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The following estimates, forecasts, and projections are mainly taken from recent publications of the National Agricultural Statistics Service, Economic Research Service, and the World Agricultural Outlook Board of the USDA.

***Corn.** Corn ending stocks are forecast at 1.74 billion bushels for the 1999/2000 marketing year compared with 1.79 billion bushels at the end of 1998/99 season. The market year average price is expected to be between \$1.85 and \$1.95. The Farm Service Agency has paid corn growers Loan Deficiency Payments on 7.13 billion bushels of corn, totaling \$1.96 billion in payments and averaging 0.28 cents per bushel.

***Soybeans.** The U.S. soybean export forecast for 1999/2000 is up 20 million bushels this month to 910 million bushels. U.S. soybean ending stocks are forecast at 325 million bushels, down 20 million bushels from the previous forecast. A market year average price is projected between \$4.50 and \$4.90 per bushel. Through March 22, growers have received Loan Deficiency Payments on 2.24 billion bushels of soybeans, receiving just over \$2.06 billion in payments averaging 0.92 cents per bushel.

***Oranges.** As of March 1, U.S. orange production for the 1999-00 season was 12.8 million tons, up 3% from last month's forecast and up 29% from last season's freeze-damaged crop. Florida's all orange forecast was 226 million boxes (10.2 million tons), 3% higher than the February 1 forecast and 22% higher than the 186 million boxes (8.36 million tons) utilized last season. Early and midseason varieties in Florida are forecast at 134 million boxes (6.03 million tons), 6% higher than a month ago and 20% higher than last season. Florida's Valencia forecast of 92.0 million boxes (4.14 million tons) remains unchanged and is 25% higher than last season's final utilization.

***Grapefruit.** The March 1 forecast of the 1999-00 grapefruit crop for the United States remains unchanged at 2.47 million tons, representing a 2% decline from last season. The Florida all grapefruit forecast continues at 46.0 million boxes (1.96 million tons).

***Cattle.** March 1 **cattle on feed** in the U.S. feedlots with capacity of 1,000 or more totaled 11.33 million head, up 9% from a year earlier. February placements were up 4% from the previous year. Marketings of fed cattle were 12% above 1999. At mid-March, **prices** for choice steers (Nebraska direct, 1100-1300 pounds) averaged \$71 per cwt. Feeder steer prices (Oklahoma City, medium-large frame, 750-800 pounds) were around \$84 per cwt in mid-March, up \$1 from mid-February.

***Hogs.** During the first two weeks of March, slaughter has been running about 2-3% below a year ago. Prices at mid-March (Iowa-Southern Minnesota direct, 230-250 pounds) were around \$44 per cwt, up \$3 from mid-February. Second quarter prices are expected to average \$41 per cwt.

***Other Livestock.** February **milk production** was up 8.2% from the previous year. However, adjusting production for the additional day due to the leap year causes February milk production to be up 4.5% on a per day basis. Production per cow increased 7.2%, without adjusting for the extra day. **Cheddar cheese prices** (U.S. 40 pound blocks, wholesale) decreased 0.2 cent for the first week of March and 0.1 cent for the second week. During January, total **cheese** production was 6.5% above the previous year, **butter** production was up 14.0% and **nonfat dry milk** production was up 9.2%. Sheep slaughter totaled 282 thousand head, 5% above last year. The average live weight was 137 pounds, up 3 pounds from January a year ago. US table **egg production** during February 2000 totaled 5.63 billion, up 6% from 1999. Wholesale market **egg prices** for the first quarter of 2000 (Grade A large, New York) are expected to average 63-64 cents per dozen, compared with 75.0 cents a year ago. Second quarter 2000 egg prices are expected to average 54-56 cents per dozen, compared with 58.1 cents a year ago. **Broiler**-Type chicks hatched during February 2000 totaled 701 million, 6% more than last year. Cumulative broiler-type placements in 15 selected states for 2000 was 1.44 billion, 1% above a year ago. The wholesale 12 city average price for whole **broilers** for the first quarter of 2000 is expected to be 54-55 cents, compared to 58.1 cents for the first quarter of last year. Second quarter 2000 broiler prices are

expected to average 56-58 cents per pound, compared with the 58.6 cents for a year earlier. Cumulative **turkey poult placements** for the 2000 marketing year through February 2000 were 142 million, 2% more than the same period a year ago. Placements in February 2000, at 24.1 million, were 2% more than last February. Prices (8-16 lb. hens, Eastern Region) for the first quarter of 2000 are expected to be in the 62-63 cent range compared with 59.4 cents for the first quarter last year. Turkey prices for the second quarter of 2000 are expected to average 64-68 cents per pound, compared with the 65.8 cents average for the second quarter of 1999. **Supplies in refrigerated warehouses** at the end of February, 2000 compared with a year earlier were: total chicken, up 10%; turkey, down 7; pork, down 11; beef, up 7; and frozen orange juice, down 13%.

***Trade.** March U.S. **trade projections** for soybeans and cotton improved. Wheat, corn, rice, beef, pork, broilers, and turkeys were unchanged from February. March projections for the volume of exports for the 1999/2000 marketing year compared to 1998/1999 are: **wheat** up 1%; **corn** down 2%; **rice** up 1%; **soybeans** up 14%; **soybean meal** down 2%; **soybean oil** down 35%; and **cotton** up 50%. March projections for the volume of meat exports in calendar 2000 compared to 1999 are: **beef** down slightly; **pork** up 3%; **broilers** up 2%; and **turkeys** up 3%. The **U.S. trade** deficit for goods and services increased to \$28.0 billion in January, from a revised \$24.6 billion in December. The **U.S. agricultural trade** surplus was \$1.027 billion in January, compared with \$1.038 billion in December.

***Prices.** The rate of **inflation**, as monitored by the CPI for all urban consumers, increased 0.6% in February and has increased 3.2% over the last 12 months. The February **PPI** increased 1% in February, and has increased 4.0% for the 12-month period ending in February. The February **prime rate**, averaging 8.73%, was up from 8.50% in January. Compared to a year earlier, **feed** prices in February were unchanged; **feeder livestock and poultry** prices up 16%; **fertilizer** up 3%; **ag chemicals** down 1%; **farm machinery** down 1%; **seeds** down 2%; and **fuels** up 100%.

***World Weather and Crop Developments** (March 13-19). In the **United States**, a cold front produced moderate to heavy rainfall as it moved eastward from the western Gulf coast through the lower Mississippi Valley late in the week. The rainfall boosted soil moisture levels in southern and eastern parts of Texas and much of the Mississippi Delta region. Drought conditions continued in central Texas and the High Plains. In the Corn Belt, scattered, light precipitation moistened soils, but a dry weather pattern returned in the upper Mississippi Valley and northern Great Plains. Dry weather also returned to the Southwest and most of the Pacific Coast. Cool weather limited winter wheat growth in the central Great Plains, but soil moisture levels were adequate to sustain development. Despite the below-normal temperatures, winter wheat development was ahead of normal in Oklahoma and Kansas, where 60% and 13%, respectively, was jointing. In **EUROPE**, dry weather helped spring grain planting in England and France. Despite this dry weather, soil moisture remained adequate in southern England and northern France for winter grains in the tillering and jointing stages of development. Farther south, mainly dry, unseasonably warm weather continued across the Iberian peninsula, further reducing moisture supplies for jointing winter grains and recently planted corn, cotton, and sunflowers. In the former **Soviet Union** a series of storm systems brought unsettled weather to the region during the week. Rain and snow fell in the Baltics, Belarus, Ukraine, and southern Russia, increasing moisture reserves but hampering early-spring fieldwork. Seasonably cool weather prevailed over most areas, keeping winter grains dormant. In the **North China Plain**, seasonably warmer weather continued to promote winter wheat greening and early vegetative growth. Also, dry weather continued across the region, necessitating supplemental irrigation for wheat development. In southern **Brazil**, drier weather prevailed across Rio Grande do Sul and Parana, aiding maturing soybeans. Farther north in Mato Grosso do Sul, Mato Grosso, and Goias, moderate to heavy showers caused some soybean harvest delays. According to reports as of March 17, Brazilian soybeans were 14% harvested compared with the 5-year average of 22%. In **Australia**, somewhat drier weather returned to the eastern summer crop zones. No rain fell in southern Queensland, aiding maturing cotton and sorghum, and allowing a resumption in harvesting. Dry weather also dominated a broad area of northeastern New South Wales south of Darling Downs, but showers lingered in western growing areas of northern New South Wales.

***Other News.** The **U.S. farm real estate value**, including all land and buildings, **averaged \$1,050 per acre on January 1, 2000**, up 2.9% from January 1, 1999. The \$30 per acre increase continued the climb that began in 1987. However, the 2.9% increase is the smallest percentage gain since 1992. The overall increase was slowed by cropland values which rose only 2.1% during 1999 to a value of \$1,440 per acre. Pasture average value per acre for the U.S. increased 2.7%, with most States going up. During the 1990's the U.S. average farm real estate value increased 65% for an average of 6.5% a year. Overall conditions in the **farm economy** in early 2000 are largely a replay of last year. Markets for major commodities, particularly field crops, are very weak as supplies remain relatively large. Positive developments in U.S. agriculture this year include higher cattle and hog prices. The consumer **price index for all food** is expected to increase 2-3% in 2000, following a 2.1% increase in 1999, the smallest since 1992's 1.2% gain. U.S. certified **organic cropland** more than doubled during the 1990's, and two organic livestock sectors -- eggs and dairy-- grew even faster, according to a new study by USDA's Economic Research Service.

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