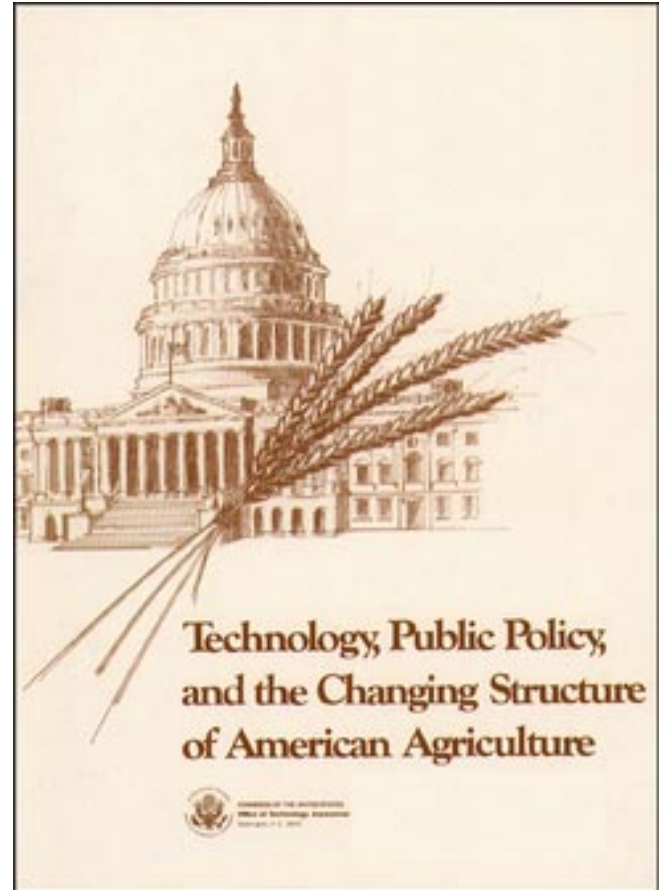


*Technology, Public Policy, and the  
Changing Structure of American Agriculture*

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# Foreword

American agriculture is undergoing significant change and stress. Much of the recent change has been attributed to the financial farm crisis caused mainly by declining agricultural exports. However, underlying these financial difficulties are strong technological and structural forces which will cause further changes and adjustments in American agriculture for the remainder of this century.

Congress, concerned about the nature of these adjustments, requested the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) to analyze the underlying technological, structural, and political forces which impact American agriculture and to determine the industry's probable future direction. Committees requesting the study include: the Senate Committee on Agriculture, the Senate Small Business Committee (the Subcommittee on the Family Farm), the Joint Economic Committee, the House Committee on Science and Technology, and the House Committee on Agriculture (the Subcommittee on Livestock, Dairy, and Poultry; the Subcommittee on Department Operations, Research, and Foreign Agriculture; and the Subcommittee on Forests, Family Farms, and Energy).

In the course of preparing this report, an interim report entitled *A Special Report for the 1985 Farm Bill* was transmitted to the requesting committees for their use during the debates and the writing of the Food Security Act of 1985 (1985 Farm Bill). The special report focused on assessment findings that were particularly relevant for issues debated in that legislation.

This report addresses the longer run issues that technology and certain other factors will have on American agriculture during the remainder of this century. It focuses on the relationship of technology to: agricultural production, structural change, rural communities, environment and natural resource base, finance and credit, research and extension, and public policy. The assessment identifies many benefits that new technologies will create, but these benefits will also exact substantial costs in potential adjustment problems. This report is a first step toward understanding these interrelated problems and identifying policies to ameliorate them.

OTA greatly appreciates the contribution of the advisory panel, workgroups, workshop participants, authors of the technical background papers, and the many other advisors and reviewers who assisted OTA from the public and private sector. Their guidance and comments helped develop a comprehensive report. As with all OTA studies, however, the content of this report is the sole responsibility of OTA.



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