

# "Aq Notes"

A SUMMARY OF NEWS, EVENTS AND FACTS FROM USDA

## Congress Approves Homeland Security Department

President Bush's vision for a new Department to protect America against potential threats moved a step closer to becoming a reality when the U.S. Senate voted overwhelmingly (90-9) in support of the proposal to create the new agency.

The President immediately praised the Congress saying, "Congress has taken an historic and bold step forward to protect the American people...this landmark legislation, the most extensive reorganization of the Federal government since the 1940s, will help our Nation meet the emerging threats of terrorism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century."

Secretary Veneman echoed the President's praise saying, "I applaud the bipartisan support and passage of this legislation. Today's action is an important step that will bolster the planning, coordination, management and response systems to better protect our nation against potential threats."

The Secretary said USDA will work very closely with the new Department of Homeland Security to ensure a swift, efficient and responsible transition. "When the President proposed this bold and visionary plan earlier this year he understood clearly the importance of agriculture to America's homeland security," she said. "This new agency will bring together federal resources, including USDA's border inspection and protection services, to ensure the safety and security of food, livestock and agricultural production."

## VENEMAN PRAISES FARM BROADCASTERS

Secretary Veneman praised the work of farm radio broadcasters in keeping America's agriculture sector informed in a live satellite speech to their national convention. She also reflected back on what has been a busy year and the issues ahead as the new year approaches.

The Secretary said that farm bill implementation has been a top priority, but that USDA's work is far from over. She praised USDA employees for their hard work and dedication saying, "USDA has met the timetables and as a result, more than \$13 billion is flowing to our farm sector in this final quarter of the year."

Veneman also discussed priorities for the Administration in the coming months and as the new Congress convenes in January. These issues include providing strong conservation tools for farmers and ranchers, which the Bush Administration worked hard to provide in the new farm bill; pursuing strong trade policies to create jobs and help U.S. farmers better compete in the global economy; seeking additional tax relief and permanently eliminating the death tax; initiating strong energy policies that increase investments in renewable fuels; continued protection of the homeland; reauthorization of child nutrition programs to assist families; and providing strong investments in rural communities and infrastructure programs.

"President Bush and this Administration have been working hard to achieve a policy agenda that moves our country forward and supports a strong food and agriculture sector," said Veneman.



Secretary Veneman receives "Best Wishes" from the National Association of Farm Broadcasters. 11/15

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*"Chairman Combest has provided strong, effective leadership on agricultural and trade issues as chairman of the House Agriculture Committee. His dedicated service in Congress has benefited the nation's farmers and ranchers. I wish Chairman Combest and his wife Sharon all the best as they begin their move back to Texas, and look forward to working with him throughout his remaining time in Congress." Secretary Veneman upon learning of Chairman Combest's decision to resign in May 2003.*



## Quotables...

*"I am pleased with the ruling today...this is very good news because the USDA regards such programs, when properly administered, as effective tools for market enhancement."* Secretary Veneman following a ruling from the U.S. District Court that the Beef Promotion and Research Act is constitutional. 11/01.



Secretary Veneman, Deputy Secretary Jim Moseley and Conservation Service Chief Bruce Knight at a conference for Technical Service Providers.—3<sup>rd</sup> party contractors who will help farmers implement conservation provisions of the farm bill. 11/7.

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*"The dairy sector is one of the most important to our agricultural economy...in taking these actions together we have tried to make adjustments that will best serve dairy farmers and the entire dairy industry..."* Secretary Veneman in announcing several dairy policies. (USDA Release 0476.02, 11/15/02)

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## USDA issues directive to reduce Listeria

USDA issued an administrative directive on Nov. 18, which outlines additional steps to be taken by USDA inspectors to ensure that establishments producing ready-to-eat meat and poultry products are taking the necessary steps to prevent contamination with Listeria monocytogenes.

The directive is a result of last month's announcement calling for a strengthening of current Listeria protocols and testing programs. Dr. Elsa Murano, USDA's undersecretary for food safety, outlined the directive during a scientific summit that is being held in Washington, D.C. this week.

"This directive is an aggressive and targeted approach to further reduce the risk of listeriosis from consumption of contaminated ready-to-eat products," Secretary Veneman said. "The actions we are announcing today underscore this Administration's continued commitment to improving public health through scientific enhancements of our inspection process."

## TRADE NEWS—

--Secretary Veneman, in her remarks to Farm Broadcasters said 2002, was a good year regarding advancement of Bush Administration trade policies. Accomplishments have included passage of Trade Promotion Authority, a bold U.S. proposal regarding agriculture negotiations in the WTO, and initiating several bilateral trade negotiations.

--The United States and the European Commission (EC) last week agreed to maintain the current import system for almost all wheat and feed grains from the United States (known as the margin of preference), averting a situation that could have restricted more than \$400 million worth of U.S. grain exports to the European Union (EU).

"This is a very important agreement for our feed grain and wheat farmers," said Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman. "While we would have preferred no changes to the MOP, we are pleased that we were able to settle this difficult issue with only minimal changes and thus to maintain export opportunities for our producers."

--U.S. Trade Representative Robert T. Zoellick announced Nov.14 that the U.S. and Australia will negotiate a bilateral trade pact in 2003. In a statement Secretary Veneman said in part, "As Ambassador Zoellick has said, it will be important in these negotiations to make progress on agricultural issues. Through these negotiations we must work hard to open and expand U.S. food and agricultural exports to the Australian market. USDA will continue to work closely with Ambassador Zoellick and his team as negotiations move forward to also address the full range of issues facing U.S. agricultural exports."

## USDA continues Farm Bill implementation progress—

USDA began making payments under the Direct and Counter-Cyclical payment and 2000-crop Apple Market Loss Assistance programs on November 7. "USDA has worked diligently to implement complex 2002 Farm Bill programs to get benefits to our farmers," said Veneman. "The result is that producers are receiving payments just a few weeks after sign-up began."

The first partial counter-cyclical payments total about \$610 million for 2002 cotton, rice, and peanut crops. Of the total, \$430 million is for cotton; \$116 million for rice and \$64 million for peanut growers. Eligible apple growers began receiving about \$75 million on their 2000 crop apple production. Since Oct. 1 USDA has issued payments of \$612 million under the Milk Income Loss Contract program. In addition, dairy farmers have received \$100 million in Livestock Compensation Program payments.