

USDA *news*

USDA's Employee News Publication—For You & About You!

USDA's Proposed Budget For FY 2008 Emphasizes Priorities, Fiscal Discipline

by Ron Hall
Office of Communications

Noting that USDA's proposed budget supports the Department's priority items, but that tough choices have to be made to keep spending under control, Secretary **Mike Johanns** unveiled USDA's proposed budget for FY 2008 at a press conference on February 5 at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC.

He said that USDA's proposed budget "continues programs vital to the protection of ag from disease and pests and human threats. It significantly increases investment in bioenergy, it fully supports food assistance programs, and provides record funding to enroll a record number of acres into our conservation programs. It supports policies that lead to decreases in the level of food-borne illness."

But he then cautioned that "as with any budget, tough choices have to be made as well to keep spending under control and to achieve the President's goal of a balanced budget. This means doing more with less, and then eliminating programs that quite simply are just not getting the job done."

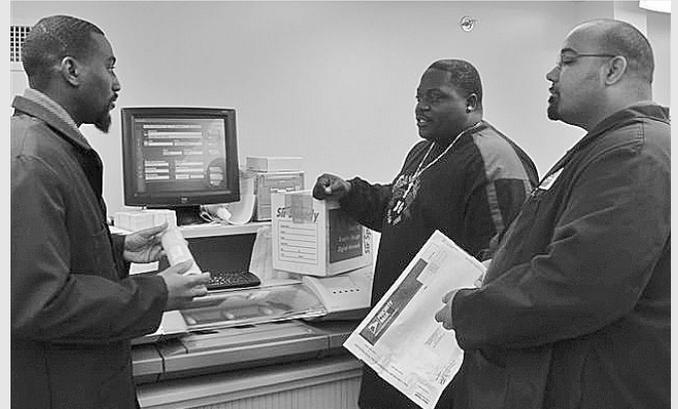
"USDA," Johanns emphasized, "will continue to be a team player in strengthening the nation and will implement

reforms that will improve our programs and generate savings that will help balance the budget and strengthen the economy."

USDA's FY 2008 proposed budget calls for approximately \$89.0 billion in spending. This represents a slight increase over the Department's currently estimated spending for FY 2007 of nearly \$88.8 billion.

Roughly 75 percent of those proposed expenditures, or \$67 billion in 2008, would be for mandatory programs that provide services required by law. They include many of the Department's nutrition assistance, commodity, export promotion, and conservation programs. USDA's discretionary programs account for the remaining 25 percent—or \$22 billion—in 2008. They include the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program; rural development loans and grants; research and education; soil and water conservation technical assistance; management of National Forests; and domestic marketing assistance.

USDA's budget proposes a federal staffing level for FY 2008 of 92,221 full-time equivalent positions, or federal staff years. This is a decrease of 4,650 federal staff years from the currently estimated FY 2007 federal staff year level of 96,871.



"Our new digital postage meters—plus you two guys, of course—are helping us all make sure that the mail service we're providing here in the Department is more streamlined and efficient," affirms **Hakim Johnson** (left), the Central Mail Unit Supervisor in OO's Mail and Reproduction Management Division at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC, as he confers with OO mail technicians **Jeff Bonner** (center) and **Ray DeVaughn**. That's no doubt also the case for USDA's 8,000-plus other mail centers located around the country and around the world, based on a change in postage meter technology that became effective on Dec. 31, 2006. Note the story on page 4.—**PHOTO BY TONY MYERS**

Agencies that reflect proposed increases in federal staff years for FY 2008 include the Food Safety and Inspection Service (an increase of 91 federal staff years, to total 9,515 federal staff years), the Food and Nutrition Service (39, to total 1,403), the Economic Research Service (30, to total 446), the Grain Inspection, Packers & Stockyards Administration (16, to total 690), the Office of the Chief Information Officer (9, to total 1,103), and the Homeland Security Staff (8, to total 16).

Agencies with proposed decreases in federal staff years include the Forest Service (a decrease of 2,126 federal staff years, to total 31,391 federal

staff years), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (1,979, to total 10,605), the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (251, to total 1,509), the Agricultural Research Service (250, to total 8,300), and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (244, to total 7,186).

These federal staff year estimates are all subject to adjustments to reflect the final outcome of budget negotiations, plus such unpredictable factors as natural disasters and other emergencies.

Highlights of USDA's FY 2008 budget proposal, thought to be of particular interest to USDA employees, include:
continued on pg. 2...



Mike Johanns *Secretary of Agriculture*

Dear Fellow Employees,
Late last month I had the great pleasure of introducing the administration's farm bill proposals. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to share with you how these proposals came together and what they will mean in your workplace.

As you know, we conducted 52 Farm Bill Forums in 48 states during 2005. This was a massive undertaking. Many of you had a hand in the success of those forums, providing essential logistical support and additional personnel. I thank you for that.

In the end we received tremendous input. We had 4,000 comments from participants that were summarized into 41 papers from which USDA economists identified five themes that warranted further analysis.

The hard work behind our proposals was really done in the countryside by the people we serve. It was all the stakeholders and farmers, many of whom drove hours to get to our forums and talk to us candidly about their hopes for the future of agriculture. Our proposals utilize much of the basic structure of current policy, but also present a vision for what agriculture can be in the future.

Producers told us they want future farm policy to be equitable, predictable, and protected from challenge in the world trade arena. They also want it to be fiscally responsible. By that I mean they want to be able to justify to their friends in town that this is a wise and effectively-spent federal investment. In addition, they found some programs to be too complex or confusing.

Those sentiments are reflected in our proposals [outline on page 3]. To offer a few highlights, we propose targeting \$5 billion over ten years to specialty crop producers. The value of specialty crops now exceeds that of the five program crops—feed grains, wheat, cotton, rice, and soybeans—yet historically, support for specialty crops has not kept pace with program crops. These additional funds will provide a more equitable policy and will be used for additional research, trade promotion, and purchases for the nutrition programs. We propose a new safety net for producers that they can count on, which will be better able to withstand world trade challenges.

Another feature that cuts across all mission areas includes suggestions to simplify, consolidate, and streamline programs. Let's take conservation programs for example. Under current law there are six cost-share programs, all of which have separate eligibility requirements, signup periods, regulations, and applications.

One of our proposals would combine the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, the Ground and Surface Water Conservation Program, the Agricultural Management Assistance Program, the Forest Land Enhancement Program, and the Klamath Basin Program into one Environmental Quality Incentives Program. To that mix we would add a Regional Water Enhancement Program. We want to make conservation easier by grouping programs to better address natural resource concerns on all landscapes.

Consolidation of programs does not mean the workload of employees will decrease but our aim is that it will get simpler, will become less time consuming, and will better serve our customers.

What we are proposing is a new way to achieve the goals USDA has always pursued: to provide a safety net for farmers; to increase and expand the mix of conservation solutions we have to offer; to support emerging priorities such as renewable energy, rural development, trade, and research; to reach those in need of nutrition assistance; and to target funds to beginning and socially disadvantaged producers.

The comments, summary papers, theme papers, and proposals are all available on our farm bill website. I think you will find them innovative and exciting. I strongly encourage all USDA employees to become familiar with the proposals. Your enthusiasm can have a very real impact as the people we serve ask questions and seek assistance in understanding our proposals. I can tell you in all sincerity that I believe these proposals recommend policies that are more equitable, predictable, and protected from challenge. Perhaps most importantly, these proposals embrace the future of American agriculture. These are exciting times in agriculture and I'm honored to have had the opportunity to collect and convey the collective thoughts of so many stakeholders, represented in our 2007 farm bill proposals ■

USDA's Proposed Budget...continued from pg. 1

① \$91 million for continued upgrading of technology in county office Service Centers. This provides for the continued replacement of aging business and technology systems with a Common Computing Environment (CCE) in those offices. That allows the Service Center agencies (the Farm Service Agency, NRCS, and Rural Development) to share data among themselves and their customers and to streamline business processes. Implementation of the CCE began in 1998 through the Service Center Modernization Initiative, and most of its major hardware and software components are in place. This is all designed to increase the ability of USDA customers to interact with USDA staffers over the Internet, so as to save time and money.

② \$23.1 million for the Office of Civil Rights, which includes an increase to sup-

port compliance monitoring and an increase to complete USDA's civil rights complaints tracking information system used by OCR and USDA's program agencies and staff offices.

③ \$325 million in USDA funding—an approximate increase of \$150 million at the Department—as part of the government-wide "Food and Agriculture Defense Initiative" which began in 2004. USDA's contribution is to go to such activities as: strengthening USDA's Food Emergency Response Network and USDA's Regional Diagnostic Network to ensure the capacity to respond quickly to food emergencies and plant and animal diseases and related training; strengthening research to ensure food safety; developing the means to quickly identify pathogens; developing improved animal vaccines; better understanding the genes that provide disease resistance; and

enhancing surveillance and monitoring activities to quickly detect pest and disease threats and to improve response capabilities.

In addition, the budget includes funding for a newly budgeted item: to design a new ARS Consolidated Poultry Health Research Facility in Athens, Ga., which would be the Department's premier center for conducting critical research on exotic and emerging avian diseases.

④ \$82 million in avian influenza efforts, in which USDA continues to work closely with states in domestic surveillance efforts and improves the nation's preparedness and response capabilities to help stem the spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N1) overseas. USDA is a partner in the governmentwide effort to prepare the country for a potential pandemic, and in the

continued on pg. 7...

Notes *from USDA Headquarters*

On January 31, Secretary **Mike Johanns** released a 183-page document with more than 60 proposals which he hopes become building blocks for a new farm bill. "I approach this discussion firmly believing that Federal support of agriculture is a wise investment and that how we provide that support is immensely important," he said.

Highlights of the 2007 Farm Bill Proposals:

The Administration recommends increased **direct payments** for program commodities—wheat, feed grains, cotton, rice, and soybeans. Direct payments are more predictable and less susceptible to challenge in the world trade arena.

Instead of being fixed by law at an arbitrary level, the proposal would set **loan rates** based on a historical average—85 percent of the Olympic average (five years excluding high and low years). Instead of setting posted county prices (PCPs) daily to determine loan deficiency payments, they would be set monthly. The change would encourage producers to plant crops based on market prices instead of loan rates.

The **counter-cyclical payment** would no longer be triggered by price but would reflect target revenue. This would address the issue raised by producers during Farm Bill Forums that they received payments when production was high (because the large supply drove down prices) and yet when times are tough due to drought or other disaster, there are no payments because prices go up when supply goes down. This newly proposed program would address that problem by paying producers based on lost revenue.

Restrictions on planting fruits and vegetables on crop base acres would be eliminated.

Farmland sold for purposes other than agriculture would lose program benefits.

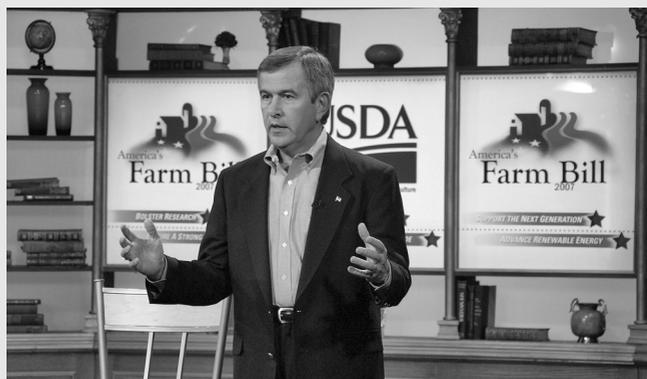
Farmland that is purchased under a Section 1031 tax exchange would lose program benefits.

Producers could receive an additional 10 percent increase in direct payments in return for meeting certain conservation requirements and agreeing to forgo future marketing loan and counter-cyclical payments.

Payment limits would be tightened and loopholes closed. These proposals eliminate the three-entity rule and tie payments to an individual. This plan also sets the subsidy payment limit for individuals at a total of \$360,000.

This plan proposes to reduce the **Adjusted Gross Income (AGI)** limit of \$2.5 million to a new limit of \$200,000. The AGI is very different from gross income in that farm expenses and depreciation are subtracted from the total. AGI also includes income from non-farm sources as well as other deductions including the cost of self-employed health insurance, one-half of the self-employment tax, and contributions to retirement accounts. If a producer has an average AGI that equals or exceeds \$200,000 for the three tax years immediately preceding the applicable crop, program or fiscal year, that individual would no longer be eligible for commodity payments. Internal Revenue Service (IRS) data for 2004 indicate that 97.7 percent of all American tax filers have an AGI under \$200,000. Looking at farmers specifically, only 25,191 tax filers received farm payments and had an AGI over \$200,000; this represents only 1.2 percent of the two million Schedule F (farm proprietor) filers.

A new supplemental **crop insurance** policy would cover all



Speaking from the studio of RFD-TV in Nashville on February 1, Secretary **Mike Johanns** speaks not only to a live audience in the studio but also to a TV audience, as he reviews particulars of USDA's 2007 Farm Bill proposals.—**PHOTO BY ALICE WELCH**

or part of a producer's individual policy deductible in the event of a county or area wide loss.

Current **conservation program** funding would be increased by \$7.8 billion over ten years. The Administration proposes to consolidate all cost-share programs dealing with wildlife habitats, water conservation, management assistance, forest land enhancement, and the Klamath Basin into one Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Funding would increase \$4.25 billion over ten years. In addition, a new Regional Water Enhancement Program would be created filling a void in the Federal government's conservation delivery system with a cost-share program to coordinate large-scale water conservation and water quality projects.

The **easement function** of the Emergency Watershed Program and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) would be combined into one WRP. The acreage limit would increase from 2.3 to 3.5 million acres with a 250,000 acre enrollment target per year.

The Emergency Watershed Protection Program and the Emergency Conservation Program would become one new **Emergency Landscape Restoration Program** to serve landowners and communities

that need assistance after a catastrophic event.

The three existing **easement programs** for working lands—the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program, the Healthy Forest Reserve Program, and the Grasslands Reserve Program—would become one new Private Lands Protection Program with a shared goal of protecting farmland and open space. Funding would be increased by \$900 million.

The **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** would continue to focus on lands that provide the most significant environmental benefits through the continuous CRP enrollment and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. Priority would be given to the enrollment of whole fields that would produce perennial biomass crops for cellulosic energy production.

The **Conservation Security Program (CSP)** would be enhanced to require new conservation commitments and simplified by creating two tiers of conservation achievement instead of three. Under the proposal, CSP enrollment would expand from 15.5 million acres to 96.5 million acres over ten years. CSP would also be offered nationwide on an annual basis, instead of in select watersheds. Funding for

continued on pg. 6...

Employees *make these things happen*

Departmental Administration

Here's Why That Digital Postage Meter Is Now In Your USDA Mail Center

Yeah, we might be tempted to assume that every living, breathing human on the planet communicates solely by e-mail these days. But the fact is that a whole heck of a lot of mail is still sent through the U.S. Postal Service and similar carriers in the private sector. That's also the case within USDA, at both its headquarters and field locations.

And that's why U.S. Postal Service postage meters at all USDA offices were recently upgraded or replaced as needed, in an attempt to move those meters to newer, more secure technology.

As of December 31, 2006 the postage meters in all federal facilities—including the estimated 8,000 housed at USDA headquarters and field locations both around the country and around the world—were to have been replaced with a newer version. This change in meter technology was mandated by the USPS.

"Several years ago the U.S. Postal Service concluded that certain postage meters—including the ones used in most federal facilities, plus here at USDA—were susceptible to fraud or misuse," explained **Tony Myers**, a mail management specialist in the Mail and Reproduction Management Division in the Office of Operations.

"In other words," he said, "the postage meters were susceptible to either inadvertent inaccuracies or intentional distortions in the end-of-month accounting which is done to determine the amount of postage revenue from each postage meter. The shorthand for this is 'revenue risk'."

Secondly, he pointed out that the old meters were vulnerable to counterfeiting.

"Third," he said, "I must note that there have been occasions when federal personnel responsible for using postage meters in their government offices have used those machines to meter their own personal correspondence."

So, Myers noted, USPS's solution was to come up with better equipment. And that's what happened.

"The result," said **Betty Froehlich**, USDA's mail manager located in OO, "is that all of our USDA mail centers around the country and around the world are now equipped with newer digital postage meters."

"We call it 'digital print technology,'" she pointed out.

According to Froehlich, the advantage of this new equipment is that it is considered more secure. Secondly, a digital postage meter requires a PIN—or "Personal Identification Number"—code in order to be used. "The issuance of those PINs," she emphasized, "is restricted to only those personnel—and their supervisors—who are authorized to use those machines. That way, nobody can break into a USDA mail center in the middle of the night and use a digital postage meter for their own personal use."

Thirdly, the new 'digital meters' provide clearer, crisper imprints, to include a holographic image. "That particular image offers better protection against counterfeit postage meter imprints," she noted.

So, does the inked imprint on the upper right corner of the letter now have a different look to it?

"Yes," said **Richard McGilberry**, the mail manager for Rural Development's Centralized Servicing Center in St. Louis, "and it's because of that holographic image—which never existed before we went to these new digital postage meters."

"And, by the way," added **Cindy Herbig**, the Administrative Officer for the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's Veterinary Services Office in Conyers, Ga., "a 'digital postage meter imprint' is *not* the same thing as a 'cancellation.' A 'cancellation' is what happens when the U.S. Postal Service invalidates, for reuse, that 39-cent stamp you put on your personal letter."

And is this new way of doing business more cost effective?

"Well," quipped **Anita Fincher**, Chief of the Support Services Office at USDA's National Finance Center in New Orleans, "I would think that it's more cost-effective for the U.S. Postal Service, because that's the agency that has always ultimately gotten all the revenue, both from the postage collected by all the federal mail centers and from the fees that USPS charges all the federal mail centers for the digital postage meters it's renting to them."

"But," she continued, "for the *individual* mail centers—like our 8,000-plus USDA mail centers around the country and around the world—the new digital postage meters help us provide—to our USDA offices and USDA employees—a quicker, more efficient, and more streamlined postal operation."

Bottom line: Why should this new development be important to USDA employees?

"Hey," laughed **June Bryan**, Chief of OO's Mail and Reproduction Management Division, "Anita just answered that!"

—**RON HALL**



Consuelo Navar, the mail and file clerk at NRCS's State Office in Reno, Nev., has entered her unique and protected Personal Identification Number into that office's digital postage meter—so now she's ready to process several official letters for mailing.—
PHOTO BY LIZ WARNER

Natural Resources And Environment

How We're Helping To Protect Those Coastal Sand Dunes

Included among the attractions of a trip to the beach are the sun, the surf, the water, the warmth, the breeze, the sand—and the dunes. Specialists with the Natural Resources Conservation Service are doing

their part to make sure that we all can *keep* enjoying the dunes, far into the future, as part of our treks to the beach.

Specifically, employees at NRCS's Plant Materials Center in Galliano, La., recently released a new plant designed for sand dune enhancement and stabilization on

coastal beaches and barrier islands—especially the beaches of Louisiana and Mississippi and the barrier islands of the Gulf of Mexico. "It's called Timbalier Germplasm gulf bluestem, and it's the latest plant release in our fight against coastal erosion," explained **Don Gohmert**, NRCS's Louisiana

Editor's Roundup *USDA's people in the news*



Mark Keenum is the Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural

Services.

Before joining USDA, from 1996 until his confirmation for this position by the U.S. Senate Keenum served as Chief of Staff for U.S. Sen. **Thad Cochran** (R-Miss.). From 1989-96 he worked as a legislative assistant on Cochran's staff, focusing on agriculture and natural resources. While serving in those two positions he helped to write the 1990, 1996, and 2002 Farm Bills.

From 1988-89 Keenum was an assistant professor of agricultural economics at Mississippi State University. In addition, from 1997-2006 he was an agricultural economics adjunct professor at that university and taught an annual seminar course on agricultural legislative policy. From 1986-

88 he worked as a research associate with the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station at MSU, after having worked as a marketing specialist with the Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service at MSU from 1984-86.

J.B. Penn, the previous Under Secretary for FFAS, is now the Chief Economist at Deere & Co. in Washington, DC, with responsibility for analyzing global macroeconomic, policy, and trade developments, and their impact on corporate growth initiatives worldwide, for that company. ■



Keith Williams is USDA's Press Secretary.

Before joining USDA, from January 2003 until his appointment to this position Williams served as the Communications Director for the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry. In

addition, during 2004 he served as Press Secretary for U.S. Sen. **Thad Cochran** (R-Miss.). He was Communications Director for the Committee on Agriculture in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1998-2002. During that time he also served as Communications Director for the House-Senate 2002 Farm Bill Conference. From 1989-98 he was Press Secretary for [then] U.S. Rep. **Larry Combest** (R-Texas).

Williams worked as a reporter and TV newscaster for KAMC-TV in Lubbock, Texas from 1980-89. During that time, in 1986 he was accepted as an initial applicant for the "Journalist in Space" Program conducted for the U.S. Space Shuttle Program. In 1975 he began his career in journalism, while still in college, as a reporter and radio newscaster for KLLL-Radio, and then worked for KSEL-Radio, both in Lubbock.

Ed Loyd, USDA's previous Press Secretary, is now Manager of Corporate Communications

and Investor Relations for Chiquita Brands International in Cincinnati, Ohio. ■



Lynn Heirakuji is the Deputy Director of the Office of Human Capital Management.

Before joining USDA, from January 2006 until her selection for this position Heirakuji served as the Program Manager for Human Capital Evaluation in the Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. From 2003-2006 she worked on the "Human Resources Reform Initiative" within DHS and was a member of its original design team.

Heirakuji served as the Manager of Civilian Employee and Labor Relations Programs for the U.S. Coast Guard from 2000-2003 and, earlier, from 1996-99. From 1999-2000 she was Personnel Director for the Office of ...continued on pg. 6

...continued from pg. 4

State Conservationist based in Alexandria, La.

He noted that, after years of evaluating a number of native plants, specialists at the NRCS Center in Galliano concluded that Timbalier Germplasm gulf bluestem has demonstrated that it is a superior plant for holding sand in place and helping to enhance and protect sand dunes by trapping blowing sand.

Michael Trusclair is an NRCS district conservationist based in Thibodaux, La., about 30 miles from the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. He said that the barrier islands, which are located in the Gulf of Mexico just offshore from the mainland of Louisiana and Mississippi, are left over from shifts of the Mississippi River Delta centuries ago. "The islands," he explained, "act as buffers against storm surges from hurricanes and tropical storms by absorbing some of the storm's energy."

He added that the barrier islands are also important as resting and refueling habitat

for migratory birds, and can serve as vital nesting areas for many other birds such as the brown pelican.

"So the stability of healthy barrier islands," Trusclair affirmed, "is vital to many coastal communities. And Timbalier is now playing an important role in the long-term health and stabilization of barrier islands by trapping sand and building dunes."

"Timbalier's robust top growth is now trapping sand, and its massive root system is now holding it in place—thereby building dunes over time," said Center Manager **Richard Neill**. "As the dunes build, they enable the islands to sustain themselves as they buffer the Gulf's storms. The plant is also being used on shorelines and beaches along the Gulf coast."

Neill clarified that he and his staff don't develop plant species, but rather evaluate plants that they have found in nature. "We try to determine what are the best plant choices—from the plants we've gathered from around the region—which would be



"The robust top growth on this Timbalier Germplasm gulf bluestem does a great job of trapping sand, and its massive root system holds the plant in place—so that all helps to build and stabilize sand dunes," affirms **Richard Neill** (center), Manager of NRCS's Plant Materials Center in Galliano, La., as he examines three pots of the plant with NRCS soil conservationist **Garret Thomassie** (right) and office automation assistant **Alexis Luke**.—PHOTO BY SHAUN HARRIS

Inspector General at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. From 1989-96 she worked as the employee relations and labor relations senior policy specialist at the [then] U.S. General Accounting Office. She began her federal career as a human resources specialist at the U.S. Census Bureau in Suitland, Md., in 1980.

Joe Colantuoni, the previous Deputy Director of OHCM, retired from that position with 29 years of federal service. ■



So here we are, smack in the middle of winter, and many of us are dodging snowbanks, avoiding hypothermia, and wish-

ing we were basking on a beach, catching rays. And along comes **Darrell Simpson**, who says “Hmmm, You May Want To Reconsider That Option!”

Simpson is an Extension agent for agriculture and natural resources with the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service in Muhlenberg County, Ky. For the last three years he has been active in giving away hats. But not just any hat. These are wide-brimmed hats that provide protection from the sun to a person's nose and ears. “The main part of the hat is made of a seagrass material,” he pointed out, “with a solar weave fabric underneath the brim of the hat. The hat I use actually has an excellent ‘Ultraviolet Rating’ and was approved by the American Dermatology Association.”

“I work a lot with farmers,” Simpson explained, “and a few years ago I was working with a farmer who had a bandage on his lip. I knew he had a history of skin cancer on his lip and the back of his neck. I assumed that he had just had another bit of skin cancer removed—and he later confirmed that.”

So Simpson obtained a \$1,500 grant from the College of Agriculture at the University of Kentucky to launch a local Extension initiative to help his clientele avoid skin cancer caused by exposure to the sun. “I used the grant to buy 75 hats and lip balm,” he recounted. “Then, as I was working with farmers, gardeners, and others who spend a lot of time outdoors, I’d give them a hat and some lip balm.”

According to **Gary Crawford**,

a radio news producer with USDA's Office of Communications, Simpson also did research into the disease, and found out that an estimated one out of seven people in the U.S. will develop some form of skin cancer during their lifetime, and an estimated 9,000 deaths will occur annually due to skin cancer. Simpson utilized a previously-developed fact sheet containing these statistics, which he distributes to his clientele.

Then four months later he surveyed his clientele, and found out that most—78 percent—*were* wearing the hats he had provided. In addition, most—53 percent—*were* wearing long-sleeve shirts as he had recommended. Finally, most—59 percent—*were* using the lip balm he had distributed.

continued on pg. 7...

Notes...continued from pg. 3

the program would increase \$500 million over ten years.

More than \$1.6 billion in new **renewable energy** funding, especially targeting cellulosic ethanol projects, would be provided. A Bioenergy and Biobased Product Research Initiative would receive \$500 million to continue improvements in crop yields and to reduce the cost of producing alternative fuels.

Another **\$500 million** for the Renewable Energy Systems and Efficiency Improvements Grants Program would support small alternative energy and energy efficiency projects that directly help farmers, ranchers, and rural small businesses. Cellulosic ethanol projects in rural areas would compete for an estimated \$2.1 billion in loan guarantees.

Rural Development would consolidate some programs to add flexibility for USDA customers. The proposal also provides funding to support \$1.6 billion in guaranteed loans to complete the rehabilitation of more than 1,200 Rural Critical Access Hospitals. This proposal would invest \$85 million to support \$1.6 billion in guaranteed loans and \$5 million for grants.

An additional \$500 million would reduce the backlog of applications for water and waste disposal grants and direct loans, emergency community water assistance grants, Community Facilities loan and grant programs that assist rural first responders, broadband access loans, and distance learning and telemedicine grants.

The **Food Stamp Program** would be renamed the Food and Nutrition Program. The USDA proposal includes numerous provisions to improve access to USDA nutrition programs and to strengthen program integrity.

The Agricultural Research Service and the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) would be consolidated into a **single agency** named the Research, Education, and Extension Service. The new agency would coordinate both intramural and extramural research and increase investment in high priority areas such as specialty crops, bio-energy, and bio-based products.

The **support price for milk** would remain at \$9.90 per cwt and the Milk Income Loss Contract Program would be

reauthorized with payments based on past production rather than actual milk sales.

The **sugar program** would be revised to balance supply and demand through domestic marketing allotments and the tariff rate quota on sugar imports.

Cotton competitiveness provisions would be repealed in response to the Brazil cotton WTO ruling.

Funding for **trade programs** would increase by nearly \$400 million to increase U.S. presence within international standard-setting bodies, fight trade barriers, and boost agricultural exports.

The proposal targets about \$5 billion to support **specialty crop farmers** through additional research, market promotion, and direct purchases of fruits and vegetables for USDA food assistance programs, including the school breakfast and lunch programs.

Beginning farmers and ranchers would receive a 20 percent increase in program crop direct payments during the first five years of operation. The statutory limits on operating and ownership loans would be raised to a maximum of \$500,000 in indebtedness for any combina-

tion of the loan types. Ten percent of conservation financial assistance would be set aside for beginning and **socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers**. In addition, the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Downpayment Loan Program would see the interest rate cut to 2 percent; would defer the initial payment for one year; would double the potential buying power by increasing the maximum loan value; and would decrease the minimum farmer contribution from 10 percent of the property purchase price to five percent.

The **2007 Farm Bill proposals** would spend \$10 billion less than was spent under the 2002 Farm Bill over the past five years (excluding disaster aid), fitting within the President's plan to balance the budget within five years. At the same time, looking forward, these proposals authorize approximately \$5 billion more than the projected spending if the 2002 Farm Bill were extended. The bottom line is that USDA's proposals represent a reform-minded and fiscally responsible approach to farm policy, while funding priorities and providing a strong safety net.

—**PATRICIA KLINTBERG**

"I was trying to assess whether my efforts had resulted in a behavior change," he noted. "My conclusion was: Yes, they had."

As a second initiative, Simpson said he and **Laura Holt**, an Extension agent for family and consumer sciences with Cooperative Extension in Muhlenberg County, will be participating in a pilot project conducted by the Health Education through Extension Leadership program (HEEL) at the Lexington campus of the University of Kentucky to initiate a "hat exchange program." The HEEL program is going to purchase

about 100 wide-brimmed hats and will then give them to Simpson.

"Up to this point I've been giving away hats that provide better protection from the sun," he said. "But this time, this June I'm going to my clientele in Muhlenberg County, offering to *swap* one of my hats for whatever cap—baseball cap, University of Kentucky cap, whatever—that the person is wearing."

"Needless to say," he added, "people need to be cautious about thinking that a ball cap is going to provide sufficient protection from the sun."

Third, Simpson said he and

Holt have been visiting local high schools and talking to students about the relationship between the sun's rays and skin cancer. As an 'attention-getter' they use a 'Derma-scan machine.' This machine is a 24" x 24" square metal box. It is equipped with an 'ultraviolet-light' and mirrors in the box. After Simpson flips the switch on the machine and the light goes on, when a student places his/her hand in the box, the ultraviolet light highlights blotches on the skin that are normally invisible to the naked eye. The student then sticks his/her head in the box, and, because of the

placement of the mirrors in the Derma-scan box, the individual can observe any blotches that may be on the hand—or on the individual's face. "Those blotches are generally caused by the sun, and they might be the first indication of skin damage," he pointed out.

"I'm always interested to hear students say 'I can't believe my skin looks like that!'—especially the students who have been going to tanning salons."

"So yeah," he laughed, "I guess you could conclude that preventing skin cancer is a pet project of mine." ■

—**RON HALL**

Happen...continued from pg. 5

the most useful in different situations and locales," he pointed out.

And, he added, the release of this latest plant means that private nurseries and plant growers can obtain its vegetative rootstock from the Center and grow the plant for coastal restoration projects.

Neill noted that Timbalier is the third such plant evaluated and released by the Center specifically to deal with dunes protection. The other plants include Caminada seaoats and Fourchon bitter

panicum.

Gohmert pointed out that NRCS has 27 Plant Materials Centers located in a total of 25 states. "They are all designed to evaluate and transfer effective state-of-the-art plant science technology to meet the needs of our customers," he underscored.

And, concerning the focus on Timbalier by specialists at the Plant Materials Center in Galliano, it's yet another part of the overall effort by USDA to help rebuild the Gulf coast. ■

—**HERB BOURQUE**



Garret Thomassie (center), an NRCS soil conservationist at the agency's Plant Materials Center in Galliano, La., and NRCS Earth Team volunteer **Gary Fine** (left) examine a stand of Timbalier Germplasm gulf bluestem plants growing in—and helping to anchor—sand dunes on Holly Beach in southwestern Louisiana. —**PHOTO BY ELIZABETH SHARRATT**

USDA's Proposed Budget...continued from pg. 2

worldwide effort to stop the spread of the virus overseas.

⑤ Funds for USDA to support the development of renewable energy resources and energy commercialization activities, designed to help meet the goal of President **George W. Bush** to reduce gasoline usage by 20 percent by 2017. This USDA budget item includes \$397 million for energy projects, an increase of approximately \$161 million over 2007. Of this increase, \$132 million is for Rural Development renewable energy investments through guaranteed loans and grants and other energy-related efforts. The remaining increase of \$29 million supports research and development activities to enhance bioenergy feedstocks and improve conversion technologies for cellulosic ethanol.

⑥ \$12.5 million in the Office of the Secretary to support the Department's efforts, coordinated by the Foreign Agricultural

Service, to assist in agricultural reconstruction activities in Afghanistan and Iraq.

USDA is providing technical advisors assigned to the Ministry of Agriculture in Iraq and on Provincial Reconstruction Teams that are operating in the rural provinces of Afghanistan and Iraq. USDA employees are advisors who serve temporary assignments on those Teams. The Sept.-Oct. 2006 issue of the **USDA NEWS** carried a story about some of those activities.

⑦ An increase of \$25 million—to total \$54 million—in the budget of the National Agricultural Statistics Service to support the 2007 Census of Agriculture. NASS conducts that particular census every five years; it conducted the last Census of Agriculture in 2002.

⑧ USDA is proposing, as part of its \$36.7 billion in funding for the Food Stamp Program, legislation that would not count "special" military pay for personnel who are deployed to a designated combat zone,

when determining their eligibility for food stamp benefits.

⑨ Among several user fees in USDA's proposed budget, one that might be of particular interest to USDA employees is an FSIS reinspection fee that would provide the authority to collect user fees from plants that require additional inspection activities because of performance failures, such as retesting, recalls, or inspection activities linked to an outbreak. The proposal would generate \$4 million that would offset appropriated funds beginning in 2009.

For more details on USDA's proposed staffing levels, as well as additional details on other aspects of USDA's proposed budget for FY 2008, click on www.usda.gov/budget

USDA's proposed budget for FY 2008 was transmitted to Congress on February 5. (*Editor's Note: Legislation to fund USDA for the remainder of FY 2007 was signed into law on February 15, 2007.*) ■



*Cardinal Sin Number One in photojournalism is to take a pic in which shadows on a person's face end up masking the person's facial features. But in this case, that's part of the game plan. Specifically, the man with the hat in this pic is **Shane Bogle**, an Extension agent for agriculture and natural resources with Cooperative Extension in Caldwell County, Ky. He's working on an injector system to fertilize stake tomatoes. But the important thing to notice is that hat: it's wide-brimmed, it covers his ears and nose, and the main part of the hat is made of a seagrass material with a solar weave fabric underneath the brim of the hat. In addition, Bogle is wearing a long-sleeved shirt. All that makes fellow Extension agent **Darrell Simpson** happy, since it shows that Simpson's recent initiatives are producing results. What initiatives, you ask? Note the story on page 6.—*

PHOTO BY BRENT ROWELL



Help Us Find **Shamaria Cleopatra Sparkman**

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D.O.B. 9-4-1989 Sex: Female
Hair: Black Eyes: Brown
Height: 5 ft. 4 in. Weight: 125 lbs.

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