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USDA in California: Progress Report on the First 100 Days

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

Vallejo, Calif. - April 28, 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 California, 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 \$2 million of Recovery Act funds for capital improvement and building maintenance projects on the Angeles, Eldorado and San Bernardino National Forests. On the Angeles National Forest, the Los Angeles Conservation Corps has begun roofing and demolition work, with 15% of the project complete to date. Thus far, 10 young adults from inner city Los Angeles have been employed for the project. Aside from the paid employment, the youth are receiving on-the-job training from skilled, licensed contractors who are teaching them their trade.

On the Eldorado National Forest, a contract has been awarded to a small business owner for roofing work of the Placerville Work Center and the popular Echo Summit Ski Lodge. Because of this contract, the small business was able to rehire 80% of recently laid-off employees.

On the San Bernardino National Forest, a contract has been awarded to a Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business for energy retrofits on facilities. Outdated windows, heating and ventilation systems, and water systems will be replaced with energy efficient systems that will reduce energy consumption and reduce operating costs.

Another \$3.75 million of Recovery Act funds have been distributed for trail maintenance projects on the Angeles, San Bernardino and Sierra National Forests. Trail work includes providing for public safety by removing dangerous limbs and debris blocking trail access and creating erosion control features. The work is being done by youth initiative groups, once again offering job skills to young adults as they work to improve natural resources and restore wildlife habitats.

Across the Shasta-Trinity and Stanislaus National Forests, \$1.5 million of Recovery Act funds have been distributed for hazardous fuel reduction work which will provide for public safety and improve the health of forests. The Shasta-Trinity project is 25% complete and has employed 106 individuals in newly created jobs. The workers have been hired from economically distressed counties in Northern California and Southern Oregon.

On the Stanislaus National Forest, a contract has been awarded to a local small business for road maintenance. These roads lead to from the forest to Sierra Forest Products, a local small business sawmill located in Terra Bella. Transportation grant funds from the Recovery Act will be used to assist in the transport of small sawlogs from fuel reduction projects, thereby assisting the mill to retain local jobs. An additional \$2 million of Recovery Act funds have been distributed for road maintenance projects on the Cleveland, Six Rivers, Sierra, and Stanislaus National Forests.

In Fresno County, \$2.269 million of USDA Forest Service Recovery Act funds have been distributed for capital improvement projects in San Joaquin. Restoration and repair work to provide for safety and improved working conditions at the San Joaquin Experimental Range have been targeted for federal economic stimulus funds. The area is a focal point for the scientific community interested in the effects of climate change, and is one of California's rural communities hard hit by the economy. The restoration project will bring a historical structure back into use to accommodate research teams while generating local construction jobs.

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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