

## **Introduction**

- Several topics I'd like to talk about today – Farm Bill, trade with Japan, WTO, avian flu, animal ID – but before I do, let me touch on a subject people always ask about.... progress in Iraq.

## **Iraq & Agriculture**

- We are helping the Iraqi people build a lasting democracy that is peaceful and prosperous – one that will never again be a safe haven for terrorists, and will serve as a model for freedom in the broader Middle East.
- But significant challenges remain to overcome the devastation at the hands of Saddam Hussein – including the damage done to Iraqi agriculture.
- Last November, Secretary Johanns had a chance to visit with Iraq's Minister of Agriculture and was impressed by his optimism. The Minister described the 30 years of neglect suffered by the agriculture sector. During Saddam's reign, Iraqi agricultural scientists were unable to do such basic things as receive academic journals on agricultural research.

## **The President's Strategy**

- But revitalization is underway. President Bush has a clear strategy for victory in Iraq structured along three tracks – political, economic and security – to assist Iraqis in establishing a government that provides for and is accountable to its people.
- As he said, this strategy “incorporates every aspect of American power, with assistance from agencies across the federal government.”
- USDA is one of those agencies—we've had a continuous presence in Iraq since the first USDA advisor to the Ministry of Agriculture arrived in Baghdad in 2003.

## **What USDA is Doing in Iraq**

- USDA is providing ongoing support to the new Iraqi Government in its efforts to reconnect with the US agricultural community and meet commercial food import needs. The Iraqis have also discussed specific products, like tomatoes, which they are anxious to export into the world community.
- Initially, we donated millions of dollars worth of food, and now we are using our *programs* to move their agriculture sector forward. Under the Food for Progress Program, for example, funds generated from the sale of U.S. donated corn and soybean meal is being used by the U.S. Grains Council as loan guarantees to provide much needed working capital to Iraqi farmers.

### TRANSITION EXAMPLE 1: Internal Civil Rights Remarks

I'm here to talk about civil rights, which is one of the fundamental tenets of a democracy. In the United States, a democracy that has been evolving for two hundred and thirty years, we are still conscious of our shortcomings, and still working to become a more perfect union, with true equality for all of our citizens.

So before I begin talking about the civil rights climate at USDA, I'd like to address the situation in another nation that is just now forging the path to democracy.

The citizens of Iraq have a long road ahead as they determine what democracy will mean for their nation. Since democracy is by definition created by and for the people, it looks different in every nation, because it must be based on that nation's unique history and circumstances. The journey towards democracy may be difficult, but it will be worthwhile for the Iraqi people.

The President has a clear strategy for victory in Iraq structured along three tracks – political, economic and security – to assist Iraqis in establishing a government that provides for and is accountable to its people. As the President's National Strategy for Victory explained, this approach "incorporates every aspect of American power, with assistance from agencies across the federal government."

USDA is one of those agencies – we've had a continuous presence in Iraq since the first USDA advisor to the Ministry of Agriculture arrived in Baghdad in 2003. We are providing ongoing support to the new Iraqi Government in its efforts to reconnect with the US agricultural community. US agriculture is re-establishing its role in helping Iraq meet commercial food import needs as well as re-establishing professional agribusiness contacts between the two countries. We approved a \$5 million Food for Progress Program to revitalize Iraq's poultry sector -- funds generated from the sale of US donated corn and soybean meal will help develop this private sector loan program and provide much needed working capital to Iraq's poultry producers. USDA is actively engaged in helping the Iraqi people build a lasting democracy that is peaceful and prosperous – one that will never again be a safe haven for terrorists and will serve as a model for freedom throughout the Middle East.

We're also very busy domestically, as you know. Every day of the school year, USDA provides lunches for 29 million children. We are the stewards of our nation's 192 million acres of national forests and rangelands. We bring housing, telecommunications, and safe drinking water to millions of Americans living in rural areas. And we ensure that our food supply is safe and plentiful. None of this productivity would be possible without the dedicated efforts of the 100,000 employees working for USDA...

### TRANSITION EXAMPLE 2: Risk Management Remarks

I'm looking forward to walking through the exhibit hall after our breakfast this morning, and seeing all of your agricultural products and services displayed in such abundance. American agriculture had a great year in 2005, as events like this demonstrate.

But before I begin discussing the productivity of American agriculture, I'd like to take a moment to talk about a nation that is just now beginning to rebuild its own agricultural production.

Iraq is part of the 'fertile crescent' of Mesopotamia. It is there, in around 8,500 to 8,000 BC, that mankind first domesticated wheat, there that agriculture was born. In recent years however, the

birthplace of farming has been in trouble. Last November I had a chance to visit with Iraq's Minister of Agriculture. I was impressed by his optimism even as he described the 30 years of neglect suffered by the agriculture sector. During Saddam Hussein's reign, Iraqi agricultural scientists were unable to do such basic things as receive academic journals on agricultural research.

But revitalization is underway. President Bush has a clear strategy for victory in Iraq structured along three tracks – political, economic and security – to assist Iraqis in establishing a government that provides for and is accountable to its people. As he said, this strategy “incorporates every aspect of American power, with assistance from agencies across the federal government.”

USDA is one of those agencies—we've had a continuous presence in Iraq since the first USDA advisor to the Ministry of Agriculture arrived in Baghdad in 2003. We initially donated millions of dollars worth of food, and now we have moved to using our programs to drive their agriculture sector forward. A \$5 million Food for Progress donation is currently helping Iraq's poultry sector. Funds generated from the sale of U.S. corn and soybean meal are being used as loan guarantees to provide much needed working capital to Iraqi farmers. The Iraqis are excited about the opportunity to apply new farming techniques and utilize products that increase quality and yields.

As you are well aware, agriculture is the heart and soul of a nation and its importance should not be underestimated in the Iraqis' efforts to build a strong, self-sustaining democracy. USDA is proud to assist them in their efforts by helping to open new doors to agricultural development.

In America, we are fortunate enough to have a healthy agricultural industry that is able to provide plentiful food to sustain our nation. We are able to produce with enough abundance to export across the globe, in fact...

#### TRANSITION EXAMPLE 3: Food Aid Remarks

This year, Food for Progress is funding 38 programs. They'll reach out to vulnerable populations ... to farmers ... and agribusinesses with technical assistance, infrastructure, and other development activities. This \$250 million investment will help recipients build a sustainable future.

Thanks to the work of PVOs like Visions in Action, Techno Serve, and the World Council of Credit Unions, the program is helping farmers in Liberia, Honduras, and Sri Lanka. And USDA-donated corn and soybean meal is now helping to revitalize the Iraqi poultry industry.

This is the kind of work that rebuilds livelihoods, lives, and nations. And it contributes to the U.S. efforts in the Global War on Terror. USDA has a role in the President's National Strategy for Victory in Iraq that includes assistance to Iraqi agriculture ... and, through agriculture, to the Iraqi people ... by creating jobs and providing a healthy food supply.

What we're doing, ladies and gentlemen, is helping the Iraqi people build a lasting democracy that is peaceful and prosperous and that will serve as a model for freedom in the broader Middle East. I want to mention that in our audience today we have – for the first time ever -- guests from Northern Iraq. It was my privilege yesterday to meet with these three distinguished individuals.

USDA and USAID are also working to leverage food aid with other developmental and health resources...