

"Ag Notes"

A SUMMARY OF NEWS, EVENTS AND FACTS FROM USDA

4-H Leaders Visit DC for Centennial Celebrations

Young adults visited Washington from all parts of the United States last week as part of an extraordinary celebration of 100 years of 4-H in America. USDA Secretary Ann M. Veneman was among several agriculture leaders who took part in the two-day activities.

On Thursday evening, Veneman was the keynote speaker at the Congressional dinner where Senator Pat Roberts (KS), Congressman Collin Peterson (MN) and Congresswoman Eva Clayton (NC) also addressed the charged up crowd of more than 1000 students and 4-H alumni.

The Secretary shared her experiences as a 4-H'er and credited 4-H as preparing her for giving her first public speech as a teenager. "4-H is helping mold the next generation of Americans. That clover-leaf may be but decades-old, but it's an ideal that dates back to the very founding of our country...the enduring ideal that citizenship and community spirit is best derived from the cultivation of head, heart, hands and health."

Veneman praised the Congress, particularly those in attendance, for their continued support of 4-H programs saying, "Many members themselves grew up with 4-H and are here this evening to joins us in that support. This Administration will continue to promote these leadership programs and I know the Congress shares my enthusiasm in getting more young Americans involved in these terrific programs."

Veneman pledged to continue supporting youth leadership programs at USDA and discussed a new initiative she announced in January called "Leaders of Tomorrow" where the Secretary is participating in a speaking series this year, talking directly to agriculture students at universities and colleges throughout the country. Veneman is also serving as a mentor to 4-H and FFA students as she visits agricultural regions during her travels "We want to inspire the next generation by encouraging community involvement, careers in public service, and learning about agriculture, one of the most dynamic sectors of our economy," she said. **(CONTINUED, Page 3)**

Administration Fights to Protect US Poultry Exports

As the Administration was being praised by Congressional leaders for resolving a Japanese ban on imports of U.S. poultry, Russia announced plans to cut off its U.S. imports, claiming antibiotic concerns. Secretary Veneman and Trade Representative Robert Zoellick immediately responded, saying in a joint statement, "we know of no reason whatsoever that would justify a ban on our products."

Both Veneman and Zoellick had discussions with Russian officials to attempt to resolve the matter and announced a delegation would travel to Russia for discussions. "U.S. poultry and poultry product exports meet the highest safety standards in the world. We will work closely with Russian officials for continuance of trade based on fair and scientifically based standards," they said.

Earlier in the week, Japan announced it would resume imports of poultry. President Bush raised the issue with Prime Minister Koizumi during a state visit to Japan. Resolving the issue was a top priority for Secretary Veneman, who had a team of officials in Japan working to negotiate a settlement. Japan imposed the ban on Jan. 12 after a low-pathogenic avian flu virus was detected in isolated parts of Pennsylvania and Maine. Senators Tim Hutchinson (AR) and Zell Miller (GA) praised the Administration's efforts.



Secretary Ann M. Veneman visits with WGN's Orion Samuelson and 4-H leaders as USDA Deputy Communications Director Larry Quinn looks on.

Upcoming Events with Secretary Veneman:

3/05 – Opening Remarks, National Women's History Month Ceremony, USDA, Washington, DC

3/06 – Testify before the House Budget Committee, Washington, DC

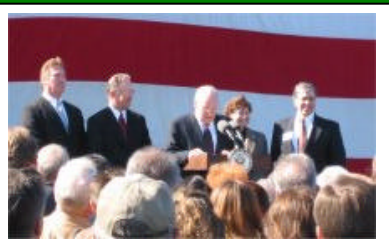
3/06 – Remarks, Susan B Komen Foundation Capitol Celebration, Washington, DC

3/08 – Remarks, National Arboretum 75th Anniversary Event with Senator Kit Bond, Washington, DC

Quotables...

“One, we need a good farm bill to help with jobs. Secondly, we’ve got to think about value-added processing when it comes to agriculture. I believe in ethanol. I believe ethanol is good for the quality of the air, I believe ethanol is important for the agricultural sector of our economy. I think it makes sense...And at the same time, we must open up markets for Iowa corn growers and soybean growers. When I was in China I spent a lot of time talking to the Chinese leadership saying, ‘buy those Iowa soybeans. You said you would do so. Open your markets...’”

*President George W. Bush,
Des Moines, Iowa 3/1*



*Vice President Cheney and
Secretary Veneman meet with
farmers in Fresno, Calif. on 2/20*

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“I salute the Bush Administration for its work in convincing Japan to comply with international standards and lift its unnecessary import restrictions. President Bush, Secretary Veneman and Trade Representative Zoellick have proven themselves effective advocates for U.S. poultry producers markets.”

*Sen. Tim Hutchinson—2/25*

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USDA’s Radio Newslines has the latest sound bites in broadcast quality – 202-488-8358

Veneman Completes Twelve-State “Heartland” Tour; \$52 Million Provided for Rural Programs

Meeting with farmers and ranchers about critical farm issues, discussing the Administration’s priorities for the coming year, which includes farm bill passage and implementation, homeland security, trade expansion, rural development and mentoring, were a part of Secretary Veneman’s agenda as she traveled to a dozen states on sixteen separate trips during the first weeks of the new year.

“We’ve had the opportunity to meet face to face with so many farmers and talk about the important issues facing our farm communities. We are going to continue these types of forums throughout the year.”

The Secretary visited Massachusetts, Illinois, Missouri, Florida, Georgia, Texas, Ohio, Colorado, Utah, California, Louisiana and Tennessee. At almost every visit, the Secretary met with local producers to discuss farm policy issues. Veneman joined President Bush in visits to Missouri, Illinois and Colorado. She joined Vice President Cheney in a farm event in California. Congressional members joined Veneman at many of the events.

The Secretary made several important announcements that will help America’s farmers and ranchers and discussed the Administration’s farm priorities in the coming year. In Texas, the Secretary announced that the President would seek \$146 million in new spending for homeland security in FY2003. In Georgia and Missouri, the Secretary announced measures the USDA is taking to prepare for farm bill implementation, including unveiling a new computer system to help farmers and ranchers receive services. In California, Veneman announced USDA had reached agreement to open the Australian market to table grapes, ending ten years of negotiations on the matter. In Tennessee, at the Commodity Classic, Veneman announced the U.S. would send a team of negotiators to China for further discussions on proposed biotechnology regulations. In Florida at the fruit and vegetable conference, the Secretary announced a newly created industry advisory committee and in Louisiana, she announced the selection of Ellen Terpstra, formerly from USA Rice, as the new Foreign Agricultural Service Administrator. While in Ohio, Veneman outlined a mentoring initiative called “Leaders of Tomorrow.” During many of the stops, the Secretary also announced funding projects to strengthen rural America, totaling more than \$50 million in new investments by the Administration. “These were very good trips. We gained a great deal of insight that will help as we continue to advance policies that help the American farmer and rancher,” said Veneman.

President Bush Establishes Klamath Working Group; Names Cabinet Officials to Spearhead Resolution

Due to a prolonged drought and complex federal and state legal issues that have made for difficult times in the Klamath River Basin, President Bush has established the Klamath River Basin Federal Working Group to address concerns raised by farmers, ranchers, fishermen, Tribes, and others affected by these difficult conditions. The President named Secretaries Norton, Veneman, and Evans, along with CEQ Chairman Connaughton, to devise a strategy on resolving the issue. Following the President’s announcement, Veneman said, “The issues facing our farmers and ranchers in the Klamath region are critical and we have worked hard to ensure quick distribution of emergency appropriations that have been provided to date. The President has been clear on his objectives regarding this matter. We will continue to work closely with Secretaries Evans and Norton, as well as CEQ Chairman Connaughton, in committing the necessary resources and expertise to address the concerns of farmers, ranchers, and other interested parties, in bringing about an equitable solution to this important issue.”



Secretary Veneman speaks to USDA's Agricultural Outlook Forum, 2/21

In Case You Missed It....

USDA ANNOUNCES EFFORTS TO IMPROVE CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO SUMMER FOOD PROGRAM

Secretary Ann M. Veneman announced efforts to improve access to USDA's Summer Food Service Program. FNS Undersecretary Eric M. Bost is heading up the effort that includes streamlining program management and operations by allowing school districts to apply for waivers through FY 2004; developing a comprehensive strategy to work more closely with potential community-based sponsors; and, forming new partnerships with food service organizations. "We are committed to the principle that no child be left behind so we are examining ways to make these programs more responsive to local needs," said Veneman.

For the latest news and information, visit USDA's website at www.usda.gov.

Farm Bill, Homeland Security & Trade Continue to be Top Priorities for Administration According to Veneman

In an address to the 78th annual Agricultural Outlook Forum, Secretary Veneman continued a long-standing tradition of previous Secretaries when she described the critical issues facing America's farm sector and laid out the Bush Administration's priorities.

"While the current climate for agriculture has been hampered by natural disasters and most recently have certainly been clouded by the events of September 11th, a slowing of the U.S. and world economy and continued slow growth and demand for some agriculture products, I do continue to be bullish on American agriculture," Veneman said. "I believe we're on the doorstep of a new era of resourcefulness and partnership in agriculture. Farmers, ranchers, processors, distributors, policy-makers, and many others are actively engaged in making American agriculture and our food system grow and thrive. We're working together to address the age-old and new issues facing producers."

The Secretary said the top issues in the coming year will be completing a new farm bill and ensuring quick and efficient implementation. As well, homeland security will continue to be of critical importance. "The events of September 11th have made us look even more closely at our ability to protect our food supply. We want to make sure that we have a strong system of checks and balances, and that we will be able to deal with any circumstance—deliberate or accidental."

Veneman also told the audience of more than 1,200 policy-makers, agri-businessmen, farmers and USDA employees that trade will continue to be prominent in the coming year. "We have to continue to open new markets and that means making sure that other countries live up to their trade obligations." She called biotechnology policy initiatives of the European Union, Japan and China "wrong-headed" and said they would "move free and open markets backward and would hurt U.S. farmers. Ever since "fast-track" authority expired in 1994, the U.S. has had to sit on the sidelines as other countries have shaped trade agreements beneficial to their industries."

The Secretary outlined several other areas of importance, and said the Bush Administration would continue to pursue policies that strengthen programs that support renewable energy sources through agriculture, conservation, biotechnology development, and food aid. Complete remarks and a fact sheet are available at www.usda.gov.

Veneman Makes Surprise Visit to 4-H Conference

(CONTINUED) On Friday, Veneman invited farm broadcaster Orion Samuelson and a group of 4-H students from Kansas, Florida and Minnesota to join her in USDA's radio studio for a 4-H tribute with America's farm broadcasters.

Brita Thomas, a 4-H'er from Minnesota talked about a community service project called "Happy Feet" that she helped start. "Happy Feet is a kid-to-kid charity, where we give shoes to those that can't afford it, and, you know, it's growing so big, and we've given so many shoes to those happy little faces, and it makes me feel good," she said. Marcus Cook, of Florida, said he helps tutor elementary students through his participation in 4-H. "It sends a rush of joy through me to help the younger kids with their learning and school work," he said.

On Friday afternoon, Secretary Veneman made a surprise visit to the convention site where the students were completing an intense discussion about national priorities. The Secretary visited with several student groups, listened to student discussions, answered questions, and took photographs with various state delegations. She praised the students for their dedication, hard work and commitment.