

"Ag Notes"

A SUMMARY OF NEWS, EVENTS AND FACTS FROM USDA

Bush Administration Urges Bipartisan

Consensus as Farm Bill moves to Conference

As the farm bill moves to Conference Committee, the Bush Administration urged quick action by conferees and a bipartisan consensus that produces a bill that meets the President's objectives.

Following passage of the Senate bill, Secretary Veneman said, "The President has outlined what he would like to see in a new farm bill. It is important to produce a conference bill that provides farmers a responsible safety net, promotes expanded trade, encourages improved conservation, establishes farm savings accounts and adheres to the budget agreement."

In a written statement, the President said, "I look forward to working with Conferees to produce a plan that will benefit farmers in the long-term..." But the President expressed concerns about the Senate bill saying, "this bill front-loads spending into the first five years, leaving vital programs underfunded in the years that follow."

The Secretary acknowledged the formidable task facing the Conference Committee. "Their work will significantly affect the viability of the farm sector for many years to come." Veneman pledged to continue to "work closely with members of Congress and the farm, commodity, conservation and nutrition communities for completion of a farm bill that the President can sign. USDA stands ready to ensure its timely and efficient implementation."

In recent weeks, USDA has been working to make sure systems are in place to implement the new farm law once it is passed. In a speech to the National Cotton Council and a meeting with USDA employees, Veneman said, "Implementing the new farm is a challenge in and of itself. That's why at USDA we are already working on our implementation plans. We want to make sure that we can implement a new farm bill quickly once the President signs it...moving this process ahead is a very big priority for us at USDA."

U.S. Rules in Favor of Wheat Producers in Dispute over Canadian Wheat Board

U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick announced Feb. 15 that the U.S. will pursue multiple avenues to seek relief for U.S. wheat farmers from the monopolistic trading practices of the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB).

Secretary Veneman applauded the announcement saying, "The findings from the Section 301 investigation clearly establish that the trade-distorting practices of the CWB and the country's restrictions on imports of wheat are detrimental to the U.S. wheat industry."

The North Dakota Wheat Commission filed a petition to begin the investigation in September 2000. Industry representatives praised the U.S. decision. As a result of the "affirmative finding" USTR will pursue a four-prong approach:

- USTR will examine filing a case against the CWB in the World Trade Organization (WTO).
- USTR will examine whether to file countervailing duty and anti-dumping petitions with the Department of Commerce and the International Trade Commission.
- USTR will investigate impediments of U.S. wheat exports to Canada while,
- Pursuing meaningful reform of state trading enterprises during the upcoming WTO agricultural trade negotiations.



Louisiana FFA and 4-H students introduce Secretary Veneman at press conference as part of Veneman's "Leaders of Tomorrow" initiative.

Upcoming Events With Secretary Veneman

2/20 – Joins Vice President Cheney for meetings with local farmers in Fresno, CA

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

2/22 – Speaks to 2002 Commodity Classic in Nashville, TN

2/24 – Attends various Governor's Association meetings, Washington, DC

2/25 – Attends National Association of State Departments of Agriculture meeting, Washington, DC

2/27 – Testifies before Senate Appropriations Committee, Washington, DC

2/28 – Attends National 4-H Congressional Dinner and Celebration, Washington, DC

Quotables...

"My comprehensive energy plan, the first energy plan that any administration has put out in a long period of time, provides \$4.6 billion over the next five years in clean energy tax incentives to encourage purchases of hybrid and fuel cell vehicles, to promote residential solar energy, and to reward investments in wind, solar and biomass energy production. And we will look for ways to increase the amount of carbon stored by America's farms and forests through a strong conservation title in the farm bill. I have asked Secretary Veneman to recommend new targeted incentives for landowners to increase carbon storage..." President Bush 2/14, Silver Spring, Md.



Secretary Veneman visits with Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison at National Cotton Council Meeting in Dallas, TX

"I was talking with some of you earlier today and they were telling me that they've heard some comments from those attending the convention that they were really excited that finally there's a member of the President's Cabinet, a Secretary, that exudes charm, magnetism, and is helping bridge the gender gap. I knew immediately that they were talking about Don Rumsfeld." Secretary Veneman, 2/11, joking with attendees at the National Cotton Council Convention, Dallas Texas

Recent Appointments at USDA: Secretary has made the following selections to fill key positions at USDA in recent weeks.

R. Mack Gray, Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment

Gray left retirement in January 2001 and has been acting in the position since then. The Texas native retired from the Soil Conservation Service, the predecessor of NRCS, in 1991 after 35 years of service.

Dr. Rodney J. Brown, Deputy Under Secretary for Research, Education and Economics

Brown will oversee agencies dedicated to agricultural research (ARS), extension (CSREES), economic research (ERS) and agricultural statistics (NASS). Most recently he served as senior program liaison between NASA and USDA.

James E. House, Director, Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization

House returns to this position, having previously served between 1991-93. He has also been an economic consultant.

Ellen Terpstra, Administrator, Foreign Agricultural Service

President and CEO of the USA Rice Federation, Terpstra's career has focused largely on international food and trade policy with stints at the Congressional Research Service and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative.

Ross Davidson, Administrator, Risk Management Agency

Davidson comes to the position of Administrator from USAA, a broad-based insurance company, where he was vice president for industry affairs and corporate finance.

John Surina, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration

A former director of USDA's Office of Ethics, Surina has held high-level positions at the Federal Election Commission and the Interstate Commerce Commission.

OTHER NEWS OF THE WEEK:

On Feb. 11—After attending the National Cotton Council meeting in Dallas, the Secretary met with rice farmers and USDA employees in Crowley, La. where she announced a \$3.5 million package of loans and grants aimed at improving community water and waste systems.

On Feb. 12--The Secretary met with more than 200 employees at the USDA complex in Kansas City, Mo. who have the responsibility of implementing a new farm bill. There she announced the advent of a common customer computer database--Service Center Information Management System--that will let farmers and rural residents complete paperwork via home computer. In a meeting with farmers, the Secretary also announced \$6.1 million in loans and grants to stimulate business development and improve airport security and electrical service in rural Missouri.

On Feb. 13—Secretary Veneman testified before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture about the President's proposed budget for fiscal year 2003. Complete testimony can be found at: www.usda.gov.

PREVIEW OF 78TH AGRICULTURAL OUTLOOK CONFERENCE

Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman will give the keynote address at USDA's Agricultural Outlook conference on Feb. 21. at 10:15 a.m. EST. The speech follows the 8:30 a.m. opening with USDA Chief Economist Keith Collins and USDA Under Secretary J.B. Penn, which will be web cast at www.usda.gov with a simultaneous audio bridge. At 10:45 a.m., a panel on biotech food convenes. It will include Under Secretary of State Allan P. Larson. For a complete listing of panels and discussion topics during the two-day agricultural conference, visit www.usda.gov/oc