

FEATURE – VILSACK TESTIFIES ON USDA BUDGET

INTRO: Ag Secretary Vilsack talked about USDA's proposed budget at a House Sub Committee hearing this week (3/31/09). USDA's Patrick O'Leary has more.

SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE TOM VILSACK, IN TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, SAID REVITALIZING RURAL AMERICA IS A KEY PART OF THE ADMINISTRATION'S PROPOSED USDA BUDGET.

Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture: In my view the President is on the right track, a track that takes this nation on a path to recovery, provides the foundation for diverse opportunities for farmers and ranchers to succeed, as they play an increasingly important role in the 21st century American economy.

VILSACK ANNOUNCED AN EXTENSION OF THE FARM PROGRAM SIGN UP DEADLINE TO AUGUST 14TH, AND OTHER MEASURES TO HELP PRODUCERS. HE ALSO SPOKE ABOUT USDA PROJECTS USING RECOVERY ACT FUNDS.

Vilsack: We have to continue to modernize infrastructure in rural communities, we have to continue to expand broadband so that markets are opened up. We have to continue to focus on quality of life issues, whether it's community facilities or housing. As we focus on clean jobs, as we focus on severing our dependence on foreign oil, the real opportunity in that matrix is in rural America.

THE COMMITTEE ALSO DISCUSSED FOOD SAFETY, NUTRITION ASSISTANCE, ACCOUNTABILITY OF FARM PROGRAM PAYMENTS - AND THE SIZE OF THE BUDGET.

Rep. Jack Kingston (R-GA): You know, frankly, as Republicans, we did not do a very good job of controlling spending, we should have done a better job but I'm very concerned, as we all are, about the spending level of this administration so far – a deficit of over a trillion dollars projected.

Vilsack: If there is one distinction between where we are today and where we were when we were debating the farm bill, it is that – that we are in an economic circumstance and situation where we're faced with very, very substantial deficits over time and we have to control them in some way.

IN WASHINGTON, FOR THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, I'M PAT O'LEARY.