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Issue Briefing Paper - FY 2004

1. Subject: USDA-REE Agricultural Water Security (Water Supply, Availability, Allocation, and Distribution Issues)

2. Nature and Background of Issue:
 - The National Research Council's report (NRC, June 2001) by the National Academies, "Envisioning the Agenda for Water Resources Research in the Twenty-First Century," acknowledged that "research occupies only a very small portion of the current water agenda." The report recommended that "Efforts should be made to invest relatively more in institutional research than has been the case in the past" and identified 43 research needs.
 - In 2003, Agriculture Secretary Veneman signed a memorandum of understanding with Interior Secretary Norton to address the growing crisis of water availability in the western United States.
 - The National Research Council refined its earlier report (NRC, June 2004) in a report entitled "Confronting the Nation's Water Problems: The Role of Research," and found that "Water resources research has remained relatively constant (around \$700 million in 2000 dollars) since the mid 1970s." This report stated "More specifically, over the last 30 years water resources research funding has decreased from 0.0156 percent to 0.0068 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP), while the portion of the federal budget devoted to water resources research has shrunk from 0.08 percent to 0.037 percent . The per capita spending on water resources research has fallen from \$3.33 in 1973 to \$2.40 in 2001."
 - In August 2004, the Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy (John H. Marburger, III) and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (Joshua B. Bolten) in a memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies emphasized certain areas of research and development of particular importance, including climate, water, and hydrogen fuel initiatives. The memorandum stated that "The ability to measure, monitor, and forecast the U.S. and global supplies of fresh water is another high -priority concern. Agencies, through the National Science and Technology Council (NSTC), should develop a coordinated, multi-year plan to improve research to understand the processes that control water availability and quality, and to collect and make available the data needed to ensure an adequate water supply for the Nation's future."
 - On September 9-10 2004, the USDA-Research Education, and Economic (REE) Agencies conducted an Agricultural Water Security Listening Session in Park City, Utah, to determine the relevance of current USDA-REE efforts and to develop the basis for an expanded research, education/extension, and economics program within USDA that takes full advantage of partnerships with other Federal and State Agencies. Approximately 90 representatives from federal and state agencies,

universities and colleges, non-profit and private sector firms and local municipalities participated in the listening session.

3. Outcomes:

- Six key topic areas were identified for REE involvement through the listening session: drought preparedness and mitigation, irrigation efficiency, general water conservation, urban and rural water reuse, biotechnology, and economics and water marketing.
- Participants in the listening session identified 19 “Bold Steps” that USDA and particularly the REE Mission Area could take to move closer to solutions for agricultural water security.
- A report summarizing the activities and findings of the listening session is being prepared and is expected to be available for comment in November, 2004.

4. Recommended Actions:

USDA:

- It is recommended that the USDA Working Group on Water Quality be reformulated as the USDA Working Group for Water Resources. This change will allow better coordination between USDA efforts on water quality and those on water quantity.
- It is recommended that Secretary Veneman reconvene the Interim National Drought Council (INDC) to explore how information from the Agricultural Water Security Listening Session can be used to better address national and international drought issues.

REE Mission Area:

- It is recommended that the REE Mission Area provide the leadership for USDA’s response to the soon to be released NRC report entitled "Confronting the Nation's Water Problems: The Role of Research."
- It is recommended that the REE Steering Committee for the Agricultural Water Security Listening Session continue to meet and coordinate appropriate information needed to complete the report from the listening session.

Agency Actions:

- CSREES will use outcomes from the listening session to identify opportunities to link water quantity and water quality issues in competitive grants programs to expand the knowledge base available on water resources.
- ARS will use outcomes from the listening session as input to the National Program Workshop (May 2005) for priority setting in the Water Quality and Management Program.
- NASS will collaborate with the newly formulated USDA Working Group for Water Resources and the INDC to identify necessary data needs on water issues and the associated budget proposals to provide the resources to fill data gaps.
- ERS will continue to partner with NASS in developing survey data to monitor the use of water as an input to agricultural production and to assess the adoption of irrigation technologies.