



United States Department of Agriculture

# USDA Accomplishments 2009-2011

Secretary Tom Vilsack

## Agriculture

USDA works each day to strengthen American agriculture. Despite the difficult economic climate of the past years, USDA's efforts—coupled with the 2008 Farm Bill, the Recovery Act, and the entrepreneurial spirit of America's farmers and ranchers – are paving the way for American agriculture to lead the nation's recovery.

- American agriculture is a bright spot in our nation's economy. Since 2009, median farm family household income rose 4.9%. Farm sector earnings reached a nominal record with net farm income of \$100.9 billion for 2011. Agriculture exports reached record levels in 2011, continuing a year after year trade surplus.
- American agriculture is the second most productive sector of our nation's economy in the past decade. Agriculture accounts for 1 in 12 American jobs, provides American consumers with 86% of the food we consume, ensures that Americans spend less of their paychecks at the grocery store than most other countries, and supports homegrown renewable energy markets.

### Maintaining a Strong Safety Net for Farmers and Ranchers

- To help keep American agriculture profitable and keep farmers on the farm, USDA immediately responds to farmers affected by the disasters across the country, ranging from record floods, droughts and tropical storms.

- USDA's crop insurance program insures 264 million acres on about 500,000 farms. Over the past three years, USDA has paid out about \$16.2 billion in crop insurance indemnities to more than 325,000 farmers who lost crops due to natural disasters.
- Helped more than 250,000 farmers and ranchers suffering from severe drought and other natural disaster in business, providing assistance worth more than \$3.4 billion.
- In response to the tightening financial market, USDA has expanded the availability of farm credit, helping struggling farmers refinance loans. In the past three years, USDA provided 103,000 loans to family farmers totaling \$14.6 billion. Over 50 percent of the loans went to beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.
- USDA worked to combat and eliminate animal and plant diseases. For livestock producers, we helped rid Texas, and the nation, of swine brucellosis; reduced by 70% the incidence of a neurological disease in sheep and goats; and eliminated tuberculosis in cows in New Mexico and Minnesota. We helped farmers preserve their crops in the face of pests and disease: protecting California, Florida and Texas' multi-billion dollar grape, citrus and fruit industries by reducing and eliminating moths and fruit flies; opening export markets for New York and Idaho potatoes by eliminating nematodes; protecting the nation's wheat crop from fungal disease; and eliminating a virus to protect the stone fruit industry in Pennsylvania and Michigan.

## Streamlining Our Assistance, Saving Taxpayer Dollars

- Saved taxpayers \$4 billion by renegotiating contracts with private companies that deliver crop insurance programs to farmers and ranchers. USDA also released the Common Crop Policy that replaced five policies with three simplified versions.
- In 2011, proposed a new rule that cut by 70% the time it takes to announce a disaster declaration, speeding help to farmers and ranchers devastated by natural disasters.
- Established 15 common dates for farmers and ranchers to report acreage and crop data, reducing burdensome paperwork on producers and USDA costs. There had previously been more than 70 reporting dates.

## Boosting Competitiveness with Better Research and Predictable Access to Technology

- Teams of USDA scientists are announcing pioneering breakthroughs on drought-tolerant, heat-tolerant, and saline-resistant crops that enhance the competitiveness of American farmers in global trade.
- Science supported and conducted by USDA has cracked the genetic code of plants and animals, like apples, pigs, turkeys, and even a biofuels grass, to ensure American households have more abundant and nutritious food and home-grown affordable energy choices.
- To continue to promote a vision for American agriculture where all segments – including genetically engineered (GE), organic and non-GE – can co-exist and thrive, USDA has brought stakeholders together in an attempt to find common ground where the balanced interests of all sides can be advanced. We have revived a committee of outside experts to make recommendations on how best to move forward.

- While maintaining strong oversight to ensure the safety of GE products, we have cut the time it takes to consider petitions for use of GE crops in half, reducing to 13-16 months the potential adoption of new seeds that can deliver impressive yields with reduced inputs.

## Helping the Next Generation of Americans Get Their Start in Farming

- To raise a new generation of leaders for American agriculture, USDA provides affordable credit, including loans under the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Program, and Youth Loans via Extension and 4-H offices. In just the past two years, more than 40% of all FSA's farm loans went to beginning farmers and ranchers.
- Created an office specifically to reach new farmers, plus new grants that – in just two years – have supported education and training for 15,000 beginning farmers and ranchers.

## Connecting More Consumers with American Farmers

- Through the Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food initiative, USDA has eliminated longtime bureaucratic barriers to provide more effective support for producers and to expand markets with local and regional food systems, and keep wealth in rural communities. Local food sales were worth \$4.8 billion in 2008 and are on the rise.
- Programs like the Farmers Market Promotion Program and the Community Facilities Program helped drive a 54% increase in the number of farmers markets since 2008 to over 7,200. Direct farmer-to-consumer sales were worth \$1.2 billion in 2008 and are on the rise.

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