

"Ag Notes"

A SUMMARY OF NEWS, EVENTS AND FACTS FROM USDA



For updates about the new farm bill click on the logo above at www.usda.gov

Upcoming Events with Secretary Veneman:

May 30, 2002: Travels to Detroit, Michigan for homeland security event.

May 30, 2002: Joins Senator Mitch McConnell in Greensburg, Kentucky for conservation event.

May 31, 2002: Joins Senator Wayne Allard for agriculture event in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

May 31, 2002: Joins Senator Pat Roberts for agriculture event in Wichita, Kansas.

May 31, 2002: Participates in agriculture event with Congressmen Richard Pombo in Turlock, California.

June 1, 2002: Gives Commencement Address at California State University - Stanislaus, Modesto, CA. Following, the Secretary will participate in a Leaders of Tomorrow 4-H event at Hilmar Cheese.

VENEMAN RESPONDS TO FARM BILL CRITICISM

In a conversation with farm print and radio reporters on May 21, Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman said, "since the bill was signed, we've heard a lot of noise out there, particularly from people from other countries regarding what's contained in this new bill. Many of the claims we're hearing, we think are unjust and some, for their own political purposes are distorting the facts."

Continuing this theme in letters to the editor published in several major newspapers including *The Financial Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, the Secretary said in part, "I felt the need to set the record straight on several key points that have not been accurately reflected in editorials and commentary on the farm bill."

"If you look at the whole picture, the increase in annual farm spending is roughly the same as it has been over the past four years. The only difference is that farmers and ranchers now have stability and do not have to fight the supplemental appropriation battle in Congress each year."

Veneman said criticism that the farm bill does not comply with U.S. international trade obligations is, "just plain wrong." She pointed to a circuit breaker provision in the law that would keep farm spending within existing trade agreements. And she said, "while our competitors complain about our level of farm spending under WTO rules, these countries are able to spend much, much more to support their farmers - and they do." The U.S. is limited to spending \$19.1 billion in farm program support while the European Union limit is \$60 billion and Japan is \$30 billion.

The Secretary also pointed out other positive aspects of the new farm bill, including an 80% increase for environmental programs, increased support to help low-income Americans, strong energy provisions, and investment for research, food safety, animal and plant disease protections, trade development and rural communities.

DROUGHT RELIEF ANNOUNCED IN SEVEN STATES

Secretary Veneman approved grazing of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acreage in seven states last week, a full month earlier than in previous drought years. Producers in eligible counties in Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah and Wyoming will have access to additional forage.

"The extreme drought has devastated many farmers and ranchers, especially in western states," the Secretary said. "We continue to look at every available program within USDA's authority to assist producers who are adversely affected by drought conditions."

Quotables...

"Restoring Trade Promotion Authority will give me the flexibility I need to secure the greatest possible trade opportunities for American workers, consumers, families and farmers. Every day the U.S. goes without TPA is another day the American people are deprived of the benefits of trade. Therefore, I urge the House and Senate to convene a conference committee immediately so they can resolve their differences and send me a TPA bill I can sign at the earliest opportunity..."

President Bush, on Senate passage of TPA, 5/23/02



Secretary Veneman visits with Forest Service personnel while attending wildland fire management conference in Idaho, 5/23.

"Colorado is facing its worst drought in the last hundred years, so this quick action by Secretary Veneman to release CRP lands for emergency grazing may make the difference in allowing several Colorado ranchers to survive the drought."

Colorado Senator Wayne Allard following CRP announcement by USDA.

SENATE PASSES TPA BY HUGE MARGIN

The U.S. Senate decisively approved Trade Promotion Authority by a bipartisan vote of 66-30 on May 23. Secretary Veneman immediately praised the vote saying, "This is extremely good news for American agriculture. It is an important step in restoring the President's authority to negotiate and enter into trade agreements that will boost U.S. food and agricultural exports."

The Secretary said, "TPA is a critical tool in prying open international markets for U.S. farm and food products," and praised the U.S. food and agriculture community for their continued support for the legislation.

"Securing a strong economic foundation for America's farmers and ranchers has been one of the President's top priorities. We at USDA, along with Secretary Evans and Ambassador Zoellick, will continue our collective pursuit of a comprehensive trade agenda."

Veneman said the new trade talks launched in Doha last November offer tremendous potential benefits to America's farmers and ranchers by expanding access to rapidly growing foreign markets. "Trade Promotion Authority will strengthen the U.S. leadership role in ongoing negotiations and help us obtain our ambitious objectives."

NORTON, VENEMAN & WESTERN GOVERNORS LAUNCH LONG-TERM WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Secretary Veneman joined Interior Secretary Gale Norton and western Governors at a day-long conference in Idaho to discuss forest and rangeland health and how to reduce the risk of wildfires. They also endorsed an historic implementation plan to aggressively manage wildland fires and reduce hazardous fuels, protect communities and restore ecosystems over the next decade.

"President Bush is strongly committed to restoring forest health in a way that benefits both communities and the environment," said Veneman. "This plan provides the detailed framework for reducing fire risks and rehabilitating and restoring ecosystem health."

The President issued a statement praising the collective efforts by federal and state agencies saying, "our goal is to reduce the threat that wildfires pose to homes, communities and the environment. Severe drought conditions in many areas of the U.S. make it essential that we cooperate in our efforts to fight fires and reduce the fuel loads that cause them."

Governor Dirk Kempthorne of Idaho said it was just one year ago that a 10-year strategy for improving the health of our forests. "This historic agreement sets in motion a locally-led process that preserves forests and protects communities," he said.

USDA TESTS INTERNET FARM BILL PAYMENTS

Secretary Veneman announced that USDA is testing a new program in selected counties in 21 states to allow farmers to receive farm bill payments via the Internet. "This type of service would save time and resources that producers now spend in USDA offices," she said. For a complete list of selected counties, visit www.usda.gov/farmbill.

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