Currently, crop production in the USA can be characterized by (i) low commodity prices, (ii) relative high input costs, and (iii) increasing concern over the influence of modern agriculture on environmental quality. Recent trends in corn (*Zea mays* L.) and soybean (*Glycine max* L. Merr.) prices are shown in Fig. 1-1. Since 1983, prices in the USA have declined for these commodities which represent several other important grain and oil seed crops. This decline is related to a surplus in world supply of most crop commodities and a decrease in U.S. exports (Runge, 1986). The decline in U.S. exports was related, in turn, to an overvalued dollar, inflating prices paid by foreign buyers (Runge, 1986). The currently deflated value of the dollar, however, has not nor is it expected to help agricultural exports because of large grain surpluses.

While commodity prices have been dropping, production costs have been increasing. Average production costs for corn and soybean grown in the Corn Belt over the past 10 yr are shown in Fig. 1-2. These values are generally less than those from other regions of the country (Robinson, 1986), but trends are similar. Since 1979, input costs have increased significantly for several reasons. Crop production in the USA is highly mechanized, requiring little labor but dependent instead on large and specialized equipment, relatively