

"Aq Notes"

A SUMMARY OF NEWS, EVENTS AND FACTS FROM USDA



Secretary Veneman and Undersecretary Elsa Murano view new food safety technologies at the trade show of the International Poultry Exposition in Atlanta, GA. During an address to the U.S. Poultry and Egg Association, Veneman announced that President Bush will propose a record level of funding to strengthen the USDA's food safety protection systems



Secretary Veneman holds a child receiving benefits from the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Clinic at Bellevue Hospital in New York City. She announced the President will seek record funding for WIC in FY2004. 1/15

In budget preview--

President seeks record food safety, WIC spending

President Bush will propose substantial increases in USDA's food safety and child nutrition programs when the FY 2004 budget is formally released Feb. 3. In a speech to producers at the U.S. Poultry and Egg Association meeting in Atlanta, Ga., yesterday, Secretary Veneman said the President will propose a record \$797 million in meat and poultry food safety spending as well as increase efforts to strengthen agriculture protection systems. This is \$42 million more than last year's request and \$148 million—or 20 percent--more than the increase in FY 2000.

Accompanied by USDA Undersecretary for Food Safety Elsa Murano, Veneman said, "the President cares deeply about ensuring a strong food safety system and the protection of agriculture against potential threats." The FY 2004 request will fund 7,680 food safety inspectors, provide specialized training for the inspection workforce, increase microbiological testing and sampling, strengthen foreign surveillance programs and increase public education efforts."

In addition, USDA's budget also will include \$70 million in new funding through other USDA programs to strengthen agricultural protection systems, that would include increased laboratory security measures; biosecurity, animal disease and vaccine research; and additional animal and plant pests and disease monitoring programs.

Veneman told the gathering, "Again, the President's budget reflects another year of providing record levels of resources and inspectors to strengthen America's food-safety programs and services. This is good news for your industries and it's good news for consumers."

The President's budget will also seek record funding to feed low-income mothers and their children. At a Women, Infants and Children (WIC) clinic at Bellevue Hospital in New York last week, the Secretary said the administration will request \$4.77 billion for FY 2004. This is a \$43 million increase above last year's budget request and reflects a \$737 million increase since FY 2000. It also includes an additional \$25 million to support child obesity prevention projects and breastfeeding programs, as well as a \$150 million contingency fund should there be an increase in WIC participants.

"President Bush is strongly committed to providing a healthy start for women and children through these important programs," Veneman said. "Since taking office the President has recognized the success of the WIC program, which is helping so many mothers provide their children with a healthy and nutritious start in life."

According to the latest figures, the WIC program achieved an all time record of over 7.64 million participants in October 2002. The President's new budget will allow local WIC programs, like the one the Secretary visited in New York, to provide benefits to nearly 8 million low-income mothers and children in 2004.

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Quotables...

"The number one positive is the spirit and resiliency of the American farmer. Even though we have seen farmers face very difficult times during the past few years, we have seen their resilience, their ingenuity and their management skills overcome most challenges and set the pace in terms of competition and achievement—"

Secretary Veneman on the ten positives for the future of U.S. agriculture—AgWeb.com 1/23



Secretary Veneman meets with farmers and farm group representatives to discuss drought and disaster assistance issues. 1/8

"Vernon Parker is a highly respected and well qualified nominee to serve the President and this Administration. Upon confirmation, Mr. Parker will be a strong leader in advancing USDA's civil rights policies to ensure fair and equitable treatment for our customers and employees." *Secretary Veneman on the nomination of Vernon Parker to be Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1/14*

Deputy Secretary Jim Moseley announced that USDA and Pheasants Forever agreed to create a cooperative partnership to help improve the Nation's wildlife habitat during the group's 20th anniversary meeting in Bloomington, MN. 1/11

U.S. –Mexico avoid chicken tariff dispute

U.S. poultry will continue to be exported to Mexico with preferential access; Secretary Veneman and U.S. Trade Ambassador Robert Zoellick announced this week. The announcement was praised by the U.S. poultry industry.

Under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Mexico's tariffs on U.S. poultry fell to zero on January 1. However, NAFTA allowed Mexico to impose an emergency tariff of up to 240 percent to protect its domestic industry. Instead, Mexico will allow 50,000 metric tons of U.S. chicken leg quarters into Mexico duty-free over the next six months and will impose a provisional tariff on imports of chicken leg quarters above that level. All other U.S. poultry exports will continue to enter Mexico duty free.

"This provisional safeguard will help to preserve preferential access for U.S. poultry in our third largest market. While the safeguard is in place we will continue to work with the Mexican Government and the poultry industry to ensure long-term access for U.S. exports," Veneman said.

Forest Service, fire fighters to train together

Bolstering Homeland Security efforts, the Fire Department of New York (FDNY) and USDA's Forest Service established a training program on Jan. 15 in incident command management to hone the skills of firefighters in responding to terrorist incidents and natural disasters.

"For years, the Forest Service has been regarded as one of the world's best in managing large-scale fires, emergency incidents and natural disasters," said Secretary Veneman at a ceremony at Fire Department headquarters in Brooklyn. "Following the tragedies of September 11, we worked together with the FDNY to provide assistance. This training we are announcing today will enhance FDNY's capability, as part of America's first responder community, to better respond to threats to our homeland as well as other catastrophic events."

Once training is complete, New York City may make FDNY firefighters available for mobilization to combat wildfires and other incidents nationwide. For a transcript of the event visit USDA's website at www.usda.gov.

Veneman releases USDA midterm review

On January 7, Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman released a review of significant food and agricultural policy achievements of the first two years of the Bush Administration. The achievements include progress on increased measures to protect agriculture against terrorist threats, rapid implementation of the 2002 Farm Bill, increased trade opportunities, unprecedented funding for food and nutrition programs, new actions to strengthen food safety systems, better protection of America's forest lands and expansion of jobs and economic opportunities in rural communities.

"During these first two years, USDA has made significant progress in strengthening America's food and agricultural sector," said Veneman. "Many of the programs implemented under this Administration are helping the nation's farmers and ranchers and we continue to work hard in that regard. We have also made good progress in other areas by providing economic stimulus for rural communities, assisting families with strong nutrition and food assistance programs, and implementing effective conservation and environmental measures."

For full text of the report visit USDA's website at www.usda.gov.