

MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY

This Nation's food and agricultural system is influenced by many of the same forces that shape America's economy—globalization of markets, advances in technology, new delivery systems, and modern science. Driven by these and other forces, the farm and food sector operates in a highly competitive marketplace that must continuously respond to changing consumer demands for high quality, nutritious and convenient food and agricultural products.

Since the tragic events of September 11, 2001, homeland security has become an even more important priority for USDA. The Department has been working to ensure that programs are protecting the farm and food sector, as well as consumers, from not just unintentional threats, but intentional acts that might impact the food supply.

USDA's Strategic Plan is an important tool to assist one of the federal government's most diverse and complex agencies plan and respond effectively to the challenges and opportunities ahead. The foundation for the Plan is the Bush Administration book, *Food and Agricultural Policy: Taking Stock for the New Century*. That publication provides a comprehensive examination of the changing food system and articulates the long-term view of the policies needed to build upon past accomplishments and ensure continued success in the future.

The Strategic Plan identifies key policy and management objectives that will be integrated with USDA's budget priorities and provide accountability through a series of annual performance plans. Central to the plan is effective management of the Department's limited resources in an effort to best deliver its multi-faceted programs.

USDA is strongly committed to strategic planning and the goals and strategies outlined in this current Plan. Within this framework, we intend to continue to improve by remaining flexible and open to new opportunities and change. As such, this Strategic Plan is a dynamic, working document that will evolve in response to changes not only in the farm and food sector, but the many mission areas in which the Department has responsibility.



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Secretary of Agriculture