

# "Ag Notes"

A SUMMARY OF NEWS, EVENTS AND FACTS FROM USDA

## Veneman Makes Earth Day Announcements

On Earth Day, Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman announced that sign-up will begin May 5, for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), a program designed to stop soil erosion in the United States. In addition, Veneman announced that USDA is releasing more than \$1.8 billion for conservation assistance on working lands. She also said that \$105 million in funding for rural water and wastewater infrastructure projects has been distributed to 29 states.

"The President has said many times that if you are an owner of the land, every day is Earth Day," said Veneman. "America's farmers and ranchers have made great strides to improve the environment and this administration is committed to assisting their ongoing stewardship efforts to enhance soil, water and air."

The CRP general sign-up will be held from May 5 through May 30. Producers can sign up at local USDA service centers across the nation. The 2002 Farm Bill authorized USDA to maintain CRP enrollment up to 39.2 million acres.

Aside from the general sign-up, CRP's continuous sign-up program will be ongoing. USDA has reserved two million acres for the continuous sign-up program, which represents the most environmentally desirable and sensitive land. USDA is making a special effort to help enhance wildlife habitats and air quality by setting aside 500,000 acres for bottomland hardwood tree planting. Continuous sign-up for hardwood planting will start after the general sign-up.

Current participants with contracts expiring this fall--about 1.5 million--can make new contract offers. Contracts awarded under this sign-up will become effective at either the beginning of the next fiscal year, Oct. 1, 2003 or the following year, Oct. 1, 2004, whichever the producer chooses. One other general sign-up will be offered through 2007.

Detailed information about these programs can be found on [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov).

In addition, the Bush Administration launched [EarthDay.gov](http://EarthDay.gov), a Web site that provides Americans a comprehensive guide to environmental service opportunities and Earth Day events sponsored by the federal government, including events hosted by USDA agencies. The site is the first interagency effort to create a comprehensive federal resource for citizens who want to participate in Earth Day and other year-round environmental activities.

## President's Tax Package Benefits Farm Families

As part of "Tax Day" on April 15, Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman said that farm families would reap significant tax savings under President Bush's Jobs and Economic Growth Plan. The President's plan would save farm families \$4 billion in taxes for 2003," she said. "Through his plan, the President hopes that by the next tax day, millions of Americans will be able to keep more of their own money to invest and spend."

Veneman said that under the President's plan, 85 percent of farm and ranch families would see some benefit. The savings include \$2.3 billion from accelerating reductions in income-tax rates, marriage penalty relief and the increased child credit; \$1.3 billion from eliminating the double taxation of dividends; and additional savings from increased small business expensing, making 90 percent of all farm machinery and equipment tax deductible. The result is significant saving for individual families across the country. (continued on page 2)



Secretary Veneman and Maryland Governor Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr. visit the Rossback Family's Locust Farm in Davidsonville, Md. to mark the 33<sup>rd</sup> Earth Day, April 22, 2003

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Ministers of Agriculture from about 180 nations have been invited to the Agricultural Science and Technology Conference and Expo, which will convene June 23-25 in Sacramento, CA.

The conference will focus on the critical role science and technology can play in raising sustainable agricultural productivity in developing countries, with the goal of boosting food availability and improving nutrition. For complete details go to: [http://www.fas.usda.gov/icd/stconf/conf\\_main.html](http://www.fas.usda.gov/icd/stconf/conf_main.html)

## Events--



*Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman officially swears in Vernon Parker, as the first Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights during a private ceremony April 1.*

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### **Food stamps begin for legal immigrants—**

Food Stamp Program benefits began for newly qualified legal immigrants on April 1. "President Bush is committed to ensuring that those eligible to receive food stamps can access available benefits," said Veneman. "This is an important step in the on-going effort to improve access for low-income households and in restoring fairness and equity for legal immigrants." President Bush called for the extension of benefits in the FY 2003 budget proposal which later became law as part of the 2002 Farm Bill.

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*Jim Butler, Undersecretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services at the port of Galveston, Texas where 28,000 metric tons of hard red winter wheat began the journey to Iraq. 4/3*

## Tax package benefits continued—

"The President's plan would provide well-timed stimulus to the economy," said Veneman. "It would return much needed benefits to all taxpaying Americans, especially farmers and ranchers. I urge members of Congress—from both parties—to work together to pass the President's plan."

## Veneman takes action to ease effects of drought—

Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture will provide surplus USDA stocks of non-fat dry milk to livestock producers in areas hardest hit by continuing drought.

Additionally, Veneman said that a Drought Coordinating Council has been formed to monitor ongoing drought conditions and the impact on agriculture producers. The Council will coordinate the full array of resources to assist affected producers and communities.

"This Administration has remained committed to providing relief to producers who have faced difficult times because of drought," said Veneman. "Many regions continue to face persistent and severe drought conditions. The Drought Coordinating Council will monitor the situation and coordinate the resources the Administration has available to address needs where they exist."

The Drought Coordinating Council brings together resources from: the Farm Service Agency; the Risk Management Agency; the Natural Resources Conservation Service; the U.S. Forest Service; the Agricultural Research Service; the Cooperative State Research, Extension and Education Service; the National Agricultural Statistics Service; the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service; the Agricultural Marketing Service and agencies under Rural Development. Also, representatives from the Office of the Chief Economist and the Office of Budget and Program Analysis participate in the Council, which will proactively plan and respond to the threat of drought.

Veneman made the announcements during a briefing with reporters from USDA's radio broadcast studios, where she was joined by Nebraska Governor Mike Johanns, who is the co-leader of the Western Governors Associations' drought response efforts; Vernon Hill, Chairman of the Eastern Shoshone Business Council of the Wind River Indian Reservation; and USDA Chief Economist Keith Collins.

Veneman said the 2003 Livestock Feed Program will provide timely relief for livestock producers in areas hit hardest by drought by making available surplus stocks of non-fat dry milk (NDM), which are not intended for nor destined for human consumption. "One of our most pressing concerns right now is the ability of pasture and grazing lands to support livestock herds," said Veneman. "Non-fat dry milk can serve as a high quality source of protein to maintain foundation livestock herds in this critical time."

USDA will partner with state and tribal governments to move the non-fat dry milk to eligible producers. Approximately 100 counties in nine states currently meet the initial eligibility criteria. For full details of drought assistance and the 2001-2002 disaster program provided by the Agricultural Assistance Act of 2003: <http://disaster.fsa.usda.gov/>

## Supporting President Bush's HealthierUS Initiative--

Accessing the U.S. Department of Agriculture's online National Nutrient Database is now easier than ever. A user friendly, searchable version of the authoritative nutrient database is available for download onto personal computers (PCs) and laptops free of charge. Secretary Veneman announced during a speech at the Department of Health and Human Service's HealthierUS Conference. To access the software go to:

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp>.

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