

NEWS

First of Its Kind — FSA Ships Seeds to Russia

The port at Norfolk, Va. was recently the scene of a first in modern times — American seeds were shipped from there to Russia. Pea seeds from the Pacific Northwest made up the initial shipment of food aid donated to Russia. The 48 containers of seeds, loaded aboard the vessel “Sea Lion,” arrived in St. Petersburg on March 11.

You may ask, “And what does FSA have to do with this?” Quite a lot, as FSA’s Commodity Operations purchased and exported the seeds. Vicki Hicks, Deputy Administrator for Commodity Operations, heads up the “purchasing arm” of USDA, buying commodities such as vegetable oil, flour, dairy products, and peanut butter for overseas food aid and school lunch programs throughout the U.S.

FSA got involved with food aid for Russia because many basic commodities in that country are in very short supply. The Russian farmers had a tough year in 1998. Inadequate moisture in some areas and too much rain in others produced a harvest that was Russia’s worst in 40 years. Even in good harvest years, Russia imports up to 40 percent of its food needs. Because of the bad crop year, the food items that are available in Russia have become unbearably expensive for ordinary Russians, especially after the ruble’s 70 percent devaluation last August.

Our seed shipment to Russia is a unique project for USDA. We purchased 1,000 metric tons of vegetable seeds, as well as 14,000 metric tons of yellow corn seed. We shipped pea seeds first because they can be planted earlier than other seeds. After the pea seed shipment, FSA sent corn, beet, and onion seeds to St. Petersburg for distribution to both state and private farmers. Hopefully, this will enable them to produce their own crops this year to augment what we’ll be shipping later on.

In addition to the seeds, Commodity Operations will be purchasing over a million and a half metric tons of U.S. wheat, along with other products, for the Russia food aid program. This is good timing for U.S. wheat farmers who are anticipating a very large wheat crop later this spring and early summer. U.S. farmers directly benefit from removing excess products from our markets and shipping them overseas. Anytime we have surplus wheat, for instance, the excess in our



photo by Jeff Jackson

Jerry Cornell of the Bulk Grain Division in FSA’s Kansas City Commodity Office displays the pea seeds. Cornell was the contracting officer who purchased the seeds for Russia.

*See **RUSSIA**, continued on page 3*

ADMINISTRATOR'S COLUMN

To the Rescue

A recent Associated Press article pointed out something FSA people have known for quite a while: Our county offices have more work than they can handle. The article said some offices "...are running weeks and even months behind in processing requests for loan deficiency payments....A survey of county offices last December found serious morale problems, stress, delays in payments and a tremendous amount of time worked without pay."

We do know that we have more work than we can reasonably deal with. It's also true that a lot of our employees are over-stressed and working late trying to help farmers.

So what can we do to fix things? Well, like the cavalry in the Old West, help may be on the way. But before I get to that, let me express my thanks once again to each and every one of you for

the work you have done these past months. We have processed billions of dollars for farmers, much more than in recent years, and have done so with a lot fewer people.

How things have changed! In 1993, FSA had about 22,500 employees, almost 15,000 of those in county offices. Today, we have only about 16,545, with 10,700 in county offices. And although our numbers have dropped by almost a third, our workload has increased tremendously, particularly this last year.

For the record, this is some of what FSA employees have accomplished in spite of everything:

- Within 10 working days of the signing of the supplemental appropriations bill in November 1998, you began making payments to farmers. By November 21, we had paid 1.4 million farmers more than \$2.8 billion.
- Two weeks after we announced the Livestock Assistance Program on November 12, 1998, we began accepting applications. We estimate that by the time we finish this program, the \$200 million Congress appropriated for assistance will be heavily oversubscribed. Thus, USDA will be able to pay only a portion of the total request.
- In December 1998, hog prices dropped to their lowest levels since the Depression. FSA responded by administering a special project to pay small hog producers a total of \$50 million.
- We have just announced our honey and mohair loan programs.
- The application period for the Crop Loss Disaster Assistance Program (CLDAP) payments runs until April 9, and we expect payments to be made in June. This project hasn't been easy either, because we had to develop software from scratch. Unlike previous programs, we're doing most of the paperwork ourselves, freeing the farmer from this burden. So, while at some offices it has taken longer than we would have liked to distribute the \$2 billion in payments under the CLDAP, the delays are not without good reason.

And while you've been implementing these new programs, your regular work continued, drawing historic levels of participation:

- You just finished the most recent signup for the Conservation Reserve Program, with farmers offering 7.1 million acres and USDA accepting about 5 million acres.
- We have processed four times the usual number of farm credit applications.
- By the end of calendar year 1998, we had paid \$1 billion in fiscal year 1999 production flexibility contract (PFC) payments that farmers elected to take early, as provided for in the emergency Farm Financial Relief Act. As of March 1, 1999, the total had risen to \$3.7 billion, or 66 percent of all available PFC payments authorized for 1999.

FSA News

is published monthly in the interest of all FSA employees.

Editor: Jillene Johnson
Editorial Board: Janet Baker,
Star Bryant, Dann Stuart,
Steve Thompson.

Reporters: FSA employees.

Readers are encouraged to contribute stories, photos, and suggestions. Send materials to the Editorial Board at:

FSA Public Affairs Staff
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Stop 0506
Washington, DC 20250-0506

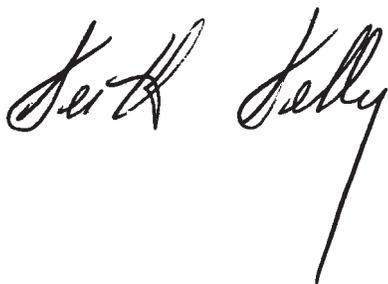
RUSSIA

continued from front page

- We have also witnessed a phenomenal explosion in demand for marketing assistance loans, loan deficiency payments (LDP), and marketing loan gains (MLG), putting enormous burdens on all of you. By way of comparison, for 1997 crops USDA paid about \$160 million to farmers and ranchers for LDPs and MLGs. For 1998, LDPs and MLGs are currently at \$2.3 billion, and we expect that total to climb to \$3.2 billion before the season ends. We expect to issue about \$5.3 billion in LDPs and MLGs in 1999, 65 percent more than in 1998.

Earlier, I said the cavalry may be coming. Let me explain. The President, Secretary Glickman, and I are all working hard to get additional funds from Congress to help us get through our current workload. Some of the money, if appropriated, would be used to hire thousands of temporary workers, bringing welcome relief to many offices. Also, because our projections show that we will run out of portions of farm loan funding authority this month, we've asked for an additional one billion dollars in loan funds, a 30 percent increase over last year.

While you've been hard at work at your jobs, we want you to know that we haven't been neglecting ours, doing our best to get you the tools and resources you need. With everything you've accomplished, you deserve nothing less.




FOOD FACT:

The top ten foods found most frequently in American kitchens are:

Ketchup
Mustard
Vegetable oil
Cinnamon
Margarine
Spaghetti
Seasoned salt
Chili powder
Potatoes
Soy sauce (more people have soy sauce in their kitchen than have tea, coffee, milk, or salsa)

Source: Wellesley College

market depresses prices. Removing the surpluses by exporting food shores up prices in this country, while providing humanitarian assistance to those in need overseas.

This first seed shipment is the beginning of a winning situation for all involved. We're helping the Russians who have found themselves in a dire situation. Also, it's a business opportunity for U.S. seed trade with Russia, as prior to now the U.S. did not export many seeds there. As the U.S. has some of the best seeds in the world, this program will help the American seed trade industry get a foot in the door of market development.

These shipments are part of the ongoing export food assistance programs under which this year we will be shipping over 300,000 million pounds of food weekly to more than 100 countries. Hicks says, "These shipments fit the classic American tradition of helping a neighbor in need, while supporting U.S. producers. Everybody wins."

Where To From Here?

by USDA Secretary Dan Glickman

This year National Agriculture Day came at a pretty tumultuous time for the men and women of American agriculture. While the general economy is humming along with the longest peacetime expansion in the Nation's history — low inflation, low interest rates, 18 million new jobs since 1993, record home ownership, a budget surplus — the situation is quite the opposite for the farm economy.

There are many reasons why agriculture is in distress. Three years of record crop production around the world has created greater competition for American agriculture than we've ever seen before and led to over supplies that drag down prices. The Asian financial crisis has left some of our farmers' best customers broke, unable to buy from us, adding to our oversupply problems. Ironically, technology, that has been a boon to the farm economy, is currently a drag because the increased productivity it has created is outpacing demand. Add to this economic uncertainty the drastic cuts in the basic farm safety net brought about by the 1996 farm bill, and you have farmers and ranchers cast into these turbulent seas without much of a life preserver.

Many still raise the question, how much should we be doing to help the American farmer and how much should they be left to their own devices and fate? Agriculture is a unique business. Many factors beyond the farmers' control determine success or failure — weather, perishable goods, and a volatile global economy among them. Even as we move to a more market-oriented farm policy, we cannot forget we are dealing with a basic human need — food. I believe we have a responsibility to those willing to engage in the backbreaking, risky business of farming to make sure they

have a fighting chance to stay on the land, become prosperous, and ensure America's continued bounty.

At the Department of Agriculture, we've pulled out all the stops and I have been using all the tools I have to help our farmers and ranchers. From relaxing our credit requirements, to buying more beef and pork for donation to our feeding programs, to increasing humanitarian aid overseas, I am doing all that the law allows. However, I believe our farmers and ranchers deserve more.

Just look at what the men and women of American agriculture have achieved in the last century. One hundred years ago, well over 40 percent of the population worked on farms. Today less than 2 percent do, allowing the rest of us to pursue other work without having to worry about producing our own food. Moreover, we spend less than 8 cents of each dollar for the food we eat at home. By comparison, the English pay over 11 cents, the French double what we pay, the Japanese a little more than 17 cents, the Swiss almost 25 cents, and the Indians and Filipinos over 50 cents.

Our farmers and ranchers are so good at keeping our supermarket bins full, too many of us have become complacent, easily overlooking the emergency in farm country. But the crisis is very real. And its significance goes beyond the immediate struggles of farmers. It also underscores the fundamental flaws and vulnerabilities in the structure of agriculture.

We've moved beyond the old price support system to a new structure based on free markets. But events of the recent past have clearly shown the new approach is not adequate in protecting farmers when times are tough and the problems are bigger than any



farmer can handle. If we are to ensure their viability and profitability, then we must adapt to the new century, not by going back to the old ways which we've outgrown, but by developing practical solutions suited to today's global economy. Anybody and everybody with an interest in agriculture needs to come to the table, set their differences aside and provide a structure for agriculture that farmers, ranchers, and the rest of the American people can count on. We need to address everything from concentration to contracting, from trade to technology, from small farms to sustainable agriculture.

And, most of all, it is our responsibility to create a safety net that helps protect hardworking farmers and ranchers; a safety net that allows them to do the important work of feeding this Nation and much of the world, with the knowledge that some of their downside is protected. That has been a core American principle since Franklin Roosevelt was President, and it remains so today.

Bill Waggener Memorial — Field of Dreams

Bill Waggener, Director of FSA's Appeals and Litigation Staff, who died last October from brain cancer, was passionate about baseball. He was not only enthusiastic about his favorite pro team, the New York Mets, but he also coached Little League for his sons in Stafford, Va.

Bill's friends and family have come up with the best way to remember him — by renovating a baseball field at Hampton Oaks Elementary School, where his sons attend school. Al-

though it will take a while to raise funds and finish the field, the Bill Waggener Memorial Baseball Field will be dedicated on April 25, with a marker recalling his spirit of dedication and love of the game.

Bill passionately coached for several years, and continued to do so as long as he could, even while undergoing radiation and chemotherapy treatments. The refurbished baseball field, with a sprinkler system, fences, dug-outs, and new sod, will be a fitting tribute for Bill. There's still a lot to be

done, though, and getting funding is just the beginning.

If you'd like to be part of this effort by donating money, make your check payable to the Bill Waggener Memorial Baseball Field Fund. Mail checks to the Hampton Oaks Elementary School, ATTN: Waggener Baseball Field Fund, 107 North Hampton Blvd., Stafford, Va. 22554. Those wishing to donate goods or services to the effort may write to the same address. All donations are tax-deductible.

The following poem was written by Enid Mortland, mother of Carma Reiss, an employee of the Benton County FSA Office in Vinton, Iowa. Last fall, during the busy loan deficiency payment signup period, three FSA employees there adopted the "Take Your Daughters to Work Day" concept and modified it to "Take Your Mothers to Work." The employees and CED Calvin Rickels gratefully accepted help from the ladies, who graciously volunteered to send to producers the state's newsletter, which included LDP signup information.

Has Beens Called to Duty

by Enid Mortland

*Three ladies met at Vinton FSA
To help their daughters, for a day.*

*They folded, stuffed and applied the labels
Three old ladies — but very able.*

*To prove that THEY, without a doubt
Could get those producers' newsletters out.*

*They chatted, joked....new friends to make
Too energetic to take a break.*

*Calvin, daughters and others dropped by
To keep their table in good supply.*

*They kept saying, "We're glad you're here"
Yes, three old ladies, happy to volunteer!*



photo by Carma Reiss

Left to right: Enid Mortland, mother of employee Carma Reiss; Bonnie Poldberg, mother of employee Trice Smith; and Gertrude Janett, mother of employee Paulette Henkle.

Gleaning Apples With Help From Prison Inmates

by Randal Croniser, CED, Wayne County, N.Y.

As part of the Wayne County FSA Office's ongoing gleaning efforts, late last year we helped salvage 300,000 pounds of apples for donation to senior care facilities and food pantries. For labor to pick and sort the fruit, we used a novel approach, as inmates from two New York prisons helped out. This gleaning effort partnered FSA with the New York State Department of Corrections, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and a New York gleaning program called Franklin County ComLinks.

The donation idea started after our county was hit by a patch of severe weather. Labor Day was especially bad, with high winds, hail, and rainstorms. Our county's abundant apple orchards suffered major damage as trees were whipped around, some even being uprooted. The farmers were left with bruised apples on their trees and other apples scattered on the grounds of their orchards. Many apples were too damaged for fresh fruit sales. This, coupled with a saturated processing market and an economically unfavorable juice market, made it clear that many apples would not be harvested. Our county office and other organizations stepped in to salvage the fruit.

FSA located farmers willing to donate damaged apples by publicizing the project in our county newsletter and at meetings with fruit farmers who were seeking Federal aid for crop damage. Our employees also asked individual farmers as they came into our office to report crop losses.

The Youngman Brothers Farm was a major apple contributor. The Youngmans' 500-acre Empire apple farm was hit hard, as the weather

damaged more than 2,000 trees, or about one-third of their crop. "We were hit by hail at least three times last year," Dallas Youngman said. The Labor Day storm especially battered their apples.

Since we needed a lot of people to help pick and sort the Youngmans' apples, the ComLinks organization suggested using prison inmates, as ComLinks has a good relationship with the correctional facilities in our area. Thirty inmates from the local Butler Correctional Facility picked \$200,000 worth of apples, being careful not to damage the trees. They collected only those apples that were of a high enough quality to be eaten fresh. Franklin County trucked the 20 bushel boxes full of apples to the Gouverneur Correctional Facility where inmates sorted and bagged them. We also located other apples that were already picked and sent these to the prison for sorting as well.

The apples were delivered to state food pantries and to other states along the East Coast, then into the hands of the needy. The Youngmans benefitted by getting a return to healthy orchards cleared of damaged fruit. They also wanted something good to come of their crop loss. "Farmers just don't like to see anything go to waste," Dallas Youngman said.



photos by Bill Huff

Inmates from Butler Correctional Facility enjoyed the sunshine as they assisted a good cause.



Agricultural Careers Hold Promise for At-Risk Youths

by Outreach Programs Staff

Over 125 rural at-risk high school students from Mound Bayou in North Bolivar County, Miss. recently participated in an agricultural career awareness program. FSA and Alcorn State University jointly funded the project.

Mound Bayou is an historic town nestled in the center of the Mississippi Delta. As the town has few job opportunities, its youth population has little to look forward to, other than low-skill jobs that offer minimal pay. This lack of promise has led to high youth unemployment, a raise in delinquency, and a general sense of hopelessness.

The county is agrarian, with an aging, predominately African-American population. The main crops are sweet potatoes, peppers, and peanuts. As the aging farmers have no one to replace them, the Sweet Potato Growers Association Cooperative of North Bolivar, the North Bolivar County Development Corporation, and Alcorn State University decided to coordinate efforts to help out. They proposed to enhance youth awareness of the many agricultural career opportunities available in the county. In March 1998, the group submitted a proposal for funding to the FSA Outreach Programs Staff, who approved the proposal for \$40,000 the following month.

Program coordinators used cooperative studies, career awareness seminars, study tours, mentoring, and hands-on experiences to expose the youths to a comprehensive array of agricultural careers. Students learned from professional agriculturists from several universities and got the chance to meet Congressman Bennie Thompson, the students' congressional representative.



William Patton (left), Agronomy Specialist from Alcorn State University, and students prepare to plant peanuts in Patton's peanut demonstration project.

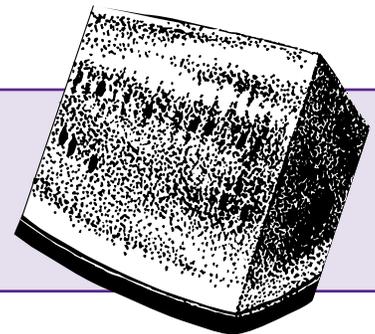
Willie Mae Sims, Program Coordinator, reports that the program was a great success. In fact, several seniors at J. F. Kennedy High School in Mound Bayou aspire to participate in the National Scholars Program with the intent of pursuing academic careers in agriculture.

A former student from the county who participated in a similar FSA funded program admits to having felt unmotivated and headed for failure prior to the program. That student is currently a successful second-year student majoring in Horticulture Science at Alcorn State University.

FOOD FACT:

They have square watermelons in Japan... they stack better.

Source: *Only Gourmet*





DOWN

1. _____ jubilee
2. FSA predecessor
3. This state's state tree is the ponderosa pine, often used for constructing houses, ships, and furniture
4. FSA producer payments
5. Rural; agricultural
6. Ham _____
8. Found just below the surface soil
11. FSA predecessor
14. Some kinds of this starchy root contain substances used to make drugs such as cortisone
17. "_____ your vegetables"
19. This state leads the Nation in cash receipts of tomatoes and lettuce

ACROSS

4. One way to extract the sugar from sugar beets is to _____ water through them
7. This 1862 Act made public lands in the West available to settlers without payment
9. USDA agency that provides crop insurance
10. A makeshift ladder for Jack
12. The SED of this state is David Warrington
13. An _____ winter freezes crops
15. USDA agency that helps with legal issues
16. Oil makes up about half the flesh of this fruit (yes, it's a fruit!)
18. The SED of this state is Laurie Lawson
20. A soil _____ tells you the makeup of your cropland dirt
21. This tiny pest might fly around your livestock

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Location	Event
April 16	Pierre, S.D.	Carolyn Cooksie, Deputy Administrator for Farm Loan Programs, to attend First Dakota Bank Agriculture Conference
April 16-20	Costa Mesa, Calif.	Vicki Hicks, Deputy Administrator for Commodity Operations, to attend American Commodity Distribution Association Annual National Conference
April 19-20	Annapolis, Md.	Jim Kearney, Associate Administrator, to attend Partnership Council Roundtable
April 22		Earth Day
April 30		National Arbor Day

Note: The above is subject to change.