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Sec. Vilsack launches multi-media report on USDA performance

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In true Obama administration style, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack took government transparency to a new level Wednesday morning with a multi-media "Progress Report" on what his Department of Agriculture has accomplished in its first 100 days. Before the media issued its own assessments of administration accomplishments, in a teleconference, new interactive web site, and blog-format report with photos, Vilsack concluded that USDA is "working to revitalize rural America" and to provide a "safe and nutritious food supply."

To check up on how USDA is spending \$28 billion in Recovery Act funds to revitalize the rural economy, broken down by state, by USDA agency, or by cost, go to: <http://origin.www.usda.gov/recovery/map/>, with additional details at www.USDA.gov/recovery.

To read the USDA's full 14-page of "Progress Report, with photos, go to: http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/?navid=USDA_100DAY. The report concludes that USDA has set a new course "to promote a sustainable, safe, sufficient and nutritious food supply, to ensure that America leads the global fight against climate change, and to revitalize rural communities by expanding economic opportunities."

As an example of how USDA's interactive www.USDA.gov/recovery web site works, using the map to click on South Dakota shows that as of Wednesday morning, \$29,740,059 has been allocated for 36 projects or programs in South Dakota. Clicking on Indiana shows \$80,191,818.43 allocated for 9 projects or programs – including a \$112,500 direct farm operating loan in New Castle. The beauty of the interactive site is that there are links to click to leave your comment about any project or program – or to read comments submitted by others.

In his Wednesday morning comments, Vilsack said that "In the first 100 days of this new administration, USDA has moved quickly to respond to these difficult economic times by creating jobs, increasing food aid to those in need, and revitalizing rural communities. Over the next 100 days and beyond, we will continue our hard work to ensure that as an 'every-day, every-way Department,' USDA helps our nation fight climate change,

provides a nutritious diet for all Americans and maintains a strong safety net for America's farmers and ranchers.”

Specifically, the USDA report card notes that:

- USDA has distributed all of the nearly \$170 million in Recovery Act funding for direct farm operating loans. The funds went to 2,521 producers in 47 states and nearly 20 percent are going to socially disadvantaged producers.
- USDA has worked with state partners to increase Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits by \$80 each month for a family of four. Over the next two years, this benefit increase will create or save 100,000 jobs.
- USDA announced \$84.8 million in Recovery Act funding to improve water quality, increase water supply, decrease soil erosion, and improve fish and wildlife habitat in rural communities.
- To make America a leader in the fight against climate change, USDA and the Energy Department are providing \$25 million for research and development of technologies and processes to produce biofuels, bioenergy, and high-value biobased products.
- To ensure better health for America's children, USDA has updated the WIC program (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children) to begin distributing new food packages which for the first time include fruits and vegetables, whole grain products and reduced-fat dairy options.
- In the first 100 days, USDA has cut waste and avoided unnecessary costs, saving the American taxpayer tens of millions of dollars by finding efficiencies in programs and administrative processes.
- Secretary Vilsack has also made civil rights a top priority, taking definitive action to improve the Department's record and to move USDA into a new era as a model employer and premier service provider. Last week he announced a temporary suspension of all foreclosures within the Farm Service Agency's farm loan program for 90 days to provide the opportunity to review the loan granting process for possible discriminatory conduct. Vilsack has also ordered an external analysis of program delivery in USDA's field offices to get specific recommendations as to how we can provide services equitably.