

# "Ag Notes"

**A SUMMARY OF NEWS, EVENTS AND FACTS FROM USDA**

## Veneman Celebrates National Agriculture Week



Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman observed National Agriculture Week by reminding audiences, who ranged from school children to agribusiness executives, to "take the time out to thank our farmers and ranchers for all that they do throughout the year to help provide food, clothing and so many other important things in our daily lives.

"Agriculture is one of the most dynamic sectors of our economy and we want to encourage more involvement and interest in this exciting industry," Veneman said. To that end, the Secretary signed a Memorandum of Understanding with a chapter of Junior Achievement based in the Washington, D.C. area to promote participation of USDA employees in volunteer activities that inspire America's youth to learn about agriculture. The MOU goes hand in hand with Veneman's "Leaders of Tomorrow" initiative aimed at promoting leadership among young people in the food and agriculture industries.

Veneman expanded on these comments to a gathering of agribusiness executives called The Food Group. After arriving in a pickup truck powered by soybean-based biodiesel fuel, the Secretary noted "a renewed interest in the potential of agriculture unrelated to the food and fiber part of what we do." She cited the renewable fuel standard in the energy bill before the Senate, the President's push for alternative energy uses and a new Cargill-Dow partnership churning out products like the plastic cups used at the Olympics made entirely of corn.

Turning to the farm bill and other issues affecting farmers and ranchers, the Secretary applauded the members of Congress involved in the farm bill conference for agreeing "on the numbers and approximately what's going to go into each title—a basic framework." The conferees agreed to \$73.5 billion in new spending over 10 years. Congress has adjourned and will resume work on the bill April 9.

Meantime, Veneman reiterated Administration opposition to front-loading that money in the new farm law. "When we looked at the Senate bill, there are approximately 15 programs that would be zeroed out or substantially reduced in the second five years. What happens to farmers and ranchers and their programs if we frontload a bill right now?"

Veneman said, "USDA has preparations underway to implement the new law but the conferees still must deal with contentious issues, many of which there are strong differences of opinion on in the agricultural community." She cited provisions on dairy, packer concentration and water laws in the West as examples. Conservation programs, however, are the exception.

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Secretary Ann M. Veneman and President of the Junior Achievement of the National Capital Area Ed Grenier sign a partnership to encourage local elementary children to pursue a career in agriculture. 3/20

### *Upcoming Events with Secretary Veneman—* (All times EST)

**3/25—11:00 a.m. Round Table with Pennsylvania farmers and Rep. Pat Toomey; 12:00 p.m. media avail at Lehigh Valley Airport, Allentown, PA.**

**3/26—10:30 a.m. Ring Opening Bell of Chicago Board of Trade; 1:40 p.m. Remarks to the Chicago Farmers Luncheon, University Club; Remarks to the National Institute for Animal Agriculture, Palmer House.**

**3/27—9:15 a.m. Round table with Indiana farm leaders and Rep. Mark Souder; 11:00 a.m. Town Hall with Indiana farmers and Rep. Mark Souder, Grabill, Indiana**

## Quotables...

"The Administration is hopeful that during the recess, further progress can be made that would lead to final passage of a farm bill in early April. We are fast approaching the critical time where implementation of a new measure for this crop year could be problematic if an agreement is not reached soon. USDA stands ready to implement a new farm bill this year and our team has been working on implementation measures during the last few months. However, each week that passes makes this formidable task ever more challenging..." Secretary Veneman 3/19

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"The good news included President Bush's attention to Klamath water issues, including the formation of a Cabinet-level working group on the subject..." *Herald and News*, Klamath Falls, Ore. 3/17—on why farmers canceled three East Coast convoys intended to bring attention to Klamath Basin farmers.

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On March 22, Secretary Veneman released \$38 million in quality loss payments to 1,775 apple and potato growers hit by natural disasters in 1999 and 2000. Because claims filed were in excess of \$129 million, and only \$38 million is available, farmers will be paid on 27.8 percent of their qualifying losses.

## VENEMAN CELEBRATES AG WEEK--CONTINUED

On "market-maintenance" issues such as Russia's ban on imports of U.S. poultry the Secretary said, "We believe their action is absolutely unwarranted...they are trying to impose conditions on us that they do not impose on their own industry." The U.S. technical team will continue to meet with their Russian counterparts and Veneman said, "hopefully will come to some agreement so we can get this trade moving again."

Veneman also expressed concern at last week's unfounded rumors of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in Kansas explaining that "we conduct about 800 tests per year for animal diseases such as FMD. These rumors were absolutely false. It's an unfortunate circumstance but again, we are constantly testing. These systems are sometimes taken for granted because they work so well."

(For full text of the Secretary's remarks go to: [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov))

## On the road with Biodiesel—

Secretary Veneman departs USDA in the Missouri Soybean Development Council's bio-diesel truck on 3/20. This eco-friendly vehicle has traveled throughout the United States during the last ten years, accumulating 315,000 miles.



The National Biodiesel Board says the truck has never needed engine modifications; has had regularly scheduled maintenance only; has used about 3,300 gallons of biodiesel or about 2,385 bushels of soybeans instead of about 79 barrels of petroleum oil and kept more than 53,000 pounds of carbon dioxide out of the environment.

## The Plight of Afghanistan—

The U.S. government has led a world effort to provide record amounts of food to the Afghan people. As of March 1, the World Food Program has delivered 333,000 metric tons of food since October 2001. In December alone, the WFP delivered 116,000 metric tons of food—more than ever before in one month, anywhere in the world. Despite this tremendous success, there are still people in remote areas who need \$45 million in food aid this year. USAID is providing more than \$117 million in food assistance to Afghanistan this fiscal year.

Because agriculture is a way of life for 80 percent of Afghanistan's people, the United States is committed to helping farmers re-establish production and become more profitable and efficient. Our efforts include rehabilitating the irrigation systems and providing the necessary agricultural inputs including seeds fertilizer, tools agricultural equipment and animal vaccines to Afghan farmers.

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