{As Prepared for Delivery}

Farm Bill Forum
Bangor, Maine
Tuesday, October 11, 2005

Thomas C. Dorr
Under Secretary for Rural Development
Opening Remarks

Thank you, Lou *[McNally, moderator]***, for that kind introduction, and thank you, Dana** *[4-H leader; leading Pledge of Allegiance]***, for helping us kick off this event today. And thanks to all of you for coming. Good afternoon.**

I'm here as part of an effort by President Bush and Secretary Johanns to open a broad national discussion on the next Farm Bill. A new Farm Bill comes along every five years, so this is an opportunity we don't have too often. At the President's direction, we're getting a two year head start on the next one. We're taking the time to get this right.

That begins with inviting the broadest possible input from people all across the country, because none of us has a monopoly on good ideas.

Before we're finished, a Listening Forum similar to this will be held in most if not all of the 50 States. You can find the transcripts on the web at USDA.gov. They're right on our home page so they're easy to find.

I can tell you that this conversation is a personal priority for President Bush. He's on a temporary tour of duty in Washington, D.C., but as you know, he makes his home on a ranch in Crawford, Texas. The vitality of American agriculture and the quality of life in rural communities aren't hypotheticals for him, or for any of us either.

There are a lot of issues we can tackle today. Obviously the world is changing. The next Farm Bill needs to take account of those changes.

We're concerned about a support system that is fair to producers, that keeps us competitive in global markets, and works for the next generation. We're especially concerned about the ability of young farmers to get started and expand their operations if they do well.

We're concerned about the quality of life in rural communities, about their ability to offer opportunities to young families. When I graduated

from college, I was one of the few in my class to go back home and farm. That's still an issue today. If a young person chases his dreams to the other ends of the earth, that's fine. But if a young person would like to stay in the community in which he was raised but simply can't find a reasonable job, that's a problem.

And I might add, if your son or daughter would like to come back home to a rural community -- but that significant other they met in college takes one look and says "You've got to be kidding" – that's a quality of life issue too.

So there are many, many issues. We're concerned about energy and America's excessive dependence on imported oil. At the same time, energy is turning into America's newest cash crop. Ethanol and biodiesel are taking off. Wind, biomass, and solar are growing. These are opportunities, and the Farm Bill needs to consider how we're going to move this process along.

95% of the world's population lives abroad. Those people are potential customers as well as competitors. Trade has been a big winner for

American agriculture for many years, and the next Farm Bill needs to keep it that way.

Conservation is an important issue. We have made enormous progress over the last 30 years cleaning up our air and water. There's always more to be done, and environmental stewardship has to be an important part of farm policy.

And last but not least, there has been a real paradigm shift over the last generation. We now recognize the need for an integrated, forward looking policy on rural development – not just a farm policy. 96% of the income in rural counties today comes from non-farm sources. Most farm families depend on non-farm income.

The quality of life and economic vitality of rural communities depends on infrastructure, affordable housing, access to broadband and full participation in the knowledge based industries of the future. These are key Farm Bill issues as well.

Bottom line, this is a great time to live and work and raise a family in rural America. I'm all over the country at Rural Development related events -- it may be cutting the ribbon on a rural hospital, or a groundbreaking for a new industrial park or business incubator, or the dedication of a self-help housing project, or just about anything else you can imagine.

And everywhere I go, I meet people who are seizing opportunities. I meet people who have done the city thing and decided to come back for a better quality of life, especially for their kids. I meet young people who want to remain in rural areas if we can provide economic opportunities for the next generation.

These are the issues we're here to address today. This is <u>your</u> show. I look forward to sitting back and listening to your ideas, priorities, and concerns. So thank you very much for being here today, and for your participation in this very important discussion. Thank you.