

■ Putting It All Together

To build an informed citizenry, and to provide the information base for market decisions, REE coordinates economic and social research. This research supports programs and policies across USDA, providing data, information, and economic and statistical analyses on a variety of topics: rural development, the environment and natural resources, food safety, food prices, farm labor, farm income, financial conditions, commodity markets, and international trade. REE serves American agriculture and rural communities by providing meaningful, accurate, and objective statistical information—such as the information in Chapters 1-4 of this *1997 Agriculture Fact Book*. Forecasts and estimates for over 165 different crop and livestock commodities are provided annually to farmers, ranchers, and other agribusinesses. This information helps policymakers, Congress, and the public make informed decisions about issues related to food and fiber production.

REE also focuses on practical education that Americans can use in dealing with critical issues that affect their lives and the Nation's future by linking research, science, and technology to the needs of people where they live and work. REE offers information on issues ranging from community economic development and health care concerns to food safety; water quality; children, youth, and families; and sustainable agriculture. For example, REE programs reach over 5.4 million youth in the United States and the Territories. CSREES' Families, 4-H, and Nutrition programs empower youth to become responsible contributing members of their communities with programs that focus on health learning experiences, increased self-esteem, enhanced problem-solving skills, and agriculture and science literacy. Ag in the Classroom helps K-12 students gain a greater awareness of the role of agriculture in the economy and society, so they may become citizens who promote wiser agricultural policies.

In a society in which information access is crucial, REE is working with local communities to connect them to the information superhighway. From there, citizens have access to much of the information the four REE agencies generate and to the vast resources available at the National Agricultural Library—the largest agricultural library in the world and one of three national libraries of the United States. As the Nation's chief resource providing agricultural information, NAL offers researchers, educators, policymakers, farmers, consumers, and the general public about 48 miles of bookshelves to peruse in a 14-story building. NAL's computer network and electronic bulletin board also provide information that improves access to its 2.2 million volumes.