

AGRICULTURE OUTLOOK FORUM 2009
February 26, 2009 Arlington, Virginia

WELCOME by CHIEF OF STAFF JOHN NORRIS

MR. JOHN NORRIS: Good morning. I'm John Norris, chief of staff of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 2009 Agricultural Outlook Forum. To open this conference I would ask everyone to rise for the Star Spangled Banner.

VOICE: Our national anthem.

[all stand at attention while the anthem is played]

MR. NORRIS: Speaking for Secretary Tom Vilsack and USDA's World Agricultural Outlook Board, I want to extend a warm welcome to everyone here in the audience, and Arlington, Virginia, more than 1,700 guests, and to everyone watching the webcast of these events.

Many thanks to Chief Economist Joe Glauber and World Board Chairman Jerry Bange for chairing our Steering and Program Committees as they organized the USDA's 85th Annual Forum.

And special recognition to our conference coordinator, Brenda Chapin, for this tremendous work she does every year to make this conference a success.

They've planned an exciting and wide-ranging agenda for you over these next two days. More than 140 speakers and moderators will lead discussions on virtually every segment of agriculture. They join us from all over the world and are highly distinguished in their fields. My thanks to all of them and to their contributions for this conference.

I also want to recognize the young people seated in front of me. Right here they are, folks. This is the third year of the Outlook Student Diversity Program. I'm glad to welcome these 18 students from land grant universities and Hispanic serving institutions.

And a word of appreciation to the sponsoring organizations CHS, Deer and Company, Tyson Foods, Farm Credit Bank, and USDA's Economic Research Service. You are giving these students the first-hand chance to gain an understanding of U.S. agriculture directly from the experts. This is a great opportunity for them.

Students, would you please stand?

[Applause]

Welcome.

This forum follows a complex year for agriculture: soaring agriculture exports, rising food prices and food insecurity worldwide, the boom and bust of commodity prices here at home and abroad, challenges for biofuels, and passage of a new Farm Bill after months of deliberations.

Speakers will analyze these and other issues. They will look at changing dynamics affecting farmers in rural communities and farmers' risk management decisions in terms of the 2008 Farm Bill. They will explore the promise of energy technologies like wind power for rural communities sorely in need of economic stimulus. In concurrent sessions experts will take a broad look at the compelling issues framing today's food and agriculture, from food security to food safety to biotechnology.

Secretary Vilsack will present the keynote address.

And we are privileged that Larry Summers, who heads the White House National Economic Council, will be our guest speaker this morning.

Following Mr. Summers and Secretary Vilsack, Sara Wyant, president of Agri-Pulse Communications, will lead a distinguished panel on Expectations and Realities for Food and Energy. These panelists are leaders in their field, and we are honored to have them with us. Michael Mack of Syngenta International, AG, thank you for flying in from Switzerland for the forum. Chris Policinski of Land O' Lakes. Aaron Brady of Cambridge Energy Research Associates, and Catherine Ann Bertini of Syracuse University and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. We thank you for being here as well.

I also want to put a plug in for tonight's dinner. Lisa Jackson, the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, will share her thoughts on the environment and where the administration is headed.

This is my second week at USDA, and my first chance to meet all of you, and I look forward to seeing you here today. It's an honor to serve the Obama Administration, Secretary Vilsack, the fellow employees at USDA, and the American public in this capacity.

I was raised on a farm in Southwest Iowa, a grain/livestock farm, and spent most of my life engaged in agriculture and rural issues. My greatest joy in life is raising my three sons. And one of my missions in life is to teach them the value of the land, our precious resource. I take pride in the fact that since they were nine months old they've helped me plant a garden. And they eat green peppers and tomatoes like they are apples.

That's my hope for all children. And in my capacity here at USDA I want to make sure that we don't lose sight, as we are all here economists, professors, people in the ag business, that we don't lose sight of our ultimate responsibility and obligation that I

believe is to make sure that children and people throughout the world have an opportunity to have healthy food and an opportunity that that creates for them for the rest of their life.

I also hope that we make sure that the people who are involved in agricultural production, the farmers and ranchers -- for the risks they take and the work they do -- and the people who labor in agriculture with growing and processing our agricultural goods, that they receive an equitable share and reward for their work in making sure those children and people of the world have adequate food.

So that's my goal here at USDA in assisting Secretary Vilsack: to achieve those goals and also to make sure we protect that precious commodity, that precious resource, our land. So I look forward to working with you in the coming years to see healthy rural communities and agricultural business and industry, and I look forward to working with you.

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