

MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY



The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is pleased to present the *Performance and Accountability Report for FY 2003*, which provides the results of our performance and financial management.

The report describes how USDA:

- Implemented the key provisions of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002;
- Assisted farmers and ranchers affected by severe weather conditions;
- Improved agricultural trade;
- Protected public safety, homes and resources during another severe wildland fire season;
- Supported the increased use of such renewable fuels as ethanol and biodiesel through research and incentives to spur production;
- Improved and expanded conservation programs;
- Spurred economic growth and created jobs in rural communities;
- Invested in electronic access to serve our customers better and be more efficient;
- Supported the creation of better community infrastructure, such as new water systems, hospitals, schools, housing projects and processing facilities;
- Provided food-program assistance to improve the health and nutrition of low-income people and children; and
- Protected the food and agriculture sector against intentional and accidental threats.

USDA managers have reviewed the quality of performance data included in the Annual Performance Report section of this document. Except for data limitations explicitly discussed, I hereby provide reasonable assurance that the data herein are valid and reliable.

This report satisfies reporting requirements of the Federal Managers' Financial Integrity Act (FMFIA). FMFIA ensures that Federal programs are operated efficiently, effectively and in compliance with relevant laws. Therefore, except for those areas for improvement identified in this document, USDA is providing reasonable assurance that our systems of internal control comply with FMFIA's objectives. FMFIA also requires financial systems to conform to certain standards, principles and other specifications to ensure timely, relevant and consistent financial information. Based on the work performed during FY 2003 and prior years, the Department's integrated financial-management system complies substantially with the objectives of FMFIA, with the exception of those financial system nonconformances identified in this report.

USDA, "the people's department," is improving the quality of life for all Americans. I am proud of our accomplishments and the employees responsible for these accomplishments.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Ann M. Veneman".

Ann M. Veneman
Secretary of Agriculture