

"Ag Notes"

A SUMMARY OF NEWS, EVENTS AND FACTS FROM USDA

Russia Lifts Ban on U.S. Poultry

Russia agreed to lift its ban on U.S. poultry and poultry products following more than three weeks of intensive negotiations between U.S. and Russian officials. Russia announced March 1 that it would halt imports effective March 10. The Russian market accounts for one-half of all U.S. poultry exports worldwide.

"We are very pleased that Russia has agreed to remove its import ban," said Secretary Ann M. Veneman and U.S. Trade Representative Robert B. Zoellick in a joint statement. "The agreement reached in Moscow establishes a framework for closer cooperation and communication between U.S. and Russian officials, and provides for improved certification and testing procedures."

A team of Russian veterinarians will visit the U.S. to learn more about U.S. food safety systems, which meet the highest safety standards for consumers around the world.

"We look forward to continued cooperation with Russia on this and other trade matters," they said.

Secretaries Deliver Water to Klamath Farmers

Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman concluded a six-state swing across the nation last week in Klamath Falls, Ore. where she and Interior Secretary Gale Norton opened the headgates of the "A" Canal as a first step in delivering water to Klamath Basin irrigators for the 2002 growing season. These water deliveries will begin the process of charging the canal.

Secretary Veneman said, "This is an important step in ensuring farmers and ranchers in the region have adequate water supplies. There is still a great deal of work to be done and this administration continues its commitment to help farmers and ranchers recover."

President Bush created a federal Klamath River Basin Working Group to find short-term and long-term solutions to the challenges affecting farmers, ranchers, fisherman, tribes and others in the area. The working group is chaired by Norton and includes Veneman, Commerce Secretary Don Evans and James Connaughton, chairman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality.

Veneman Travels to Mexico to Meet With Key Officials

Secretary Veneman will be the keynote speaker at the Mexico Agricultural Outlook Forum in Mexico City during a two-day trip where she will also meet with her counterpart Javier Usabiaga, to discuss various agriculture and trade issues of mutual interest to both the United States and Mexico. In addition, she will meet with Secretaries of the economy and the environment. Veneman will conclude the trip with a meeting with Mexico President Vicente Fox.



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Secretary Ann M. Veneman, joins Senator Susan Collins of Maine and Leader of Tomorrow FFA'er Aaron Morris for a tour of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange 3/26 Chicago, Illinois.

### **Upcoming Schedule of Events for Secretary Veneman**

4/3-4 -- Travels to Mexico for meetings with agriculture and trade officials.

4/8 – Speak to North American Agricultural Journalists Association, Washington, DC

4/9 – Participates in 72<sup>nd</sup> Annual National 4-H Conference, Jefferson Auditorium, Washington, DC.

4/10 – Speaks to Sparks Commodities Annual Food & Agricultural Policy Conference, Washington, DC

## Quotables...

"The working group's rapid progress, combined with the efforts of Sen. Gordon Smith and Rep. Greg Walden, give me great hope for a lasting solution to the challenges of the Klamath River Basin," President Bush 3/29

**Secretary Veneman in Penn. with Rep. Pat Toomey:**--"It was great to have a direct one-on-one meeting with the secretary of agriculture. It was good of her to meet with people who actually work the soil, who are stewards of the land," Brian Dietrick, Lehigh County Farm Bureau President 3/25

**In Colorado with Sen. Wayne Allard**--"Innovation and technology are helping bring new resources to rural communities and can improve educational opportunities and health care," Secretary Veneman announcing \$27 million in grants and \$300 million in loans for national distance learning and telemedicine projects AP, 3/27

**In Montana with Sens. Conrad Burns, Max Baucus and Rep. Denny Rehberg**—"These [changes to emergency loan program] are the most significant changes to the program in more than 15 years." Veneman AP 3/28

## Emergency loan procedures made more user friendly--

Secretary Veneman announced new rules that will make it easier and faster for farmers who qualify to get USDA loans to cover losses from natural disasters. The new rules mean farmers who cannot get commercial credit can apply for emergency loans. The rule changes also will make it easier for livestock producers to participate because USDA has updated loss determination methods to accommodate the different production levels and margins of livestock production.

## Rural Distance Learning and Telemedicine Project Funds Available

Secretary Veneman announced that the Rural Utilities Service has \$27 million in grants and \$300 million in loans available to finance remote learning experiences for students and to enable rural residents to be examined by doctors via telemedicine technology.

"These loans will help provide important resources to strengthen distance learning and telemedicine programs for rural America," said Veneman. "Innovations and technology are helping bring new resources to rural communities and can improve educational opportunities and health care."

Telemedicine technology makes it possible for doctors to examine and direct the treatment of patients without being physically present. Distance learning enables students in such areas to participate in enriched classes such as virtual field trips, college preparatory and foreign language classes.

## Biomass Pilot Projects Selected for Illinois and Oklahoma

While in Illinois last week, Secretary Veneman announced the approval of two Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) biomass pilot projects for Illinois and Oklahoma. In Illinois switchgrass will be harvested from CRP land and then pelletized and used to co-fire traditional coal energy sources. The Oklahoma project will concentrate on markets for biomass and study combining CRP grass pellets with coal to develop a lower sulphur product that could be marketed to power companies. Other projects approved last year are underway in Iowa, Minnesota, New York and Pennsylvania. Veneman said, "Both projects promote the use of a renewable fuel and a cleaner environment."

## Veneman Touts Rural Development through USDA Grant & Loan Announcements

Secretary Veneman awarded grants and loans in four states, including:

--**Illinois:** \$1.5 million to expand a revolving loan program for small businesses; improve waste disposal and construction of new buildings to house new businesses.

--**Indiana**--\$3.2 million for water treatment improvement and new fire equipment.

--**Montana:** \$3.6 million for rural businesses debt restructuring; replacing of cast iron water systems in two communities; purchase of weather radio transmitters. The Secretary also announced approval of a \$10 million guaranteed loan to enable expansion of Zoot Industries, a Bozeman, Mont. software company.

--**Oregon:** \$858,500 for loans to rural business in Gilliam, Grant, Umatilla and Wheeler counties and for renovation and remodeling of the Cannery Building creating 20 jobs.

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