

USDA Announces Improvements To Livestock Mandatory Price Reporting

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The USDA announced recently a series of improvements to be made in USDA's Livestock Mandatory Price Reporting Program to ensure more accurate and complete collecting, disseminating and reporting of market data by the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS).

"The review by our team outlines several important measures that USDA will begin taking immediately to ensure the effectiveness and reliability of these programs," said USDA Secretary Ann M. Veneman. "It is important that we continue to build and maintain a system of checks and balances to prevent any potential error in reporting."

On May 18, Secretary Veneman assigned a team of experts to review the program after inaccurate reports for boxed beef carcass values were released during its first six weeks in operation. The team submitted its report, outlining key findings and recommendations as follows:

There was a programming error and inadequate testing done prior to and after April 2 to ensure accuracy of reports. To correct this, AMS will now parallel test the data to experience a wide range of reporting conditions; work with livestock/meat industry to develop realistic validation

data sets; use validation data sets to test any change in programming; test all changes on test systems and develop additional procedures to ensure correct input data.

The audit surveillance plan for ensuring the accuracy of data being submitted is behind schedule and needs improvement. To correct this, AMS will accelerate the audit process, change job hiring specifications, seek additional personnel details or utilize other agency personnel for audit purposes.

Confidentiality provisions are preventing release of a significant portion of information, and requires change. The Department will move forward on an alternative confidentiality standard to the 3/60 which will apply confidentiality standards to data collected over a multi-day period rather than the current several hour collection period.

Cow-calf operators and feedlots incurred financial losses totaling \$15-\$25 million, while losses to packers and futures traders are undetermined. Because producer losses are an indirect effect of the misreported data, loss estimates may vary widely, depending on assumptions used to develop the estimates. The review team found that USDA is not liable for any

losses incurred and has no authority to make compensation payments as a result of the misreported data. The review team did not recommend that USDA support legislation to provide payment to producers.

"The change in this reporting structure under the new law was a huge undertaking that fundamentally changed the reporting system," said USDA chief economist Keith Collins. "Through these recommendations, our dedicated team of employees will have more effective tools to ensure collectively the continued integrity of the system."

On April 2, AMS began collecting and disseminating livestock market information under the Livestock Mandatory Reporting Act of 1999. The new law required substantial changes to the reporting program, including nearly doubling the number of required reports and releasing reports in a more expeditious manner. Under the program, larger packers and importers are required to report to USDA the details of all transactions involving purchases of livestock and imported boxed lamb cuts, and the details of all transactions involving domestic and export sales of boxed beef cuts, sales of domestic and imported boxed lamb cuts, and sales of lamb carcasses.

ASA Seeks Conservation Legacy Awards Nominees

ST. LOUIS, Mo. — The American Soybean Association (ASA) is seeking nominees for the 2002 Conservation Legacy Awards. The Conservation Legacy Program is a national program designed to recognize the outstanding environmental and conservation achievements of U.S. soybean farmers. Along with ASA, the program is co-sponsored by Monsanto and Soybean Digest, an Intertec/Primedia publication.

A national selection committee, composed of soybean farmers, conservationists, and natural resource professionals, will evaluate all nominations based on each farmer's environmental and economic program.

One ASA member actively engaged in soybean production will be selected from each of the following four regions: western, southern, midwestern

and northeastern. One national winner will be selected from the regional winners, based on the nomination form and on-farm visits to each regional winner's farm.

All four regional winners and a spouse/guest will receive a trip to Commodity Classic, the annual joint convention of the American Soybean Association and National Corn Growers Association, Feb. 21-23, 2002, at the Opryland Hotel in Nashville, Tenn. The national winner will also receive a plaque and yard sign and will be featured in a special Soybean Digest article.

Nomination forms for the 2002 Conservation Legacy Awards program are available by calling (800) 688-7692 or on ASA's electronic community, www.SoyGrowers.com. Nominations should be returned to ASA by July 15.

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Berry Meeting Set for July 18

NEW EGYPT, New Jersey — Rutgers Cooperative Extension and the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Jersey are sponsoring a twilight meeting July 18 to demonstrate organic and sustainable production of blueberries and raspberries.

The event will be held at Emery's Berry Patch in New Egypt. Speakers will discuss variety selection, fertility, disease, insects and cultural practices for organic weed control.

The event will begin with a light supper at 5:15 p.m. The educational program will begin at 6 p.m.

Emery's Berry Patch is located on Long Swamp Road in New Egypt, just off of Route 539. To RSVP or for more information (including directions), call RCE of Monmouth County, 732-431-7260, or check the NOFA-NJ website at www.nofan-j.org. Pesticide credit application is pending.

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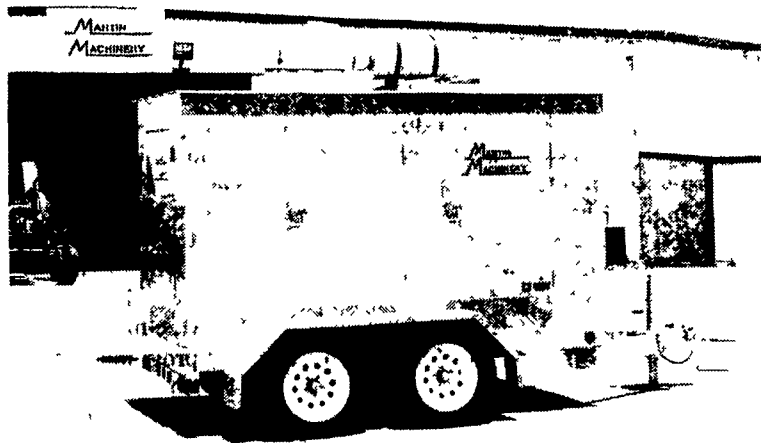
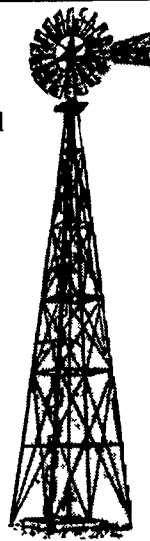
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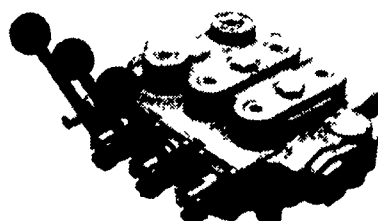
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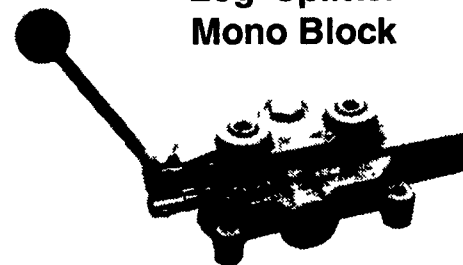
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