

AGRICULTURAL OUTLOOK FORUM 2000

FEBRUARY 24, 2000

ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA -
REMARKS BY DEPUTY SECRETARY RICH ROMINGER

Good morning, and welcome to the 76th agricultural outlook forum. I'm Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Rich Rominger. We're delighted to have with us more than 100 distinguished speakers and panelists and equally delighted to have such a large and distinguished audience. Last year, we hosted a record 1200 participants, and we expect to top that record this week. I want to acknowledge our international guests, farmers in the audience, and representatives from throughout industry and academia.

We're all here to shed light on prospects for this great industry. As always, we aim to do it in the most comprehensive way possible. Two years ago, we noted that U.S. agriculture was rushing into a time of radical change. Last year, we portrayed a contemporary agriculture in flux and built much of the outlook program around producer ingenuity in adapting to agriculture's structural changes and their need for market information.

Conditions aren't any more certain this year, with a prolonged price slump continuing to grip commodity markets. The outlook forecasts at this meeting will

clarify what's ahead for farmers, for farm commodity prices, and Rural America.

To counter historically low farm prices and establish assistance mechanisms that will be there for farmers *before* an emergency, the Administration has proposed new safety net legislation. Keynote speaker Secretary Dan Glickman will discuss the need to get out ahead of ad hoc emergency assistance. He will explain the philosophy and outline the main points guiding the Administration's approach to farm policy and new legislation in the year 2002.

Chief Economist Keith Collins and Under Secretary Gus Schumacher will lead off a first assessment of how next year's crops and livestock output are likely to shape up. We'll provide longer-term commodity projections to get a better sense of agriculture into the next decade.

Experts will consider the post-Seattle outlook for the WTO negotiations, the benefits of China's accession to the WTO, and growth and opportunity in Africa.

We've structured this year's conference to build on a theme sounded last year. The business of agriculture is changing fast, reshaped by technology, the industrialization of farming, and by mergers. We'll

examine the underlying structural changes -
concentration, consolidation, and antitrust issues.
Speakers will look at questions raised by biotechnology
for the marketing chain.

We're honored to have William Lesher of Lesher and
Russell as our featured speaker this evening. Bill will
offer some political insight into the business of
agriculture. Please join us at the Forum Dinner at 6:30.

And now, to give his thoughts on the new safety net
proposal and the future of farm policy, it's my privilege
to introduce an individual I've had the pleasure of
working with for the past five years. I want to say at
this last Outlook Conference of this Administration that
Secretary Dan Glickman is among the most effective
administrators and decisive leaders I've known. And I'm
not the only one thinking this way. The Secretary
recently got high praise from Capitol Hill. He's steering
American agriculture through some tough times. He's no
arms-length policymaker. He has a rare capacity not only
for absorbing the details of the issues, but the human
implications that make the issues complex and urgent. If
it involves a USDA constituency, it's front-burner. From
the environment to the microbe - conservation to food

safety -- he's elevated issues, promoted national understanding, urged debate, and gotten results.

Although we came from different places, we get along great.

We're in complete sync on protecting the health of our resources, as we are on defeating hunger in America, and providing our producers every opportunity through the soundest possible safety net and stronger avenues of trade.

A former representative from the state of Kansas, Secretary Glickman was instrumental in drafting the last six farm bills. The year 2002 farm legislation is the seventh to benefit from his thoughts, which he'll share with us this morning. Ladies and gentlemen, my colleague and friend Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman.