that the staff cutbacks (which amount to about 8 per cent of the total staff), combined with other austerity measures such as dropping minority courses like Italian, will halve the deficit by the next academic year, and remove it entirely by the 1974-75 academic year.

Kennedy Bill

Hearings on Senator Edward M. Kennedy's National Science Policy and Priorities Act are set to take place before John Davis's Subcommittee on Science, Research and Development this week. It is now unlikely that the committee will get the bill to the floor of the House in time for it to be passed before the election, and the committee is therefore expected to issue a report saying that the bill has merit but needs more study.