

## **Review: *Environmental Enhancement Through Agriculture***

Editor William Lockeretz

Reviewed by [Daniel L. Tufford](#)  
*University of South Carolina*

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Lockeretz, William, ed. *Environmental Enhancement Through Agriculture: Proceedings of a Conference, Boston, Massachusetts, November 15-17, 1995*. Medford, MA: Tufts University, 1996. 334 p. US \$20.00 paper.

When it comes to the environment, agriculture is widely recognized as a cause of degradation, not an enhancement. In *Environmental Enhancement Through Agriculture*, the Tufts University organizers of this 1995 conference held in Boston, MA (USA) do not ignore the reputation agriculture brings to the issue of environmental quality. Their premise is that agriculture cannot simply go away, and that environmental degradation due to agricultural activities is already the norm in many areas. The thematic approach of the conference was to bring together studies that describe enhancement, via innovative agricultural practice or policy, rather than the more typical degradation avoidance. They even posit that, in some instances, certain agricultural practices are better than an environment without agriculture.

The proceedings are organized into topical sections, each containing several papers. The first section covers "Watershed Protection." The papers detail watershed planning and management activities at various locations. This begins with holistic farm planning and management, and expands to development of watershed-wide objectives for controlling pollutant loading to streams. Farmer buy-in to the process and objectives of these efforts is often difficult to obtain. This is a large part of the reason why the current state of most work in this area, as presented in these papers, remains largely one of damage control.

The next section on "Wildlife Conservation and Biodiversity" shifts the focus to the biotic component of farm systems. Many wild animals are well adapted to farm landscapes. Traditional farms often left hedgerows or other undeveloped corridors of native vegetation and some wetland tracts intact. These provided a diversity of flora and physical habitat within and between which a diverse terrestrial, aquatic, and avian fauna thrived. Today diversity restoration or maintenance requires reverting to

earlier practices or utilizing landscape planning techniques that require valuing biodiversity. Like the efforts detailed in the prior section, there are large obstacles to success and few widespread accomplishments.

Subsequent sections cover livestock, waste and nutrients, energy from biomass, farmland preservation, and policy issues. The sections are well focused with many papers reporting a variety of techniques and results for addressing the many dilemmas presented by agriculture. These, and the proceedings as a whole, are enhanced by their broad geographical coverage of the issues. This breadth eliminates the possibility of treating any issue at great depth, but the emphasis is appropriate for the level of synthesis desired by the conference organizers.

The conference organizers seem to be suggesting that what is needed is more study and practice of agriculture that is unencumbered by a focus on prior environmental insult. It may bring a new perspective on what is desirable and achievable on the farm, in the watershed, and in the larger socio-political framework within which agriculture interacts. Success at demonstrating this thesis during the conference was self-admittedly only partial. The most pervasive theme in the articles remains the reality that, as one researcher put it; "farmers need...a viable, profitable business." The problem is ultimately an economic one, and environmental enhancement is still more a vision than an existing process.

Daniel L. Tufford, Ph.D., <[dtufford@sph.sc.edu](mailto:dtufford@sph.sc.edu)> is with the University of South Carolina Department of Environmental Health Sciences, Columbia, SC 29208 USA.