



United States Department of Agriculture



# USDA Media Recap

A COLLECTION OF OUR TOP NEWS STORIES FROM 2015

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## Biobased Economy

### **Tom Vilsack: a consistent champion for the biofuels industry**

(Houston Chronicle 2/27)

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack sees near-boundless opportunities for the U.S. biofuels industry to expand its market both inside the nation and around the globe. But he insists the key to that growth is moving beyond traditional ethanol and a 10-year-old government renewable fuel mandate to embrace exports and airlines' demand for cleaner-burning alternatives - while also beating back steep oil industry opposition. "I'm very optimistic about the future of the bio-economy and the role biofuels and advanced biofuels will play in that future," Vilsack said in an interview. While Vilsack praises the sector's successes, he also wants the industry to broaden its focus beyond the renewable fuels mandate, which forces refiners to meet annual biofuel quotas.

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### **USDA plans to inject \$100 million on ethanol infrastructure: sources**

(Reuters 5/28)

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) plans to inject \$100 million in funding to get more ethanol at the gas pump, according to two industry sources, the latest push to get beyond a "blend wall" that has capped demand for the biofuel. That would mark a big push for an overhaul of fuel-blending pumps and related infrastructure to generate higher demand for the biofuel. The USDA is expected to announce the funding on Friday, the sources said. A USDA spokesman declined to comment on the plans. Ethanol groups have asked the USDA to continue to offer this funding amid rising calls for policy reform from policymakers, oil companies, and environmentalists. The USDA launched a program in 2011 designed to get 10,000 flex-fuel options at gas pumps nationwide that would allow use of blends as high as E85, which is 85 percent ethanol.

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### **USDA expands loan program, promotes plant-based products such as plastic bottles**

(Associated Press/New York Times/Washington Post/Minneapolis Star-Tribune 7/17)

A program designed to promote ethanol and biodiesel fuels will be expanded to companies using plant-based plastic, rubber and fiber in manufacturing products such as bottles and packaging, the U.S. Agriculture Department said on Wednesday. The USDA is proposing in a new agency rule to add manufacturers of these plant-based products to a loan guarantee program that has provided more than \$844 million for 10 biofuel projects since 2008. Loan guarantees allow companies building new plants to borrow money at lower interest rates. Under the proposed new rules loans of up to \$250 million will be offered to projects involving development of plant-based materials for manufacturing, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said.

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# Climate Change

## **The Obama administration is taking on agriculture's role in climate change. Here's why that's a big deal**

(Washington Post 4/23)

When we talk about why the planet is warming, we talk about fossil fuels — oil, gas, coal and their many variants. What we rarely say or think to say, though, is that's not the whole story. The fact is that plants take in carbon dioxide in the process of photosynthesis, and release it again when they die. So if you clear large swaths of land, so that it does not contain as many trees, crops, or grasses as before, then you are also contributing to global warming. The same goes for other agriculture related emissions, ranging from nitrous oxide emissions from the use of fertilizers to methane emissions from “enteric fermentation” in cattle (those infamous “cow farts” — although really, it's mainly cow burps).

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## **Agriculture Department Forecasts Less Abundance in the Land of Plenty**

(New York Times 12/3)

The United States is the world's largest food exporter, but as the climate keeps changing, “crop yields, livestock production and revenues are expected to decline,” according to a detailed new analysis by the Agriculture Department. It is well known that the burden of climate change will fall most heavily on poor people and poor countries, and most of the research being presented at the Paris climate talks has focused on emerging-market economies in Asia and Latin America or on the least-developed countries, most of them in Africa. The analysis, which was unveiled here on Wednesday by the agriculture secretary, Tom Vilsack, was a rare exception... “There's no question that climate change will have an impact on global food security,” Mr. Vilsack, a former governor of Iowa, said.

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## **Vilsack: Climate change deal will improve food supply**

(USA Today 12/9)

Unless the warming of the earth is slowed, it will damage the quantity, quality and delivery of food across the world, perhaps generating hunger and conflict, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack told USA TODAY in an interview Wednesday. As diplomats in Paris try to forge a global climate change agreement, the Obama administration is seeking to sell proposed carbon reductions by stressing their benefits to the food supply — and the risks of inaction. “The reality is that hungry people are not happy people,” Vilsack said. “And that is going to increase unrest and it's going to increase instability in a variety of places around the world.”

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## Conservation

### **\$372.5M in federal funds awarded to conservation projects**

(Associated Press/ABC News/Washington Post/Porterville Recorder 1/14)

Projects designed to cut down on fertilizer runoff, expand bird nesting areas and restore native grasslands are among those selected for funding under a new initiative that encourages conservation partnerships between government and private organizations, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said. The federal agency has approved 115 proposals in an initial round of funding under the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, which was authorized under national farm legislation that Congress enacted last year.

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### **White House has a plan to save bees and other crop pollinators**

(Los Angeles Times 5/19)

The federal government will boost research and preserve 7 million acres of habitat for bees, monarch butterflies and other insects as part of a wide-ranging strategy to bolster the population of pollinators that are vital to the nation's food crops. The long-anticipated national strategy from a White House task force aims to bring annual bee losses to 15%, down from more than 40% last year. Managed honeybee colonies provide pollination services to the nation's crops that are valued at \$15 billion, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. California almond growers pay upward of \$290 million a year to bring tens of thousands of managed honeybee colonies to their groves, according to the USDA. A recent survey of the nation's beekeepers estimated annual losses of 42%, up from 35.2% the year before, and well above the 15%-17% that is considered economically sustainable.

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### **Department of Ag Secretary Looks Back at 30 Years of CRP**

(Outdoor News 7/31)

Outdoor News spoke by phone earlier this month with U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. He took a few minutes to answer questions related primarily to the Conservation Reserve Program, but also to conservation in general. Here's an edited version of that conversation. Outdoor News: CRP's been around for 30 years now. In your own estimation, what sorts of changes have you seen, what improvements have you seen, and, perhaps, what things need to be improved yet in terms of the program itself? Vilsack: Well, obviously it's been a very popular and successful program that has over the course of 30 years prevented 8 billion tons of soil from eroding, that has successfully sequestered 43 million tons of carbon, which is the equivalent of essentially taking 8 million cars off the roads, and has obviously provided habitat for wildlife that is directly linked to improved recreational opportunities, which is a terrific job creator and supporter of rural economies.

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## Food Safety and Nutrition

### Standards Aim to Cut Down on Salmonella in Poultry

(Associated Press/ABC News/Washington Post/Yahoo News/Businessweek/Sacramento Bee/Detroit News/Modesto Bee/Lincoln Journal Star/U.S. News & World Report/Philly.com/WCAX/St. Louis Today 1/21)

The government is pushing the poultry industry to make their chicken and turkey a little safer with new standards aimed at reducing the number of cases of foodborne illness by 50,000 a year. The proposed standards announced Wednesday by the Agriculture Department apply to the most popular poultry products — chicken breasts, legs and wings, and ground chicken and turkey. They are voluntary but designed to pressure companies to lower rates of salmonella and campylobacter, another pathogen that can cause symptoms similar to salmonella, in their products. [L](#)

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### Tom Vilsack Unveils Campaign to Combat Childhood Hunger

(National Journal 3/4)

While Republicans on Capitol Hill attempt to rein in food stamps and roll back some of the healthier-school-meals rules that have been put in place during the Obama administration, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack is organizing a new effort to curb childhood hunger and improve nutrition in some of the poorest areas of the country. In an interview Wednesday, Vilsack talked about new grant programs he is unveiling this month, portraying this push as a comprehensive campaign to make sure the next generation of American children is well educated enough that they can work smartly and spend their lives doing something besides buying imports from China. “There is a reformulation of the American economy taking place in which we are moving from a great reliance on consumption to a more balanced approach between what we can make, create, and innovate and what we consume,” Vilsack said. “That kind of economy requires all hands on deck. It requires the future generations to be prepared.”

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### States to Test Ways to Send Food Stamp Recipients to Work

(Associated Press/CBS Money Watch 3/20)

Ten states will test new ways to get food stamp recipients back to work, using Agriculture Department grants aimed at helping some of the 46 million Americans who receive benefits move off the rolls. The grants come as the Republican Congress is exploring ways to cut the program, which cost \$74 billion last year -- twice its cost in 2008. Some in the GOP have proposed stricter work requirements as a way to do that. The winning ideas ranged from using career coaches to quicker training courses to mental health assistance.

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## How Obama wants to help America's poorest kids and why even more is needed

(Washington Post 4/16)

Last year, we described an alarming divergence in America's poverty landscape having to do with kids: While the child poverty rate had ticked down over the past few years in urban areas, it had actually increased in rural areas. [...]The Agriculture Department recognizes the importance of economic development to poverty reduction and has a separate plan for replacing the jobs destroyed as automation made agriculture massively more efficient: Promoting biofuels manufacturing, for example, and fostering local food systems. That's the kind of thing that would be needed to close the widening gap between urban and rural employment, which is tightly bound up with child poverty.

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## Editorial: Texas Moving Wrong Direction on School Lunches, So It's Up to the Feds

(The Dallas Morning News 8/23)

Many of us came of age in the time of mystery meat and succotash surprise in the cafeteria line at school. School lunches didn't make us fat, because they often went from the tray to the trash with little more than a stifled gag reflex in between. That time gave way to the age of the french fry and the vending machine in the cafeteria. Pizza Fridays became pizza every day. And if kids washed it all down with a can of soda, well, at least they were eating their lunch.

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## Don't Let Lobbyists Decide What Your Children Eat at School

(Washington Post 9/13)

Five years ago, Congress brought some healthfulness to the National School Lunch Program, which spends more than \$10 billion a year to feed about 30 million K-12 students. The law is up for renewal this month, and the School Lunch Industrial Complex is trying to make it less healthful again. Its arguments in favor of lowering nutritional quality for the nation's children don't add up, and Congress should reject them. The overhaul five years ago favored whole grains over heavily processed carbohydrates, less salt, and a minimum serving of fruits or vegetables per meal. It limited what schools could sell in vending machines and à la carte lines, preventing schools from circumventing the rules by allowing fast-food junk — often from national chains — to be sold right outside the cafeteria. These rules weren't thrown together willy-nilly by vegan activists; they were developed carefully after an independent expert review at the Institute of Medicine.

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## Why turkeys are safer this year

(Sacramento Bee Editorial 11/24)

We don't often write about government doing its work as it should. And yet, in the area of food safety, an unhappy and sometimes deadly event has become rarer, and that is worthy of note in this season of holiday feasts. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety Inspection Service has reported a 10 percent decrease in foodborne illness from meat, poultry and eggs. The number is still high, 386,265 cases in 2014. But it's falling. There were 479,621 reported cases of salmonella, *Listeria monocytogenes* and *E. coli* attributable to meat, poultry and eggs in 2012. It's not by accident. The inspection service under director Alfred V. Almanza and his boss, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, has focused on foodborne illness, bringing to bear a zero-tolerance policy for raw beef products, new and tougher standards for salmonella and campylobacter, and more intensive inspection of chicken parts.

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## Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza

### Vilsack: Help for bird flu on the way

(The Gazette 5/26)

Tom Vilsack knows some Iowa bird farmers are growing frustrated with the avian influenza that is devastating flocks throughout the state. Vilsack, the U.S. secretary of agriculture and a former Iowa governor, wants Iowans to know the federal government is addressing the outbreak by attempting to be thorough, safe and expedient. “It’s a tricky process here. It’s complicated. And the reality is, because it’s complicated, it’s easy for people to assume this isn’t happening or that isn’t happening,” he said in a phone interview Tuesday during a visit to Iowa to discuss the bird flu with industry leaders. “We know this is hard. We know this is difficult for people.”

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### Vilsack: Bird flu Backlog Should be Cleared in A Week

(Des Moines Register 5/22)

Millions of Iowa birds killed or destroyed by bird flu, and piling up at poultry facilities, should be disposed of or incinerated within the next week, barring another large outbreak, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said Friday. Vilsack said a “backlog of birds” has developed because of complicated negotiations with Iowa landfills over accepting the animals. In the past week, two landfills — one in northwest Iowa, the other in southwest Iowa — have agreed to take some of the estimated 25 million birds stricken by avian influenza or killed to contain the disease. In addition, a larger incinerator is being moved into northwest Iowa and is expected to be in place by Sunday, the ag secretary said. “We want to get rid of those birds as quickly as possible,” said Vilsack, meeting in Des Moines on Friday with state officials, including Gov. Terry Branstad, industry leaders, and turkey and egg producers.

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## Local Food

### Farmers Markets Near You, A USDA Tool

(CNN 6/11)

If you’re craving fresh-baked bread, sweet strawberry jam, or the scent of seasonal flowers, you’re in luck. It’s now easier than ever to find your local farmers market, thanks to an online search tool from the USDA.

The searchable farmers market directory -- complete with an interactive map -- lets users dig up information on local food sources by filtering through more than 8,260 farmers markets by zip code, types of payment accepted, and even the products sold at the market.

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## Communities Get A Lift As Local Food Sales Surge To \$11 Billion A Year

(NPR 6/30)

There's a renaissance in local and regional food, and it's not just farmers markets in urban areas that are driving it. On this map, the U.S. Department of Agriculture pinpoints more than 4,000 local and regional food businesses and projects — from food hubs to farm-to-school programs to initiatives to expand healthy food access to low-income communities — in every state around the country. They've all contributed to the explosion in sales in local food. The USDA estimates that local food sales have grown from about \$5 billion in 2008 to \$11.7 billion in 2014. "Local food is rapidly growing from a niche market to an integrated system recognized for its economic boost to communities across the country," Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack tells *The Salt* in an interview.

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## New and Beginning Farmers

### From War To Plow: Why USDA Wants Veterans To Take Up Farming

(NPR 3/3)

Veterans returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan often have a hard time transitioning back to their civilian lives and careers. They have higher rates of divorce, depression and suicide. And they're more likely to be unemployed than both civilians and veterans of other wars. In recent years, thousands of veterans like Creech have showed an interest in farming as a way to find peace and purpose. Several nonprofit organizations and universities have launched programs to help them pursue careers in agriculture.

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### A New Generation Could Reverse the Decline in Farmers

(Raleigh News and Observer 10/1)

Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Krysta Harden came to the Triangle this week to encourage young people to consider a future in farming. But Harden picked an unlikely place to seek prospects – Duke University. It would seem that students paying top dollar at an elite university aren't the types who plan to make a living on a tractor. But for Harden the disconnect was deliberate. The United States faces a shortage of young farmers, and the USDA is pitching the appeal and rewards of farming to young people who might have never considered farming as a career. "We talk to ourselves a lot in agriculture, but we've got to get the message to others," Harden, the daughter of Georgia peanut farmers, said during a meeting with News & Observer editors.

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## USDA Budgets \$5.6 Billion to Attract New Farmers, Ranchers

(Des Moines Register 10/30)

The Agriculture Department will spend \$5.6 billion during the next two years to help beginning farmers and ranchers enter the field. USDA said this week attracting new farmers is an area of focus for the department, with the average age of a farmer now at 57. Deputy Secretary Krysta Harden said the USDA is looking to increase participation by focusing specifically on veterans, women and students. “There are folks out there who don’t know what we do and who don’t recognize the magnitude of the resources we have at USDA,” Harden told reporters.

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## There’s a Record Number of Organic Farms and Processing Facilities in the U.S.

(TIME 4/15)

The number of organic producers in the U.S. has risen more than 5% in a year. There are nearly 20,000 certified organic operations in the U.S., which is a new record, officials announced on Wednesday. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) counted 19,474 organic farms, ranches and processing facilities, up more than 5% from last year and 250% from 2002, when officials began tracking certified organic producers. Worldwide, there are more than 27,800 organic producers. “As demand for organic products continues to soar, more and more producers are entering the organic market,” said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack in a statement. “USDA tools and resources have created opportunities for organic farmers and more options for organic consumers. Growing demand for organic goods can be especially helpful to smaller family operations. The more diverse type of operations and the more growing market sectors we have in American agriculture, the better off our country’s rural economy will be.”

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## New Steps to Boost Private Investment on Infrastructure

(Associated Press/ABC News/Wall Street Journal/Fox News/Star Tribune/U.S. News & World Report 1/16)

The Obama administration on Friday announced new steps federal agencies are taking to attract private money

for projects upgrading roads, bridges and other infrastructure.

A new Water Finance Center at the Environmental Protection Agency will work with state and local governments, utilities and the private sector to use federal grants to leverage private capital to address more than \$600 billion in needs for drinking water and wastewater management over the next 20 years. A separate Agriculture Department program, the Rural Opportunity Investment Initiative, will be aimed at attracting private funding for rural projects and improving access to USDA credit programs. The administration is proposing to create a new municipal bond for public-private partnerships. Vice President Joe Biden discussed the importance of modern infrastructure Friday after touring a water project in the District of Columbia. The project is designed to reduce the flow of billions of gallons of contaminated sewer water into the Anacostia River.

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## **U.S. Backs Private Bid for \$125 Million for Rural Investment**

(New York Times 4/29)

Tom Vilsack, the secretary of agriculture, has traveled to New York and San Francisco, knocking on the doors of some of the country's biggest investors, including BlackRock, Blackstone and GE Capital. His pitch: Invest in rural America. On Wednesday, Mr. Vilsack will announce his agency's latest push to make that pitch more compelling. The United States Department of Agriculture will support two private investment funds that will together raise \$125 million to buy stakes in businesses across rural America.

The funds, called Rural Business Investment Companies, are part of a U.S.D.A. program aimed at attracting private equity investments in agriculture-related businesses. With the agency's blessing, the private firms will raise capital from the Farm Credit System, a government-sponsored network of banks and lending associations that provide credit to the agricultural industry. The investment funds will also raise money from investors, and collect fees in the process.

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## **Why the Agriculture Department is giving out tens of millions of dollars for Internet access**

(Washington Post 7/20)

You've probably never heard of La Valle. It's a town of about 1,300 people in southwest Wisconsin that's a two-hour drive from Milwaukee. But it may as well be on the other side of the world when it comes to phone and Internet access. La Valle, like many rural communities in America, have been passed over by the country's major communications providers, leaving the small town to fend for itself. And it has done so tremendously: Residents can buy fiber-optic Internet from the customer-owned LaValle Telephone Cooperative at speeds of up to 60 megabits per second — fast enough to rival the connections many Americans enjoy elsewhere.

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## **The White House is trying to introduce Wall Street to rural America**

(Washington Post 7/31)

On Tuesday, the White House hosted a sales event of sorts: The Department of Agriculture brought in about 100 investors and venture capitalists to tell them about the golden opportunities they've been missing in the nation's heartland. These aren't the usual ways you might think of for Wall Street types to make money, like backing industrial dairies or grain processing facilities. Rather, they're the projects that the government might previously have simply financed itself — sewer upgrades, nursing homes, hospitals, even schools and

community centers. Those local amenities can generate income, too, either through user fees or a long-term payback from the state and local government. “The result is a very conservative investment that fleshes out and stabilizes a portfolio,” Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said in an interview before the conference. At the moment, with interest rates so low, even those pokey yields can look attractive to an institutional investor, he argued. “So this is an opportunity for them to actually ramp up their income.”

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## **Sage grouse protection work gets 4-year, \$200 million commitment from USDA**

(Oregon Live 2/12)

A new report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture details the scope efforts across the West to stave off an endangered species listing for the greater sage grouse by preemptively improving the bird’s habitat. The report, issued Thursday morning, details how members of the Natural Resource Conservation Service’s Sage Grouse Initiative have worked to restore more than 4 million acres of the bird’s habitat in Oregon and other Western states including Nevada, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and the Dakotas. The report’s release was timed with the USDA’s announcement Thursday that it will fund another four years worth of sage grouse habitat improvements through the federal farm bill.

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## **USDA effort adds fuel to sage grouse fight**

(Denver Post 8/27)

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack on Thursday plans to announce a new round of funding for a program not usually associated with the farm-focused agency: saving the greater sage grouse. The \$211 million initiative, which will run through 2018, builds on years of work the Department of Agriculture already has done to encourage landowners to protect the rare Western bird. Notably, it continues a process in which the USDA pays ranchers to make improvements on their property to make it more hospitable for the grouse, such as cutting down invasive conifer trees. “We know what works,” said Vilsack in a phone interview ahead of the rollout in Portland, Ore. But the announcement has another, subtler purpose too. By the end of September, officials with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are expected to decide whether the grouse population is still in trouble.

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# Trade

## Trade Bill Will Help Negotiators With Farm Issues, Vilsack Says

(Bloomberg News 6/8)

A measure that would give President Barack Obama broad powers on trade deals will pass Congress, helping negotiators overcome obstacles tied to rice and bioengineered foods in two pending agreements, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack predicted. “Every trade agreement ultimately comes down to agricultural issues,” Vilsack said Monday in a meeting with Bloomberg editors and reporters. “So you have to be very conscious of making sure that whatever agreement you enter into does provide more market access.” At the meeting in Washington, Vilsack also said government spending on the bird flu outbreak may exceed \$500 million and that the virus may surge again in the fall.

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## Obama’s Day: Selling the Pacific Rim Trade Deal

(USA Today 10/6)

A day after negotiators announced a landmark trade deal among a dozen Pacific Rim nations, President Obama spends Tuesday selling the deal to Congress and the public. In the late morning, Obama travels to the Department of Agriculture to meet with corporate leaders about “the benefits of the Trans-Pacific Partnership for American business and workers,” says the White House schedule. The proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership -- which ranges from Canada to Chile to Australia to Japan -- reduces tariffs on various products, making them easier to sell overseas, supporters say.

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## US Agriculture Secretary Visits Cuba to Build Trade Momentum

(Associated Press 11/13)

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack spent Friday morning discussing soil management and crop diseases at a cooperative farm in central Cuba, part of an American push to cement detente with the communist island before President Barack Obama leaves office. Inside both governments, advocates of a closer relationship are struggling against obstacles that include the U.S. trade embargo on Cuba, resistance among Cuban-Americans in Congress and a Cuban reluctance to open to the U.S. before Washington does away with more of the embargo. Both sides have been pushing to create momentum as the first anniversary of the declaration of detente nears, and with Obama hoping to make a victorious trip to the island by the middle of next year.

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## US eyes food exports to growing Asia under TPP trade pact

(Associated Press 11/20)

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack defended Friday a recently agreed-to 12-nation Pacific trade pact, saying the Trans-Pacific Partnership would provide a counterbalance to China's growing influence in the region while also opening up promising Asian markets with their burgeoning middle class. Vilsack told The Associated Press in an interview that many Asian countries are concerned about the rise of Chinese power, "and whether or not it's disproportionate, and whether or not there needs to be a balance." The trade agreement, he said, "creates the kind of coalition of nations, if you will, that provides that balance." Vilsack, who met with Japanese government officials, students and young farmers, is en route to China to take part in annual U.S.-China trade talks in Guangzhou from Saturday to Monday.

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## As California fires rage, the Forest Service Sounds the Alarm about Sharply Rising Wildfire Costs

(Washington Post 8/5)

As 14 large fires rage across California, the U.S. Forest Service is sounding the alarm about the exploding cost of protecting people and property from a growing wildfire threat. In a new report released Wednesday, the agency says that while it spent 16 percent of its total budget on preparing for and fighting fires in 1995, it will spend more than half its budget this year on the same task — and a projected 67 percent or more by 2025 under current funding arrangements. By ten years from now, the agency's expenditures for fighting wildfires as they flare up — dubbed fire suppression — are projected to increase from just under \$1.1 billion in 2014 to nearly \$1.8 billion. And that's just one of a number of fire related costs; there is also an annual, fixed fire "preparedness" budget that exceeds \$1 billion each year.

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## Congress Should Give the Government More Money for Wildfires

(New York Times 9/28)

Wildfires that have burned more than eight million acres and are still raging in the West are draining the budgets of federal agencies and forcing them to divert money from essential environmental and land conservation programs to fight the fires. That is why Congress needs to start budgeting for forest fires in a different way, treating them more like natural disasters rather than a continuing expense. The Agriculture and Interior Departments have been making this case for some time, and it's a good one.

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## Miscellaneous

### **Opinion: On the right side of the promise**

(The Huntsville Times 3/2)

As a school kid during the first years of desegregation in the public schools of Austin, Texas, much of my experience of the world around me was shaped by color. I saw and experienced firsthand how discrimination and inequality can stunt and hold back too many Americans--not only through violence, but the more subtle, life-altering trauma of discrimination. I've also seen how inclusion and understanding have the power to lift up individuals and communities and help them heal. Those experiences inspired me to dedicate my life to helping organizations and companies chart a new, better path forward--one where every customer and every employee is treated with dignity and respect, no matter what.

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### **Agriculture Department Identifies \$1.4 Billion in Savings to Avoid Furloughs**

(Government Executive 5/28)

Making good on a pledge to plan for savings that preempt sudden furloughs, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack on Wednesday identified \$1.4 billion in "proactive" savings and efficiencies being implemented under the agency's 2012 "Blueprint for Stronger Service." At a time when the farming sector is experiencing its "most productive period in history," Vilsack said, his team is identifying cost-avoiding reforms and modernizing operations "to become a stronger and more effective department" in the wake of a 10 percent cut in its budget since 2010.

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### **Government Agencies Set Goal to Cut Food Waste in Half by 2030**

(USA Today 9/16)

As part of its effort to act against climate change, the Obama administration has taken a sweeping stance to reduce food waste by 50% in the next 15 years. The announcement Wednesday from the Department of Agriculture and Environmental Protection Agency is a continuation of efforts in recent years to educate consumers about food date labels and safe food storage, as well as partnerships with food companies to address food insecurity and help figure out how to reduce the billions of pounds of food that go to landfills.

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