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"Ag Notes"

A SUMMARY OF NEWS, EVENTS AND FACTS FROM USDA

President Bush signs farm bill—USDA begins 'difficult task' of implementation

At an early morning signing ceremony timed so farmers and ranchers could hear his remarks via radio, President George W. Bush signed the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 into law on May 13. With Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman, farmers, and members of Congress in attendance, the President said he signed the bill to provide farmers "support and help when times are tough."

"American farm and ranch families embody some of the best values of our nation; hard work and risk-taking, love of the land and love of our country. Farming is the first industry of America; the industry that feeds us, the industry that clothes us and the industry that increasingly provides more of our energy. The success of America's farmers and ranchers is essential to the success of the American economy," he said.

The President also said the new law "complies with our obligations to the World Trade Organization. Americans cannot eat all that America's farmers and ranchers produce and therefore it makes sense to sell more food abroad. Today 25 percent of U.S. farm income is generated by exports, which means that access to foreign markets is crucial to the livelihood of our farmers and ranchers. Let me put it as plainly as I can: We want to be selling our beef and our corn and our beans to people around the world who need to eat."

With the Senate poised to vote on Trade Promotion Authority (TPA), the President called on Congress to give him TPA. "The best way to help our farmers and ranchers is trade," he said.

Secretary Veneman also said the bill "will provide certainty and support for America's farmers and ranchers in the coming years, but she added, "Because of the timing of the bill and the many complex changes it contains, this process will be challenging. USDA staff has been working for several months to prepare for the farm bill and we are strongly committed to ensuring timely and efficient implementation during the coming months."

USDA LAUNCHES FARM BILL WEBSITE

To help farmers, ranchers and other interested parties keep up to date with implementation of the law, Secretary Veneman announced the creation of a one-stop website. It is integrated into the USDA home page and can be accessed at www.usda.gov/farmbill or by clicking on the 2002 farm bill logo on the USDA homepage.

Information is indexed by farm bill title and by agency. A sample of what's to come includes a side-by-side comparison of the 1996 farm bill and the 2002 farm bill prepared by the Economic Research Service; fact sheets in English and Spanish; and instructions from the Farm Service Agency on base and yield updates.



White House photo by Eric Greener

Accompanied by farmers and members of Congress, President George W. Bush at signing ceremony for the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002. "This bill is generous, and will provide a safety net for farmers," said the President.
5/13

UPCOMING EVENTS WITH SECRETARY VENEMAN—

5/21, Participates in farm bill implementation question and answer session with farm radio broadcasters and reporters from around the country, Wash, DC

5/23, Participates in Fire Summit with Secretary Gail Norton, Boise, Idaho.



Find the latest information

Regarding Farm Bill
implementation at
www.usda.gov/farmbill

President Bush on Earth Day —

"If you own your own land, every day is Earth Day. And so, therefore, I support—strongly support a strong farm conservation effort in the farm bill before the Congress. With more funding and incentives for conservation, we can help our farmers preserve wetlands and wildlife habitat, and better protect water quality." 4/22



Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman with Arizona Governor Jane Hull, Carmen Auza, sheep rancher and farmer from Casa Grande, Rancher Jeff Menges, Arizona Farm Bureau President Ken Evans of Payson and others.



Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman and Interior Secretary Gale Norton sign a memorandum of understanding creating a new Interagency Wildland Fire Leadership Council to further implement the National Fire Plan. "The objective of this council is to provide a coordinated seamless management structure to all aspects of wildland fire policy," Veneman said. 4/9

AGREEMENT REACHED TO OPEN MEXICAN MARKET TO U.S. POTATOES

While attending the 2002 Tri-National Accord meeting in Nagalos, Arizona, Secretary Veneman and her Mexican counterpart Javier Usabiaga discussed trade issues, toured border inspection facilities, and announced an agreement to open the Mexican market to U.S. potatoes. Mexico is a \$30 million market for American potato growers. The agreement comes just one month after Veneman and Usabiaga reached another deal to allow California stone fruit into Mexico for the 2002 shipping season.

"Last month we pledged to work together on various issues that would increase trade and strengthen relations on both sides of the border," said Veneman. "This agreement is a significant achievement and will provide an important export market for American potato farmers."

The announcement was praised by Idaho Senator Larry Craig who said, "I applaud the efforts of USDA, led by Undersecretary Hawks and Secretary Veneman, in promoting and expanding agricultural trade with Mexico." Senator Mike Crapo added, "The Administration should be commended for its tenacity in resolving this trade situation."

USDA PREPARES FOR CHALLENGING FIRE SEASON

During her recent trip to Arizona, Secretary Veneman joined Governor Jane Hull and Congressmen John Shadegg and J.D. Hayworth in designating the state as a drought disaster area, making farmers and ranchers immediately eligible for emergency farm loans and other assistance. "We have heard from your Governor and Congressional delegation first hand about the impact the drought has had in Arizona," Veneman said. "This emergency assistance will help farmers and ranchers recover from these devastating effects and losses."

The state has also been hit by devastating fires and the Secretary joined the Governor in touring damaged areas, visiting with victims, volunteers and firefighters. USDA's Forest Service, working with federal, state and local partners, has been working to contain the wildfire. "Federal, state and local firefighters are working to contain the fires and limit the damages," said Veneman. "We appreciate the hard work of all those involved, including the countless firefighters and volunteers, who are helping to contain these fires."

Earlier in the month Veneman testified before the House Resources Committee and reiterated USDA's commitment to managing and restoring forests saying, "we must take proactive measures to improve forest health, restore watersheds, improve our transportation and recreation infrastructure and address other serious resource needs."

USDA's priorities include, forest and rangeland management, cooperation across government, process gridlock, accountability and reconnecting with local communities. The Secretary pointed to the joint effort between USDA and the Department of the Interior to implement the National Fire Plan as a "good example of our commitment to establish a seamless delivery of services."

VENEMAN LEADS U.S. DELEGATION TO COSTA RICA

Secretary Veneman traveled to Costa Rica on May 8th to represent President Bush at the swearing in of President Abel Pacheco as the new president of the country. Costa Rica is an important trading partner to the United States and during her visit, the Secretary held bilateral discussions and meetings with several of her counterparts from Brazil, Venezuela, Columbia, Bolivia, among others.



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nn M. Veneman after
resentation of the 2002 Bauman
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ward named in honor of their
ther Dr. Howard E. Bauman,
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ecretary Ann M. Veneman
nd Secretary of Health and
uman Services Tommy
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partnership with the 5 A Day
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ecretary Veneman on the 5
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whole." 4/25*

FATHER OF HACCP HONORED AT FOOD SAFETY SYMPOSIUM

On May 9th, Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman opened the first of nine science symposiums on food safety planned by USDA's Food Safety Inspection Service by presenting the first Howard E. Bauman Award posthumously to Dr. Bauman. Bauman was the innovator behind the HACCP food safety system, which was born of a collaborative effort to provide uncontaminated food to astronauts.

"We owe much to Dr. Bauman for his creativity, and I'm sure he would be pleased to know that HACCP is now in place in meat and poultry plants nationwide," Veneman said. While crediting HACCP with establishing a higher level of food safety protection for American consumers, the Secretary said there is still much work to be done.

By holding these symposiums, "our aim is to stimulate thinking and generate new ideas that will hopefully become the foundation for future efforts to make our food safety systems even stronger and more effective than they are today," she said.

VENEMAN DISCUSSES HOMELAND SECURITY EFFORTS WITH STATE AGRICULTURE SECRETARIES

Secretary Veneman addressed homeland security with state agriculture secretaries on May 16th as part of a meeting of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture. Veneman said that in the next few weeks, USDA will announce the allocation of \$43 million in homeland security grants and cooperative agreements with states to help strengthen animal, plant and food protection systems.

"We have been working closely with many of you here - as well as the Office of Homeland Security -- to identify our highest priorities - where we need to best target these limited resources to provide the best protections," Veneman said.

Less than a month ago, Veneman testified before the Senate Appropriations Committee to discuss aggressive actions by USDA to bolster homeland security preparedness. The Secretary provided a breakdown of key biosecurity enhancements through \$328 million approved by President Bush in January.

In addition to the \$43 million for state efforts, other USDA actions include allocating \$177 million to make physical and operational security improvements at key USDA locations, \$23 million for USDA's Plum Island laboratory, \$35 million to strengthen programs to exclude pests and diseases at the borders; \$16.5 million to expand food safety capabilities and personnel; and \$15.3 million for research and rapid detection tools.

Veneman also said President Bush has requested more than \$150 million in additional homeland security resources in USDA's FY2003 budget. "If approved by Congress, the budget would bring our funding and staffing at ports of entry to record levels, more than doubling the number from where we were just three years ago. The budget would also provide record level support for the nation's food safety protection systems," she said.

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