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USDA in Arizona: Progress Report on the First 100 Days

USDA Working to Foster Rural Economic Development, Provide Nutritious Food for all Americans

Albuquerque, NM - April 29, 2009 – On the 100th day of the Obama administration, USDA reflected on the new course it has set to promote a sustainable, safe, sufficient and nutritious food supply, to ensure that America leads the global fight against climate change, and to revitalize rural communities by expanding economic opportunities.

“In the first 100 days of this new Administration, USDA has moved quickly to respond to these difficult economic times by creating jobs, increasing food aid to those in need and revitalizing rural communities,” said Vilsack. “Over the next 100 days and beyond, we will continue our hard work to ensure that as an every day, every way Department, USDA helps our nation fight against climate change, provides a nutritious diet for all Americans and maintains a strong safety net for America’s farmers and ranchers.”

In Arizona, the USDA is working to live up to Secretary Vilsack’s expectations for focusing on conserving our natural resources and mitigating global warming. In the first 100 days, the Forest Service has distributed approximately \$4.35 million for Recovery Act projects. In Gila County, \$3.125 million has been distributed for the Rim Country Wildland Urban Interface hazardous fuels treatment project. Located on the Tonto National Forest, hazardous fuels reduction projects are underway in six areas along the Mogollon Rim which will reduce the risk of wildfire to 13 surrounding communities. The projects will provide for public safety, restore fire-adaptive ecosystems, and bring funds into the local communities.

An additional \$1.23 million has been distributed for reconstruction of the Hoyer Campground and roadwork on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest. The project provides jobs, improves recreational opportunities for visitors, and helps stimulate the local tourism economy.

Throughout the country USDA has taken swift action to implement the Farm Bill and the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009. These actions have resulted in bold new projects and initiatives that will spur rural economic activity and contribute to the nation’s overall financial health. Since January:

- USDA has distributed all of the nearly \$170 million in Recovery Act funding for direct farm operating loans. The funds went to 2,521 producers in 47 states and nearly 20 percent are going to socially disadvantaged producers.

- USDA has worked with state partners to increase Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits by \$80 each month for a family of four. Over the next two years, this benefit increase will create or save 100,000 jobs.
- USDA announced \$84.8 million in Recovery Act funding to improve water quality, increase water supply, decrease soil erosion, and improve fish and wildlife habitat in rural communities. And just yesterday, we announced more than \$600 million in funding to provide safe drinking water and improved wastewater treatment systems for rural towns in 34 states. These efforts will create jobs and revitalize rural communities.
- To make America a leader in the fight against climate change, Secretary Vilsack has worked in collaboration with the Department of Energy to make \$25 million available for research and development of technologies and processes to produce biofuels, bioenergy, and high-value biobased products.
- To ensure better health for America's children, USDA has updated the WIC program (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children) to begin distributing new food packages which for the first time include fruits and vegetables, whole grain products and reduced-fat dairy options.

Finally, USDA has kept faith with the American people by working to deliver a government that is open and transparent, responsive and accountable to the American people. In the first 100 days, USDA has cut waste and avoided unnecessary costs saving the American taxpayer tens of millions of dollars. Secretary Vilsack has also made civil rights a top priority, taking definitive action to improve the Department's record and to move USDA into a new era as a model employer and premier service provider.

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