

Farmers Union Urges Completion Of New Farm Bill

WASHINGTON, D.C. — During a Capitol Hill news conference and in letters to senators, the National Farmers Union (NFU) board of directors recently urged farm bill completion to reduce the need for another year of emergency ad hoc programs.

"If a farm bill is delayed another year, producers will not only need to rely on emergency

economic assistance from Congress for 2002, but will also face the 2003 planting season with little certainty, since most producers will make planting decisions well before the end of the year — and before a farm bill will be enacted," stated the letter to senators signed by the 26-member NFU board.

The Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 provided no safety net for agricultural producers to cushion the erratic swings in the market. In answer to depressed commodity prices, declining market opportunities and increased production costs, Congress has approved billions of dollars in economic assistance for the past five years.

"Without an adequate farm program in place this year, Congress will again have to provide emergency economic assistance for farmers next year," said NFU President Leland Swenson. "Though desperately necessary to recover from economic losses, emergency payments provide little security for lenders when producers seek credit opportunities for future crops."

Swenson represented the NFU board at a Capitol Hill news conference at which Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle and Senate Agriculture Chairman Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, discussed the proposed farm bill. The NFU board was joined by representatives of American Farm Bureau Federation and 30 other farm groups.

USDA Announces \$384 Million In Funding

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman recently announced the release of more than \$384 million to 41 states and Puerto Rico to help rural communities improve public schools, invest in road improvement projects, and strengthen forest stewardship programs.

"Investing in schools and education, particularly in our rural communities, is a high priority for this Administration," said Veneman. "These funds will allow local communities valuable resources so they can determine their needs and make the proper investments to help our children and strengthen rural areas."

Veneman, who was joined by Sen. Larry Craig, Idaho; Sen. Ron Wyden, Ore.; and Sen. Gordon Smith, Ore., at a press conference announcing the funds, said many states will benefit from this program, which was authorized as part of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act. Oregon will receive \$154 million; California, \$65 million; Idaho, nearly \$23 million; and Washington, approximately \$44 million.

Veneman announced that over the next six years, USDA, through the Forest Service, will provide another \$1.1 billion for schools and rural communities in addition to the \$384 million released Thursday. These payments are the first issued under the new legislation, which returns dollars to states with national forests.

"This historic legislation helps provide important solutions to some of the challenges facing rural communities," she said. "States and local counties will make the decision on how the

dollars will be spent. For example, they can buy new books, repair or expand schools or hire more teachers to help improve the education opportunities for our nation's children."

Based on legislation passed in 1908, 25 percent of Forest Service revenues from timber sales, grazing, recreation, some mineral use fees and other land use receipts go to states that host national forests. However, the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 gave counties the option of staying with the traditional payment plan or choosing a predictable payment based on the average of the state's three highest payments between fiscal years 1986 and 1999.

Nationwide, counties have seen a significant drop in payments over the last decade under the traditional plan due to the significant decline in timber harvesting on national forests. The 2000 legislation stabilizes payment levels near to their historic high for six years. About 75 percent of the 700-plus counties elected to use the new formula, thus receiving increased funding.

In addition, the new legislation authorizes local resource advisory committees to give communities choice in funding forestry stewardship projects. To date, 49 resource advisory committees have been established.

Counties that receive \$100,000 or more under the new legislation are required to allocate 15 to 20 percent of their funding for investments in county projects or for forest projects that implement stewardship objectives to enhance forest ecosystems or both.

USDA Conservation Program To Protect N.Y. Drinking Water

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman recently announced that the USDA is partnering with the city of Syracuse, N.Y., to safeguard the city's drinking water through a \$900,000 Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.

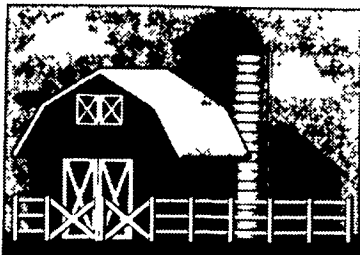
The program's focus is the Skaneateles Lake, one of the 11 Finger Lakes of central New York and the source of unfiltered drinking water for the 240,000 residents of Syracuse.

"This conservation program will preserve the lake's purity, benefiting local residents, tourists and the farming community," said Veneman.

The Syracuse CREP will pay farmers to remove from agricultural production up to 1,000 acres of cropland or marginal

pastureland that feed the lake. The program will reimburse producers for installing and restoring riparian buffers that keep sediment, nutrients and pollutants from entering the lake. The buffers will protect water quality and provide wildlife habitat for a wide array of wildlife species, like trout and pheasant. Through these and other efforts the city is taking, Syracuse hopes to be able to continue to comply with safe drinking water standards while avoiding building a costly filtration system.

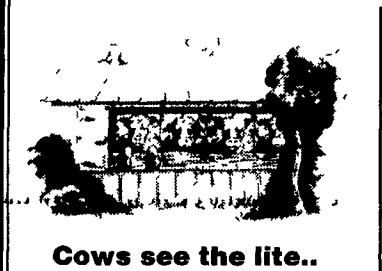
The total cost of the program is expected to reach \$900,000 over 15 years. Of that amount, \$650,000 will come from USDA and \$250,000 from the city of Syracuse.



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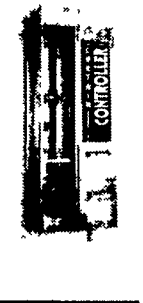


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