

## USDA's FY99 Budget Calls For A Gain Of \$3.1 Billion; Cut Of 1,964 Fed Staff Years

*by Ron Hall, Office of Communications*

"This budget has all the right stuff and we will work hard to get it passed."

With those words, Secretary **Dan Glickman** set the tone for USDA's presentation of its proposed budget for FY 1999. Speaking at a press conference held on February 2, Glickman, Deputy Secretary **Richard Rominger**, and Office of Budget and Program Analysis Director **Steve Dewhurst** highlighted items of importance in USDA's budget proposal.

"This spending plan," Glickman said, "allows us to continue our efforts to ensure a safe food supply, combat hunger in America, protect our natural resources, strengthen the safety net for farmers, and provide economic opportunities for rural Americans."

He then elaborated on several of those general areas. For instance, he observed that "As I go around the country, there is no issue that interests or excites the American people more--of anything we do in our Department--than making sure their food is safe."

He also noted that "Much of this budget is dedicated to helping our farmers and ranchers be good stewards of the land."

Glickman pointed out that USDA's budget proposal for FY99 increases resources to help quickly resolve allegations of discrimination in USDA programs and services and employment, as well as better prevent discrimination from happening through such initiatives as on-the-job civil rights training for employees.

Concerning human and monetary resources available at the Department, he noted that "Since 1993, our budget has declined from \$63 billion to a projected \$54 billion in the 1999 fiscal year, we've reduced our work force by nearly 20,000 people at the end of FY97, [and] that number will come down another 2,800 at the close of '99."

USDA's overall budget proposal for FY99 calls for a program level of over \$86.4 billion and federal cash outlays of over \$54.2 billion. This represents a 3.8 percent increase--by over \$3.1 billion--from the currently estimated FY98 program level of \$83.3 billion, as well as a 1.3 percent decrease--by over \$.7 billion--from the currently estimated FY98 cash outlay level of \$55.0 billion.

Budget officials generally regard "program level" figures as the best method for describing the total scope of federal activities, including all services, loans, and grants in a budget. This is because "Federal cash outlay" figures--while generally publicized more frequently--often don't clearly reflect the total magnitude of Federal activities, since some loan program outlay figures are either excluded or presented in net terms.

USDA's budget proposes a Federal staffing level for FY99 of 97,050 full-time equivalent positions, or Federal staff years. This represents a decrease of 1,964 Federal staff years from the currently estimated FY98 Federal staff year level of 99,014.

Agencies which reflect proposed increases in Federal staff years include the Office of the Inspector General (an increase of 175 Federal staff years, to total 925 Federal staff years), the Food and Nutrition Service (57, to total 1,782), Departmental Administration (53, to total 701), the Office of the Chief Economist (7, to total 57), the Office of the General Counsel (4, to total 378), the Office of the Chief Information Officer (3, to total 271), and the Office of Communications (1, to total 120).

Agencies with the largest proposed decreases in Federal staff years include the Forest Service (a decrease of 785 Federal staff years, to total 35,526 Federal staff years), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (532, to total 11,412), the Farm Service Agency (263, to total 5,646), the National Agricultural Statistics Service (183, to total 1,107), the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (154, to total 6,133), the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (146, to total 1,131), the Rural Housing Service (80, to total 6,108), the Foreign Agricultural Service (62, to total 819), the Rural Utilities Service (49, to total 715), and the Rural Business-Cooperative Service (24, to total 304). The non-Federal county employees of FSA are proposed to be reduced by 855 non-Federal staff years, to total 9,980 non-Federal staff years.

By comparison, one year ago USDA's proposed budget for FY98 called for a staffing level of 99,866 Federal staff years--a decrease of 1,790 from the previous year--and a program level of \$88.3 billion--a \$4.6 billion increase from the previous year.

*Highlights of USDA's FY99 budget proposal include:*

- an increase of approximately \$150 million--for a total of \$250 million--to carry out the recommendations contained in "Civil Rights at the United States Department of Agriculture-- A Report by the Civil Rights Action Team." That 212-page report, dated Feb. 1997, was the product of the 15-person team of employees which Glickman had established in Dec. 1996 to examine a number of issues related to civil rights at USDA;
- a continued focus on efforts to support food recovery, through \$20 million for a new community-based grant program;
- \$22 million for OIG to support a special Presidential Law Enforcement Initiative, which would enhance efforts to crack down on abuse in USDA programs in such areas as nutrition, health, and rural development;
- \$11 million for the Food Safety and Inspection Service to continue to implement USDA's new state-of-the-art meat and poultry inspection system (known as the "Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points" system, or HACCP), and expand consumer education;
- contributing \$10 million to a governmentwide Climate Change Technology Initiative;
- an increase of \$21 million--to total \$225 million--for FS's recreation and wilderness management activities, to meet the rising public demand for recreational use of America's national forests.

USDA's proposed budget for FY99 was transmitted to Congress earlier on the same day as the Department's press conference. ☐