

Sec. Veneman Releases Report On Food And Agricultural Policy

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman released the Bush Administration's review of the food and agriculture system with a view toward identifying critical needs for the new century Sept. 19.

The report, "Food and Agricultural Policy: Taking Stock for the New Century," details the enormous changes that have taken place in agriculture which continue to accelerate across the American food and farm sector. Given the enormity and pace of change, the report recommends that policy makers take stock to examine past policies and programs and, where necessary, define anew goals and principles that can best guide the future growth and development of the farm, food and agriculture industry in the new century.

"Our challenge today is to address the vital forces of change while at the same time modernizing the foundations of our farm and food system to ensure continued growth and development for the 21st Century," said Veneman. "Farmers today oper-

ate in a global, technologically advanced, rapidly diversifying, highly competitive environment that is driven by increasingly sophisticated consumers. The various policies, programs, and supporting infrastructure that serve our food system will require updating to meet future needs."

The report recognizes that U.S. agriculture is driven by basically the same forces shaping the U.S. economy — globalization of markets and cultures; advances in information, biological and other technologies; and fundamental changes in the workforce and family structure. It examines the enormous changes faced by today's food and farm system as well as the lessons learned from more than seven decades of food and farm policies.

While describing the background of today's policies, the goals they were designed to serve, as well as the enormous changes that have occurred through the years of growth and development, it also suggests

that past policies designed for narrower purposes in an isolated economy simply cannot meet the current needs of our modern, rapidly expanding food and agricultural system.

The report offers a set of principles to guide policy development for trade, a farm safety net, system infrastructure, conservation and environment, rural communities, nutrition and food assistance, and program delivery. The following is a summary of the key principles:

- Farm policy and programs must be tailored to reflect wide differences among farms with respect to production costs, marketing approaches, management capabilities, and household goals.

- Farm policy, including providing a safety net, must promote more sustainable prosperity for farmers through market orientation without engendering long-term dependence on government support. This does not rule out helping farmers and ranchers when unexpected events beyond their

control occur and cause output or income to plummet.

- Trade policy must focus on gaining access to foreign markets through tariff reduction and the elimination of trade distorting subsidies and be supported by domestic policy that meets our existing international obligations and provides ample latitude to pursue ambitious goals in trade negotiations. Domestic farm policy must not inadvertently reduce competitiveness at the same time that trade policy seeks expanded export market opportunities for farmers. The infrastructure that supports market growth and efficiency, which includes everything from border inspection services to research endeavors, must be renewed and reoriented to fit today's realities, with input and cooperation from every link in the food chain.

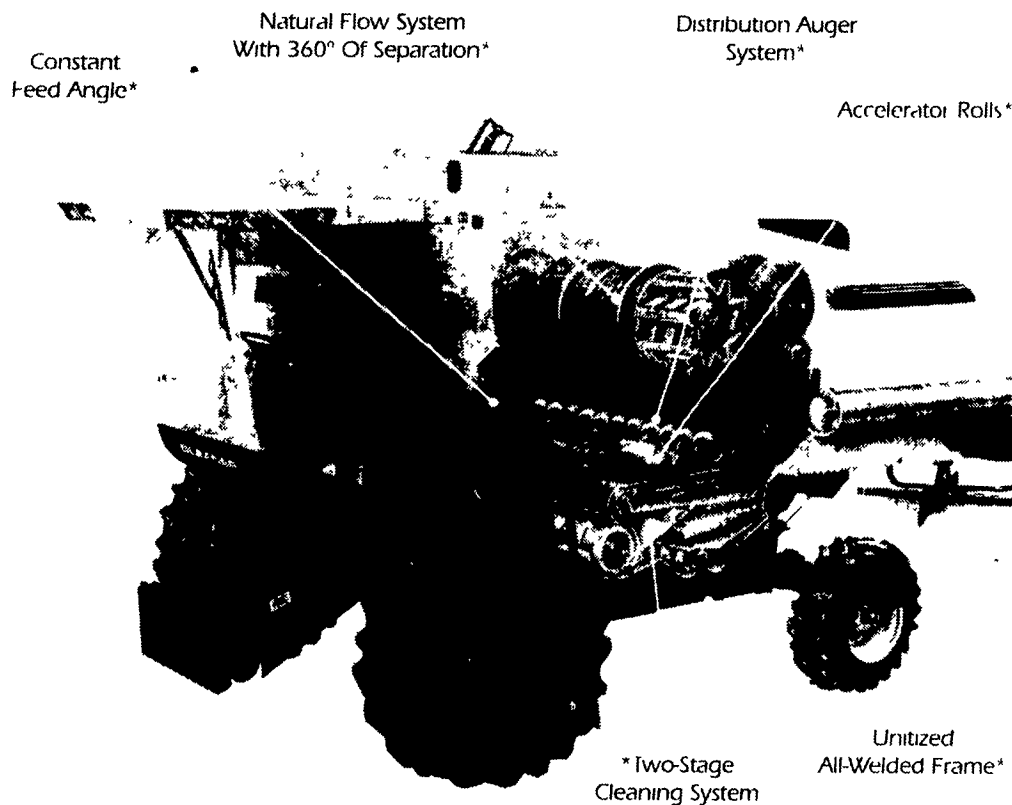
- Conservation policy must pursue a portfolio of instruments, including stewardship incentives on working farmland or retirement of environmen-

tally sensitive land to respond to Americans' growing expectations about agriculture's role in promoting and protecting environmental quality.

- A strong commitment to ensuring the access of all Americans to a healthy and nutritious food supply must continue, with particular attention to improvements in the delivery of food assistance to low-income families.

- Recognition of emerging diet quality issues is of paramount importance, as the nation's concern shifts from underconsumption and undernutrition to that of the proper variety and quantities of foods and nutrients that promote health and well-being. Rural America is diverse, and tailored policies must create conditions that will attract private investment, encourage the education of the rural labor force, and promote alternative uses of the natural resource base, including through development of renewable energy sources and carbon sequestration to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Systems must be integrated to assure coordinated and collaborative delivery of food and farm programs and to citizen access to public services.

"This report suggests that fundamental, far-reaching changes in policy, programs, procedures and institutions may be required to best prepare our farmers, ranchers and food industry as a whole for the new world marketplace," said Veneman. "It is this broader vision that we want to encourage and support, and to help bring into focus in the months and years ahead."



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