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BROADCASTERS LETTER

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Friday, February 3, 2012

(February 2)

USDA SPEEDS UP NATIONAL FOREST AND GRASSLANDS RESTORATION

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced a new report, [Increasing the Pace of Restoration and Job Creation on our National Forests](#), that outlines a strategy and series of actions for management on 193 million acres of national forests and grasslands managed by the U.S. Forest Service. As part of the accelerated restoration strategy, \$40 million for 20 forest and watershed restoration projects have been announced for the upcoming year. The funding includes ten new projects under the [Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration \(CFLR\) program](#), continued funding for the original 10 projects selected under the CFLR program in 2010, and an additional \$4.6 million to support other high priority restoration projects.

"Through our partnerships with states, communities, tribes and others, we are committed to restoring our forests and bringing jobs to rural America," said Vilsack. "Whether the threat comes from wildfire, bark beetles or a changing climate, it is vital that we step up our efforts to safeguard our country's natural resources."

Within the context of the overall restoration program, the strategy and actions announced today are designed to expand the number of forest acres treated by 20 percent over the next three years and increase the pace of active forest management, including fuels reduction, reforestation, stream restoration, road decommissioning, replacing and improving culverts, forest thinning and harvesting, prescribed fire and a range of other techniques.

As a result of these efforts, the Forest Service will be able to accomplish critical restoration objectives, including for water, wildlife, forest health and resilience, and community safety. This effort will support jobs and stimulate a more vibrant forest industry that will provide the workers and the know-how to undertake other restoration projects. Altogether, the Forest Service estimates this will increase the amount of forest products sold in 2014 to 3 billion board feet, up from 2.4 billion board feet in 2011.

The restoration of National Forest System lands is critically needed to address a number of threats to the health of forest ecosystems, watersheds, wildlife habitats and forest dependent communities. Major threats include wildland fire, climate change, beetle epidemics and invasive species.

The national forests and grasslands are the backdrop and neighbor to many rural and urban communities, providing a range of values and benefits, including clean drinking water for millions of people across the U.S., vital wildlife habitat, a variety of recreation opportunities, and other multiple uses that support jobs and economic growth in rural communities. The Forest Service's restoration program of work is designed to sustain the ability of these lands to continue to deliver a full range of ecosystem services for generations to come.

These restoration efforts will further stimulate local economies by retaining and increasing other forest related jobs, such as the 1,550 jobs expected to be maintained or generated through implementation of the CFLR projects, and by supporting recreation activities and attracting more tourists to rural areas. Currently, recreation activities on National Forest System lands contribute \$14.5 billion annually to the U.S. economy and support hundreds of thousands of jobs in local communities.

"Accelerated restoration efforts demonstrate a shared vision where environmentalists, forest industry and local communities are working together to build healthier forests and contribute to local economies," said U.S. Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell. "The increased restoration work will benefit the environment and people, with more resilient ecosystems, improved watersheds and wildlife habitat, hazardous fuel reduction, and outputs of forest products. We hope accelerated restoration activities will bring all of our partners together, working as allies for forest conservation."

Contact: Forest Service Press Office (202) 205-1134

For More Story Info: [USDA Newsroom](#)

For Radio Story: [Speeding Up National Forest Restoration](#)

[ACTUALITY: Goal Of Forest Service Restoration Program](#)

[ACTUALITY: The Benefits Of Working Collaboratively On Our Forests](#)

**WHO SAYS PUNXSUTAWNEY PHIL IS ACCURATE?
SOME WEATHER FORECASTERS ARGUE,
HE'S NOT THE ONLY RODENT THAT CAN PREDICT THE WEATHER**

How much credence can we put in the forecast of one groundhog in one tiny town in Pennsylvania? Brad Rippey, USDA meteorologist, says three other major eastern U.S. groundhogs disagree with Punxsutawney Phil.

For Radio Story: [Weather Analysts Disagree With Punxsutawney Phil's Forecast](#)

[ACTUALITY: Some Eastern Groundhogs Disagree With Phil](#)

(February 1)

**USDA ANNOUNCES CRP GENERAL SIGN-UP WITH
LANDOWNERS AND PRODUCERS HAVING 4-WEEK
ENROLLMENT WINDOW BEGINNING IN MARCH**

The four-week Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) general signup begins March 12th and runs through April 6th. The CRP has a 25-year legacy of successfully protecting the nation's natural resources through voluntary participation, while providing significant economic and environmental benefits to rural communities across the United States.

"It is USDA's goal to ensure that we use CRP to address our most critical resource issues," said Acting Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services (FFAS) Michael Scuse. "CRP is an important program for protecting our most environmentally sensitive lands from erosion and sedimentation, and for

ensuring the sustainability of our groundwater, lakes, rivers, ponds and streams. As always, we expect strong competition to enroll acres into CRP, and we urge interested producers to maximize their environmental benefits and to make cost-effective offers."

CRP is a voluntary program available to agricultural producers to help them use environmentally sensitive land for conservation benefits. Producers enrolled in CRP plant long-term, resource-conserving covers to improve the quality of water, control soil erosion and develop wildlife habitat. In return, USDA provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Contract duration is between 10 and 15 years. Producers with expiring contracts and producers with environmentally sensitive land are encouraged to evaluate their options under CRP. Producers also are encouraged to look into CRP's other enrollment opportunities offered on a continuous, non-competitive, signup basis. Currently, about 30 million acres are enrolled in CRP; and contracts on an estimated 6.5 million acres will expire on Sept. 30, 2012.

Offers for CRP contracts are ranked according to the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI). USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) collects data for each of the EBI factors based on the relative environmental benefits for the land offered. Each eligible offer is ranked in comparison to all other offers and selections made from that ranking. FSA uses the following EBI factors to assess the environmental benefits for the land offered:

- Wildlife habitat benefits resulting from covers on contract acreage;
- Water quality benefits from reduced erosion, runoff and leaching;
- On-farm benefits from reduced erosion;
- Benefits that will likely endure beyond the contract period;
- Air quality benefits from reduced wind erosion; and
- Cost.

Just last year in 2011, USDA enrolled a record number of acres of private working lands in conservation programs, working with more than 500,000 farmers and ranchers to implement conservation practices that clean the air we breathe, filter the water we drink, and prevent soil erosion.

Contact: Kent Politsch (202) 720-7163

For More Story Info: [USDA Newsroom](#)

For Radio Story: [New CRP General Sign Up Period Announced](#)

[Latest CRP Signup And Possible Average Rental Rates](#)

[Farm Commodity Prices And Latest CRP Sign Up](#)

[ACTUALITY: On CRP Enrollment Expectations](#)

PILOT PROGRAM TO HELP RURAL BORROWERS REFINANCE MORTGAGES, GET LOWER INTEREST RATES

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture is launching a two-year pilot program to help rural borrowers refinance their mortgages to reduce their monthly payments. The initiative is part of the Obama Administration's ongoing efforts to help middle class families, create jobs, and strengthen the economy. The Single Family Housing Guaranteed Rural Refinance Pilot Program will operate in 19 states for homeowners who have loans that were made or guaranteed by USDA Rural Development. These states are among those hardest hit by the downturn in the housing market.

USDA Rural Development estimates 235,000 homeowners will be eligible to refinance their loans, which is expected to save them considerable time and money. Qualified applicants are those rural homeowners in good standing (having made their mortgage payments on time for 12 consecutive months) and that have home loans that were made or guaranteed by USDA.

The process is quite simple. Homeowners do not have to obtain new credit reports, property inspections or home appraisals. Refinanced loans must be at rates below the original interest rate. Terms cannot exceed 30 years. No cash out is permitted to the borrower.

The two-year pilot is open to homeowners in Alabama, Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina and Tennessee. The performance of the pilot will be reviewed after two years to evaluate whether to continue it terminate it or make it permanent.

"Through initiatives like the one we are announcing today, the Obama Administration is taking aggressive steps to fight for middle class homeowners who have played by the rules and are trying to get ahead," said Vilsack. "This pilot program will help homeowners' to take advantage of historically low interest rates, and by working closely with lenders, we are helping rural homeowners protect one of the most important investments they will ever make."

It's expected that allowing those eligible to refinance their homes will bring increased capital to rural America and ease the financial burdens on homeowners. The program won't cost taxpayers additional dollars.

Contact: USDA Office of Communications (202) 720-4623

For More Story Info: [USDA Newsroom](#)

For Radio Story: [A New Refinancing Program For Some Rural Homeowners](#)

[ACTUALITY: Advantages Of The New Refinancing Program](#)

[ACTUALITY: Vilsack Names States Where New Program Will Operate](#)

(January 31)

USDA ANNOUNCES INVESTMENTS TO PROMOTE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, IMPROVE MEDICAL SERVICES AND CREATE JOBS IN TEN STATES

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that loans and grants will be provided to applicants in ten states to support businesses, improve the quality of medical care, and create or save hundreds of jobs. The investments are being funded through the USDA's Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant program. "During his State of the Union address last week, President Obama laid out a blueprint for an economy that's built to last – an economy built on American energy, skills for American workers, and a renewal of American values," said Vilsack. "The funding announced today will help support the President's vision by providing our rural communities with resources to support small businesses, improve public facilities, and create new, sustainable jobs. For a list of the states and projects receiving funding click [here](#).

Contact: Office of Communications 202-720-4623

For More Story Info: [USDA Newsroom](#)

DESPITE UPS AND DOWNS IN JANUARY, FARM PRICES AHEAD OF LAST YEAR

Even with some ups and downs in commodity markets over the last month, prices for most commodities are solidly ahead of this time a year ago.

For Radio Story: [Despite Ups And Downs In January, Farm Prices Ahead Of Last Year](#)

**DAIRY HERD NUMBERS MAY BE SMALLER THIS YEAR,
BUT NOT THE MILK OUTPUT**

What does the latest USDA cattle inventory report tell us about what will happen this year in the dairy industry?

For Radio Story: [Dairy Herd May Shrink This Year, But Not Milk Output](#)

(January 30)

**THE U.S. IS PRODUCING A LOT MORE
BEEF WITH FEWER COWS**

U.S. cattle numbers are getting down to levels not seen in sixty years, but that doesn't mean our beef output is down to those levels.

For Radio Story: [We're Producing Lots More Beef With Fewer Animals](#)

**CATTLE NUMBERS IN THE UNITED STATES
ARE LOWER THAN MANY HAD EXPECTED**

The U.S. cattle herd is turning out to be smaller than many had thought and that has several implications for the future. Shayle Shagam, USDA livestock analyst, gives some of the key numbers in the USDA's latest cattle inventory report. Shagam adds that we could be possibly four years away from seeing any significant increase in beef production.

For Radio Story: [U.S. Cattle Numbers Lower Than Many Had Expected](#)
[ACTUALITY: Smaller Than Expected Numbers In USDA Cattle Report](#)
[ACTUALITY: Time Frame For Beef Expansion Getting Further In Future](#)

**POSSIBLE CAUSE FOR DECLINE
IN HONEYBEE POPULATION**

A discovery has led researchers to perhaps find one of the factors behind the sudden drop in honeybee populations. Researcher Greg Hunt of Purdue University explains how seed treatments used at planting time could possibly be a contributor to declining honeybee populations.

For Radio Story: [One Possible Cause Of Honeybee Population Decline](#)
[ACTUALITY: On Seed Treatments And Honeybee Population Decline](#)

For more agriculture news visit USDA.gov and click Newsroom on the toolbar



[The Latest USDA Blog Posts](#)

Secretary's Column: Healthier Meals for our Nation's Children **(OC)**
Paradise found? Series of free snowshoe walks on California's Lassen National Forest offered this winter **(FS)**
Praise for Charting a New Direction on National Forests **(FS)** – CEQ cross post
A Smartphone App Provides New Way to Access Soil Survey Information **(NRCS)**
Foreign Markets are a Tough Nut to Crack, But Pecan Industry Finds Success **(FAS)**
Paradise found? Series of free snowshoe walks on California's Lassen National Forest offered this winter **(FS)**
Know Your Farmer Know Your Food in Action in Florida
GAP/GHP: Protecting and Serving Produce Farmers and Businesses **(AMS)**
2012 Ag Outlook Forum: Eight Former Secretaries of Agriculture Speaking **(OCE)**
Don't Just "Wing It!" Defeat Food Poisoning at Your Super Bowl Party with Food Safety Tips and a Bonus Recipe
Science Tuesday: USDA's New High-tech Guide to Green Thumb Glory **(REE)**
For the Love of the Game... or at Least the Food **(AMS)**
Meet Face (and Hands) of Food Safety Bridgette Keefe-Hodgson **(FSIS)**
US Forest Service partners with world-renowned Missoula Children's Theatre for performance in Washington, DC area **(FS)**
Mississippi USDA Staff Honor the Memory of Dr. Martin Luther King with a Day of Service **(RD)**

FROM OUR RADIO SERVICE

(Feature Line-Up Subject To Change Prior to Update On February 7)

AGRICULTURE USA CD # 06.12 – A multi-lateral trade deal among nine Pacific Rim nations including the US has drawn significant attention around the globe. Rod Bain looks at why the Trans-Pacific Partnership could be the next big deal in this edition of "Agriculture USA".

CONSUMER TIME CD # 06.12 – New School Meals Nutrition Standards. How Much Time Do Americans Spend On Food? Expert Advice: Eat At Least Something For Breakfast. Citizen Scientists Help Track Invasive Plant Species. How Sexy Is Your Credit Score?

AG UPDATE CD # 06.12 – Advancing Aviation Biofuels Development, Latest CRP General Sign Up Takes Place Soon, Cattle Herd Smallest In Sixty Years, Drought Impacts On Texas Cattle Herd Number, The TransPacific Partnership May Be A Big Deal.

UPCOMING ON THE USDA RADIO NEWSLINE – February 9 – Crop Weather Report (WAOB). February 9 – Crop Production Reports (NASS) and World Agricultural Supply And Demand Estimates (ERS-WAOB). February 10 – Oilcrops, Rice, and Cotton Outlooks (ERS-WAOB). February 13 – Wheat and Feed Outlooks (ERS – WAOB), Farm Income and Costs Report (ERS). January 31 – Agricultural Prices Report (NASS).

These are USDA reports we know about in advance. The USDA Radio Newsline carries many stories every day that are not listed in this lineup.

USDA Radio Newsline, 202-720-6776, 5:00pm ET

Or go to www.usda.gov, click on Newsroom at top of the page, scroll down on right side of page until you see Radio and TV. Then click on Daily Radio News Service or Weekly Radio Feature Service. For questions about USDA Radio's Features, fax name, station, and address to 202-690-2165.

FROM OUR TELEVISION SERVICE

ACTUALITIES – Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack and First Lady Michelle Obama Unveil New School Meals Standards

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and First Lady Michelle Obama present the final rule of the new school meals standards at Parklawn Elementary School in Alexandria, Virginia to improve the health and well-being of 32 million students nationwide.

New TV actualities are available on the USDA FTP site

Filename: Ag Secretary Vilsack and the First Lady
Unveil New School Meals Standards

Download instructions:

The host: <ftp://ocbmtcmedia.download.akamai.com>

User name: usdanews

Password: Newscontent1

The new file is in QuickTime Movie (H.264), MPEG 4, MPEG2 and HDV

Please email bob.ellison@usda.gov if you have problems or suggestions

Also, use this free ftp client if you have problems

<http://filezilla-project.org/download.php?type+client>

OFF MIKE



RURAL TV PREPS FOR ITS FEBRUARY 15TH DEBUT – The new rural business and lifestyle channel features live news with daily market coverage with a focus on the business and policy issues of rural America. RURAL TV www.MyRuralTV.com follows the format of RFD-TV. The programming will include expanded livestock auctions, equine enthusiast blocks, country music and entertainment shows, rural event coverage and expanded international programming.

RURAL TV's daily program schedule will focus on the business of rural America and will include international programming. *Market Day Report* each weekday morning gives viewers up to the minute live coverage of agribusiness news, weather, and commodity market coverage for five hours. The afternoon showcases auction broadcasts of cattle, horses, farm equipment, and ranch real estate. *The Rural Evening News* begins the prime-time lineup, with dedicated news bureaus in Washington DC, Chicago, Sao Paulo, and the U.K. being the primary sources for stories.

RURAL TV will have extensive live event coverage with two mobile production trucks traveling around the country to rural events, conventions, farm shows and horse shows; covering important gatherings for all viewers to experience.



THE SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS IS LOOKING FOR RADIO ENTRIES – You may want to pull the dust off of some of your 2011 radio stories to see if they're worthy of entering into SPJ's [Sigma Delta Chi Awards](#) that's coming up soon. The competition is open and the organization wants to make the best works of journalism do not go unnoticed.

To be eligible, work must have been published or broadcast during the 2011 calendar year. SPJ members may enter for \$60. The non-member fee is \$100. Contest rules and categories are [here](#). Visit [awards.spj.org](#) to enter. **The entry deadline is Feb. 9, 2012.**

The awards are open to all journalists, so please share this information with your colleagues. If you have any questions, contact Awards Coordinator Lauren Rochester at rochester@spj.org or 317-927-8000 ext. 210.



YOUNG FARMERS ARE BEING SOUGHT BY NATIONAL FFA ORGANIZATION – FFA is seeking students for the “New Century Farmer Conference” which prepares young farmers for success in the 21st century. Getting in the conference is highly competitive. It's open to college of agriculture students intending to pursue careers in production agriculture after college. Those chosen to attend the conference will be among the first in the nation to learn about the latest technological developments in the agriculture industry, and they will receive business management advice from top industry leaders. The program will also help students develop a nationwide network of industry professionals and colleagues. The students who are selected will head to a Johnstown, Iowa in July for the July 8-14 conference. The application deadline is March 15 at 5 p.m. EST. For conference details go to www.ffa.org/collegiate.

Broadcasters if you have any humanitarian or community service events you'd like to share please forward to susan.carter@oc.usda.gov.

We love to hear about what you're doing and share it with others in the farm broadcaster family.

From all of us to all of you ... thank you for what you do



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call (800) 795-3272 (voice), or (202) 720-6382 (TDD).*