

NEWS

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GLICKMAN RECEIVES NATIONAL STRATEGY TO ASSIST SMALL FARMS

Pledges Rapid Response To Recommendations

WASHINGTON, Jan. 22, 1998--Today, Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman received "A Time To Act," a report by the National Commission on Small Farms which Glickman appointed in July of 1997. The report contains a comprehensive set of 146 recommendations to improve USDA's service to small and beginning farmers, including credit, risk management, research, education, rural development, marketing, and outreach.

As part of his continuing efforts to expand opportunities for small and limited resource farmers, Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman named a Small Farm Action Team, led by Deputy Secretary Richard Rominger, to develop an integrated strategy to assist small farmers in response to the recommendations of the National Commission on Small Farms.

Glickman said, "USDA is poised to act quickly and decisively on this report, which highlights the many serious challenges that face our nation's small farmers. This Administration will not stand by and watch hard working family farmers relegated to a footnote in a history book.

"With its comprehensive nature, the report makes clear that small farmers have a variety of needs that must be addressed for them to be successful, ranging from conservation assistance or risk management, to business planning for a farmers market or farmer owned cooperative or market development for new crops or products. The fundamental challenge, then, is to deliver a comprehensive package of information and assistance to help small farmers not only survive, but expand," Glickman said.

"I am pleased that USDA is already implementing some of the recommendations of the Commission," Glickman said, noting that the Administration's Fiscal Year 1999 budget will seek full funding for USDA's direct farm ownership and operating loan programs as well as full funding for USDA's outreach program. "But there is more work to be done, and I am committed to continuing our efforts to help America's small family farmers thrive into the 21st century.

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“We must right the wrong of the 1996 Farm Bill which categorically declared that every farmer who has ever had a debt right-down is ineligible for USDA loans. That’s a stricter standard than private lenders use. It’s wrong. And, the longer we take to fix it, the more good people lose their land. I will expeditiously send to Congress emergency legislation to address this problem,” added Glickman.

The 30-member commission was formed by Glickman in July, 1997, in response to recommendations made by the USDA Civil Rights Action Team (CRAT). Former Congressman Harold Volkmer led the commission’s efforts to study means of assuring the survival of America’s small farms. It is the first time USDA has undertaken an in-depth examination of the needs of America’s small farmers.

Highlights from the commission report include recommendations to:

- Initiate a new Beginning Farmer Development Program which creates training and assistance centers for beginning farmers in partnership with community-based nonprofits, land-grant universities, and the private sector. This program will provide farm management training and long-term support through mentoring programs;
- Develop a small farm research initiative which focuses on promoting less capital intensive technologies and practices to improve the competitiveness and profitability of small farmers;
- Create an interagency initiative to promote and expand local and regional food marketing opportunities for the benefit of small farmers, rural communities, and low-income families in rural and urban areas, including expanding the use of cooperatives as a business vehicle for small farmers; and
- Launch a Small Farm Entrepreneurial Development Initiative to provide small and beginning farmers with entrepreneurial training, technical assistance, and priority program funding for the purpose of developing farmer owned and operated marketing enterprises.

Volkmer said, “Our nation’s economic foundation is built on the backs of America’s small farmers. Their survival and success is not only important to their families, but to consumers, rural communities, the environment, and the global economy.”

For a copy of the National Commission on Small Farms report to the Secretary, check the USDA Web site at: www.usda.gov/news/news.htm, or contact commission staff director Jennifer Yezak Molen at: smallfarm@usda.gov; telephone (202) 720-0122; or write to National Commission on Small Farms, P.O. Box 2890, Washington, D.C. 20013.

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