

USDA MARKS 75th ANNIVERSARY OF COOPERATIVE PROGRAMS

WASHINGTON, June 29, 2001— During a ceremony held yesterday, the U.S. Department of Agriculture recognized 75 years of providing research, education, information and technical assistance through Cooperative Services programs. USDA Secretary Ann M. Veneman was joined by former Secretary Earl Butz, as well as employees, former Administrators and other invited guests, for the event.

“Our mission provides some valuable tools in the food and agriculture industry’s toolbox to help them better compete in today’s changing food system,” said Veneman. “Seventy-five years after its creation, Cooperative Services recognizes these changes, and our employees are playing a major role in helping promote the opportunities that lie ahead in what promises to be a world of opportunity.”

There are about 3,500 farmer-owned agricultural cooperatives in the nation today, which record about \$72 billion per year in sales of crops and livestock and about \$23 billion in farm supply sales. Co-ops help members market their products and, increasingly, add value to the products through further processing, as well as helping members obtain farm supplies and services at fair prices. Utility cooperatives use the same principles to bring quality electrical and telecommunications services to many rural and urban parts of the nation.

"From input supply co-ops to operations that market crops or livestock, co-ops benefit not only family farmers, but the communities in which they live and do business," said Jim Barr, Nebraska state director for USDA Rural Development. "We're proud of the role USDA has played in helping Nebraska farmers and ranchers get a better deal. USDA will continue doing its best to promote new co-ops and support the ones we already have."

Earlier this week USDA announced 28 grants totaling almost \$10 million to promote development of value-added products. Nearly 25 percent of the grants were targeted to finding new energy solutions by utilizing raw agricultural commodities. A large majority of the grant recipients were cooperatives.

“We need to continue to think creatively to meet the challenges of this new marketplace in terms of how cooperatives operate,” Veneman said. “This can be done by providing the kind of flexibility in our programs that embrace the changing structure of agriculture to ensure the services we deliver are moving our customers forward in this new century.”

For more information about USDA’s efforts to assist cooperatives, visit the USDA Rural Development web site at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov>. In Nebraska, contact Debra Yocum at 402-223-3125, debra.yocum@ne.usda.gov, USDA Rural Development 201 N. 25 Street Beatrice, NE 68310; Mary Gambill, 308-534-2360, mary.gambill@ne.usda.gov, USDA Rural Development 1202 S. Cottonwood North Platte, NE 69101; Jim Crandall, 308-995-3889, crandall3@unl.edu, Nebraska Cooperative Development Center 11854 730 Road Holdrege, NE 68949.

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