

# "Ag Notes"

**A SUMMARY OF NEWS, EVENTS AND FACTS FROM USDA**

## At Outlook Forum—

### Veneman Outlines Key Priorities for Agriculture

Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman presented the keynote address at the opening of the 79<sup>th</sup> Annual Agricultural Outlook Forum where she outlined some key priorities for the food and agriculture sector to help America's farmers and ranchers better compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

"Our world is in constant change, and so is the world of agriculture. When you examine where agriculture has come in a relatively short time, the pace of that change is remarkable," said Veneman. "But some issues that have confronted America's farm sector are still challenges today and will continue to be so in the coming years."

In keeping with the Forum theme: "Competing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century", Veneman said that as agriculture looks to the future, several critical areas are important to examine closely to help shape the future of the industry:

- Applying technology to its fullest potential, advancing alternative uses for agricultural products and adopting a forward-looking regulatory system that ensures the integrity of technology advancements in food and agriculture;
- Strengthening the nation's food safety systems and ensuring the protection of the food supply against potential bioterrorist threats;
- Improving and expanding risk management tools for producers to better prepare the agriculture sector when it faces difficult and challenging times; and
- Continuing to expand and open new international markets and working harder to educate all involved about the perils to agriculture if progress is not made in this area.

In addition, Veneman announced a new initiative to strengthen the crop insurance program. "The foundation of the nation's risk management program is crop insurance. Today over 50 percent of the insured acreage is now insured at a 70 percent or higher level of coverage compared with only 9 percent in 1998," she said.

"Despite such progress we need to strengthen our crop insurance program and improve risk management tools, generally. Our goals are to insure widely available and effective risk management tools for our diverse farm sector, for farmers and stakeholders to be well informed, that the delivery system is fair and effective, the programs are operated with integrity, and that we excel at service to the nation's producers."

To achieve this objective, the Secretary has asked the Risk Management Agency (RMA) to identify underserved producers and closely examine the regions, commodities and risks and then prioritize the development of new products to fill the gaps identified. She also announced the release of \$18 million in RMA financial assistance to reach underserved producers in 15 states. For the full text of her remarks go to [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov).



*Secretary Veneman delivers the keynote address at 79th Agricultural Outlook Forum, Crystal City, Virginia 2/20*

### **Upcoming Events with Secretary Veneman—**

USDA National Nutrition Education Conference, Omni Shoreham Hotel, 9:45 a.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 25

The House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, 2326 Rayburn, 9:30 a.m. on Thursday, Feb. 27

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### **Public meetings on the 2002 Farm Bill & USDA programs and services will occur—**

--At the Trade, Recreation, Agricultural Centers in Pasco, Washington on Feb. 24.

--At Fresno State University, Fresno, California on Feb. 26

## Quotables...

"Over the last 10 years, U.S. exports to our NAFTA partners grew 76 percent, while exports to the rest of the world grew 12 percent. Think of what our farm economy would be without NAFTA growth, and think about what it would be if that NAFTA growth had been applied to the rest of our exports.

"This year will be a critical one for advancing our overall trade agenda. The WTO negotiations are entering a crucial phase, as countries work to develop the modalities for reducing tariffs and subsidies to achieve trade reform."—*Sec. Veneman at the 79<sup>th</sup> USDA Outlook Forum*



*Secretary Veneman and Leaders of Tomorrow participant, Levi W. Gassaway, at the White House hosted Faith-Based and Community Initiatives conference in San Diego, CA. Veneman delivered the keynote address at the Feb. 18 conference which aims to partner social service providers with the federal government to provide help to those in need.*

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"Devotion, determination and the ability to exceed goals and remain focused on USDA's mission has earned APHIS this esteemed award," *Sec. Veneman upon presentation of the People of the Year Award to APHIS employees by Progressive Farmer magazine 2/19*

## Veneman jumpstarts disaster aid process--

On Feb. 20, the same day that President Bush signed into law the omnibus spending measure that provides \$3.1 billion in disaster aid to crop and livestock producers, Secretary Veneman established a disaster assistance-working group.

"We want to make sure that the disaster aid implementation is a farmer friendly process and our team at USDA is going to work to ensure that the program benefits reach producers as quickly as possible," said Veneman. "This working group will examine ways to expedite the process and cut red tape if possible to get program benefits in the hands of farmers and ranchers."

While it is still too early for USDA to determine when sign-up for the various disaster assistance programs will be available, this working group will begin examining program requirements and appropriate timetables. The disaster assistance programs contained in the measure will require producers to sign-up to receive program benefits through local Farm Service Agency offices. In addition, USDA must establish regulatory guidelines and write computer software programs so county offices are able to perform sign-up when those timeframes are announced. As part of the disaster aid implementation process, USDA will launch a new website next week that will contain information about the disaster assistance programs, questions and answers, as well as other pertinent data.

## Veneman keynotes White House Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Conference

"USDA has a long history of working with faith-based and community organizations to provide programs, grants and other services that help build stronger communities through rural economic development and investment, food and nutrition programs, and food aid here and abroad," Secretary Veneman said in an address to nearly 1,600 leaders attending the White House's Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Conference in San Diego.

President Bush tasked his White House Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Office with leading a "determined attack on need" by strengthening and expanding the role of such organizations in addressing the nation's social problems. He signed an Executive Order establishing USDA's Faith-Based Center on December 12, 2002.

Through USDA's food distribution, rural housing, school feeding and food aid programs, the Department deals extensively in areas where there are many faith-based and community providers.

## USDA mourns passing of Secretary Orville Freeman

Orville Lothrop Freeman, a former Governor and native of Minnesota, passed away on Feb. 20. He was Secretary of Agriculture under President John F. Kennedy and President Lyndon Johnson, serving from 1961 until 1969.

"Secretary Freeman will be long remembered for his dedicated service to our country as a three-term governor of Minnesota and for his stewardship of the Department of Agriculture for nearly all of the 1960's, Secretary Veneman said in a statement. "He was a friend of the American farmer and made a significant impact on the entire food and agriculture system during his leadership at the Department. The entire USDA family extends our heartfelt sympathies to Secretary Freeman's wife, Jane, and the entire Freeman family."

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