

"Aq Notes"

A SUMMARY OF NEWS, EVENTS AND FACTS FROM USDA



President Bush outlines farm bill parameters to NCBA—praises Secretary Veneman

"There's nobody more central to the American experience than the cowboy", President George W. Bush said to thunderous applause from more than 4,000 National Cattlemen's Beef Association members last Friday in Denver.

The President used the opportunity to highlight what he wants to see in the next farm bill and discussed issues important to farmers and ranchers including trade, homeland security, and economic recovery.

While urging the cattle industry to remain vigilant in the war against terrorism, President Bush said he wanted to "put the death tax to death," and said "we need your help in making sure the Senate and the House hears that the tax relief we passed last winter must be permanent." The President also called for passage of Trade Promotion Authority so that agriculture remains cornerstone of U.S. economic policy, not only at home, but internationally."

Central to the President's remarks, was his call for farm policies that "strengthen the farm economy over the long-run, policies that promote independence." The President called on Congress to pass a farm bill that also contains responsible loan rates; that promotes trade, establishes farm saving accounts and encourages good conservation practices.

Mindful of the ongoing debate on a new farm law, the President reiterated his support for \$73.5 billion in additional spending over 10 years but he said he wants the money spread "relatively" evenly over the decade.

Clearly at home with the crowd, the President lauded the "families who ranch our land" because of their "values of hard work, of faith and family...values that are incredibly important for our nation to uphold during a time of national testing."

The President praised Secretary Veneman for "her genuine concern about the farmers and ranchers of this country." The Secretary helped warm up the crowd with an anecdote from the early days of the war on terrorism. She recalled a story recently reported in the *Washington Post* of how Secret Service agents wanted the President to go down to the bunker for protection. He refused and instead said he was hungry and wanted a hamburger. "Now I don't know about you, but I take great comfort in the fact that we have a President in office - whether in good times or bad -- that looks to beef for comfort," Veneman said to sustained applause.

Joining the President for the event was the First Lady, Secretary Veneman, House Agriculture Committee Chairman Larry Combest (TX) and Senate Agriculture Committee members Pat Roberts (KS), Craig Thomas (WY) and Wayne Allard (CO). Other dignitaries included Senators Charles Grassley (IA), Bob Bennett and Orrin Hatch (UT), Colorado Governor Bill Owens, Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell and Rep. Tom Tancredo (CO).

For full text of remarks go to: www.usda.gov.

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President Bush talks with more than 4000 cattle producers at National Cattlemen's Beef Association Annual Convention in Colorado. Photo courtesy NCBA.  
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Upcoming Events With Secretary Veneman

2/12 -- Visit employees and meet with local farmers at USDA facilities in Kansas City, Missouri to discuss farm bill and agriculture issues.

2/13 – Testimony before the House Appropriations Committee on USDA FY2003 budget, Washington, DC.

2/17 – United Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Assn. Convention, Orlando, FL.

2/20 – Meeting with farmers in Fresno, California

2/21 – USDA Agricultural Outlook Forum, Wash., DC

2/22 – 2002 Commodity Classic, Nashville, TN

Quotables...

"Ann's doing a really good job for the country. You know, one of the things that concerned me a lot is to make sure that hoof and mouth never made it into our land. I've talked to Ann a lot about it. I said, whatever you do, you make sure we stop it. And she did, along with a lot of other good folks who work for the Agriculture Department. I'm proud of her efforts. I'm proud of her genuine concern about the farmers and ranchers of the country. And I appreciate her strong leadership..." *President Bush—Feb. 8 NCBA*

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"In these challenging times...as we stand united as one nation, with one voice, in a new struggle to secure our freedom, we must never forget the courage and sacrifice of those Americans for whom freedom and equality were hard-fought propositions, and at other times so elusive a dream..."  
*Secretary Veneman Feb. 5, Speaking at a USDA Black History Month Celebration*

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Senator Dick Durbin—"I am heartened by the fact that President Bush, in his budget message...has said that we will allow legal immigrants to receive food stamps. That is the right and humane thing to do. It is the right thing to do to make certain children are healthy..." Feb. 6—*upon passage of an amendment to the farm bill reinstating food stamp benefits for legal immigrants*

USDA FY2003 BUDGET PROTECTS FARM PROGRAM SPENDING

Reflecting commitments to fully fund farm safety net programs, protect the nation's food supply with new funds for homeland security and meat inspection and to bolster nutrition programs for low-income Americans, the \$74.4 billion budget proposed for USDA is \$11 billion more than the budget submitted by the President a year ago.

"This budget supports strong farm programs, helps protect the food supply and helps low-income Americans in need of assistance," Agriculture Secretary Veneman told reporters at a Feb. 4 briefing. "The budget specifically provides for an additional \$73.5 billion over 10 years to meet our commitment to a generous farm bill based on sound policy."

Other key aspects of the USDA budget include:

- \$146 million increase to protect the nation's food supply, strengthen food safety programs and support research activities. This is in addition to the \$328 million approved by the President in January for homeland security.
- The budget reflects the Administration's commitment to a nutrition safety net by including a record \$41 billion for nutrition assistance programs.
- Record funding for the Food Safety and Inspection Service at \$905 million a \$28 million increase above FY 2002.
- \$6.4 billion in spending for international trade programs, a \$50 million increase, designed to promote U.S. agricultural exports, develop long-term markets overseas and improve world food security.
- \$6.1 billion in spending for the Natural Resources & Environment Agencies.
- \$2.3 billion to support research programs in high priority areas.
- \$11.6 billion to support rural community development programs.

For full text of her remarks go to www.usda.gov/budget.



Secretary Veneman Continues "Heartland" Tour

In just the first six weeks of the new year, Secretary Veneman has hit the road talking to major agriculture groups, meeting with farmers and ranchers, and getting a first-hand look at farming operations around the country.

By the end of February, the Secretary will have visited twelve states on sixteen separate trips. She also visited England for an annual farming conference. The states include Massachusetts, Illinois, Missouri, Florida, Georgia, Texas, Ohio, Colorado, Utah, California, Louisiana and Tennessee. At almost every visit, the Secretary has met with local producers to discuss farm policy issues and toured farm facilities to get a first-hand look at operations. She also included 4-H and FFA students in her visits as part of her "Leaders of Tomorrow" mentor initiative. At her recent visit to Texas with Ag Commissioner Susan Combs, Veneman said, "It is really good to get out into the countryside and visit with America's farmers. We have the most innovative and efficient producers in the world and they contribute so much to our nation's economy. It's nice to see them and say thanks for all they do for our country."

Veneman/Zoellick Say China Situation "unacceptable"

In a joint statement issued last week following meetings by a U.S. delegation with Chinese officials on proposed regulations for biotech products, Secretary Veneman and U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick said, "China has not presented any science to support these regulations. As drafted, these regulations fail to provide a transparent and predictable framework for exporters and importers. The result could be a halt in exports of farm products. That is an unacceptable situation. A complete statement is at: www.usda.gov.