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Assisting America's Small Farmers and Ranchers in the 21st Century

Meeting the Challenge of
A Time to Act



Small Farms@USDA
www.usda.gov/oce/smallfarm/



This report, *Assisting America's Small Farmers and Ranchers in the 21st Century*, was prepared by the USDA Small Farms Coordinators. The report provides highlights of the continuing efforts made by USDA to assist the Nation's small farmers and ranchers since the USDA National Commission on Small Farms published its report, *A Time to Act*, in January 1998. This report reflects accomplishments through October 2001.



Assisting America's Small Farmers and Ranchers in the 21st Century

Accomplishments through
October 2001

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Foreword

Ann M. Veneman, Secretary of Agriculture

It has been several years since the USDA’s National Commission on Small Farms completed its report, *A Time to Act*. The United States Department of Agriculture has indeed acted, swiftly and effectively, to empower our small, family-sized American farmers. In these pages, you will find descriptions of innovative efforts that are helping small producers survive in an increasingly concentrated and top-heavy farm economy.

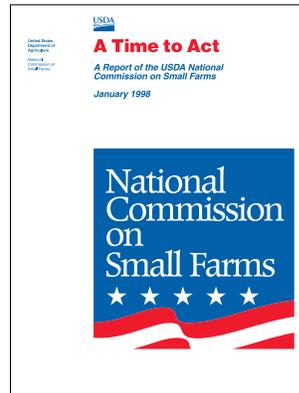
In taking on this challenge, we have tapped the resources of the entire Department, not just those agencies responsible for administering farm programs. Our Small Farms Coordinators—one from each USDA mission area; individual agencies; the National Offices of Outreach, Civil Rights, Budget and Program Analysis, Communications, Chief Economist, and the General Counsel—have been the key to this strategy, uniting in pursuit of a common goal instead of protecting their individual turf.

While our Farm Service Agency and Agricultural Marketing Service are deeply involved, there is much more to our small farms efforts. For example, our Food Safety and Inspection Service and State Extension Service have launched training programs in Pacific Island and Navajo farm communities to promote animal hygiene and proper preharvest handling practices, thus ensuring a safer product.

Our Food and Nutrition Service is involved in several efforts to promote the purchase of commodities from small farms for USDA Nutrition Assistance Programs. Our Natural Resources Conservation Service is reaching out to small farmers from Maine to Oregon, helping them work the land in a way that is both economically productive and environmentally responsible.

Our Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service is working to improve the economic viability of small farm operations throughout the United States and its territories via partnerships and collaborations with the land-grant university system and other public and private sectors, including farmers, community-based organizations, foundations, and others.

Our National Agricultural Statistics Service has improved its data collection procedures to ensure that small farms



Report of the National Commission on Small Farms dated January 1998.

across America will be included in the 2002 Census of agriculture and other surveys that provide invaluable information on the farm topology of small family farms. Our National Office of Outreach has taken a proactive role to insure that USDA programs and services are accessible to all constituents, including the underserved, socially disadvantaged and limited-resource farmers, ranchers,

farm workers, and other rural constituents. Also, our Risk Management Agency awarded over \$20 million in FY 2001 for the development of new kinds of crop insurance plans and ways to lessen the risks of farming, to educate producers about crop insurance, and to improve services to small, limited-resource, and underserved communities.

These individual success stories only tell part of the story. On a large scale, USDA, more than ever before, has been active and vocal in efforts designed to support small farmers. Our new policy on mandatory price reporting, our work on national organic standards, our commitment to civil rights, our support for farmers’ markets, and endorsement of sustainable agriculture have demonstrated USDA’s commitment to small farmers. The challenges facing American agriculture, especially the struggles of the small farmer, too often go unnoticed.

In addition to their economic potential and the role they play in ensuring a safe, abundant, and affordable food supply, small farms are a part of the fabric of American life. They are a unique part of our heritage, a tradition older than the nation itself, and a national treasure that must be preserved. The trend toward consolidation, in agriculture and other sectors of the economy, will not stop any time soon. In many cases, where it leads to greater efficiency, profitability, and job creation, we do not want it to stop. But bigger is not



necessarily better. Small producers deserve a place in 21st century agriculture. They can and must co-exist side-by-side with larger agricultural operations in a diverse marketplace that presents consumers with a variety of choices and provides all farmers with economic opportunity.

Despite all the accomplishments outlined in this report, there is still plenty of work to be done. I am confident that this Administration will continue to make significant progress in meeting the challenge of the National Commission on Small Farms original report, *A Time to Act* (published in January 1998). The Commission's report included eight policy goals and 146 recommendations on how USDA could help small farms and ranches. This report, *Assisting America's Small Farmers and Ranchers in the 21st Century*, highlights USDA's continuing efforts to assist small farmers and ranchers since the USDA Small Farms Coordinators issued its first report, *Meeting the Challenge of A Time to Act: USDA Progress and Achievements on Small Farms* (published in April 2000). I am also pleased to note that the 2002 Farm Bill enacted this year recognizes, supports, and promotes the unique interests of small farmers and ranchers.



Introduction

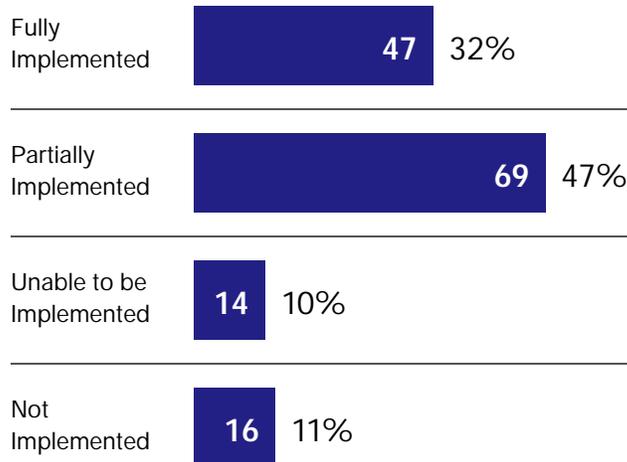


A rancher testifies to the National Commission on Small Farms at one of the regional hearings.

This report was prepared by a Department-wide group of Small Farms Coordinators, representing each mission area; individual agencies; and the Offices of Outreach, Civil Rights, Budget and Program Analysis, Communications, Chief Economist, and the General Counsel. The report outlines USDA’s progress and achievements in response to the National Commission on Small Farms’ report, *A Time to Act*, published in January 1998. The Commission’s report included eight policy goals and 146 recommendations based on written and oral testimony from over 600 people attending seven public hearings and meetings held across the United States.

The USDA Small Farms Coordinators published its first report, *Meeting the Challenge of A Time to Act: USDA Progress and Achievements on Small Farms*, in April 2000. That report highlighted USDA’s progress and achievements on small farms and ranchers from the period February 1998 to December 1999. This second report primarily covers the time period January 2000 through September 2001. Since receiving the Commission’s report, *A Time to Act*, in 1998, the Department has either fully implemented or partially implemented almost 80 percent of the Commission’s recommendations (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1
Commission Recommendations Implemented by USDA



Almost 80% of the 146 recommendations submitted by the National Commission on Small Farms to USDA in its report, *A Time to Act*, have been implemented in whole or part.



Some recommendations could not be implemented by USDA due to budgetary constraints or because the Department lacked the legislative authority to do so. (See Appendix 3 of this report for an explanation of the implementation codes cited in Figure 1, page 3 of this report.) Every mission area in USDA has committed staff time and resources to respond to the Commission's recommendations and policy goals.

The progress and achievements in this report are divided into the following program areas:

Program Areas

- Outreach
- Market Development
- Market Access
- Risk Management
- Conservation
- Credit and Finance
- Research and Extension
- Beginning Farmers
- Farm Workers
- Civil Rights
- Additional Small Farms Initiatives
- Appendixes

Except for the program area identified as "Additional Small Farms Initiatives," all of these areas were outlined in the Small Farm Coordinators' first report (in April 2000), *Meeting the Challenge of A Time to Act: USDA Progress and Achievements on Small Farms*. This area was added to highlight USDA's progress and achievements in areas other than those that were designated to include the Commission's 146 recommendations.

The **Small Farms@USDA** web site includes a database of all the Commission's recommendations and specific actions taken by USDA in response to the recommendations. The web site address is: www.usda.gov/oce/smallfarm/.



Many USDA programs are designed to strengthen the economic viability of America's farms so the next generation can compete successfully in the global food chain.