



USDA adds bite to health foods

WASHINGTON AP — The Agriculture Department, which has been helping farmers use the latest technology to produce crops and livestock for 116 years, for the first time is promoting exports of health foods.

For years, many department officials have tended to downplay the role of so-called health foods or organically produced items that are grown without chemical additives.

Sometimes they have reacted with outright scorn and ridicule to those who have advocated the elimination of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

But USDA on Wednesday proudly announced that "the first U.S. Natural Foods Exhibit to be held overseas" opened for a two-day stand in Zurich, Switzerland, this week and soon will be headed for Stockholm, Sweden, for another round of promotion.

The department's Foreign Agricultural Service, which is sponsoring the overseas promotion, said that 24 U.S. companies are involved.

Marvin Warner, U.S. ambassador to Switzerland, reported that "300 to 400 prospective buyers" attended the exhibit's debut in Zurich.

An agency spokesman said that products on display included dried and canned fruits, cereals, juices, nuts, natural snacks and peanut butter.

Asked about the unusual turn taken by the department to promote natural foods, the spokesman, who asked not to be identified, said that "our first export was a non-health food, tobacco, and we're just trying to even it up."

It's almost enough to make Earl Butz give up telling jokes.

When he was secretary of agriculture during the Nixon and Ford administrations, Butz rarely

had a kind word to say about health foods, the kind produced without chemicals.

Butz frequently lashed out at those who wanted to "turn the clock back at least 75 years" by doing away with fertilizers and other chemicals used by farmers to boost production and control pests.

Butz was not alone in criticizing those who advocated the elimination of agricultural chemicals in favor of returning to the old days of raising animals and crops organically.

But he was perhaps the most prominent and widely quoted government official of his time on the subject.



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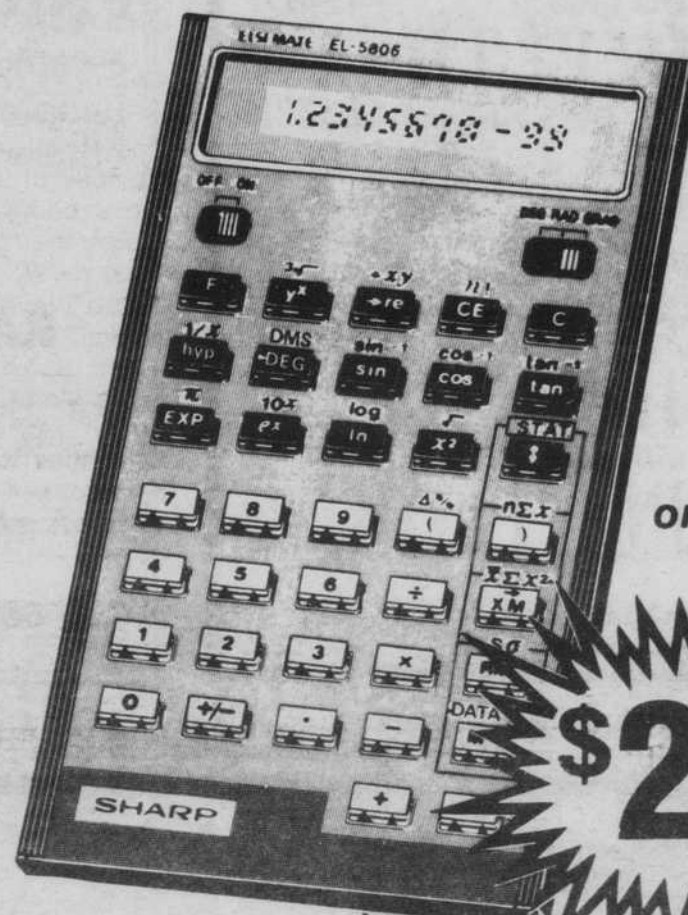
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