



USDA Official Discusses Priorities

September 16, 2009

At a meeting of the Washington Ag Roundtable on Sept. 15, the Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) presented “USDA’s Expanding and Changing Agenda.”

USDA Deputy Secretary Kathleen A. Merrigan discussed USDA’s current operations and outlined its future role in U.S. and international affairs. Merrigan outlined the following four priorities for USDA under the Obama Administration.

1. **Creating Wealth in Rural America** - Included in this effort is assisting rural areas with acquiring broadband internet service, benefiting from offsets under climate change mitigation programs, and promotion of local and regional food systems. Another focus discussed was consolidation of rural development efforts to ensure that programs are appropriately targeted instead of only providing “a dab here and there but not enough.”
2. **Addressing Climate Change** - In addition to creating opportunities for farms and ranches to benefit under climate change programs, the Deputy Secretary also discussed efforts to transition away from fossil fuels, including biofuel production and improved on-farm efficiency.
3. **Sustainable Production** - Systems should be promoted which include both biotech and non-biotech production, according to Merrigan. USDA will promote science in international discussions to ensure that other countries understand our production systems and accept our products in international trade. Co-existence between organic and traditional production will be promoted to ensure that commingling of production does not result in lost markets for organic production.
4. **Safe and Nutritious Food Supply** – While most of the focus of food safety discussions is on the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), efforts are under way to improve coordination between FDA and USDA for a unified message and approach. Additionally, both hunger and childhood obesity will require significant focus from USDA. While the two issues may seem at odds, Deputy Secretary Merrigan expressed that the crux of both issues is appropriate placement and use of resources. To address obesity, USDA will focus on proper dietary guidelines and food labeling.

Deputy Secretary Merrigan previously served as Administrator of the Agricultural Marketing Service at USDA, Senior Staff Member of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, and most recently as Assistant Professor and Director

of Tufts University's Friedman School of Nutrition, Forestry and Environment. She also served as an expert consultant to the Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome.

The Washington Ag Roundtable, of which AFTC is a member, is a group of leaders in agricultural policy from various public and private commodity and food organizations based in Washington, DC.