USDA - An Every Way, Every Day Department

When President Abraham Lincoln founded the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1862, he called it "The People's Department." Back then, most Americans farmed and lived on farms. Today, with dramatic increases in productivity across the entire agriculture sector, farmers and ranchers account for only a small percentage of our population. Between 1950 and 2010, corn yields per acre have quadrupled and cotton yields have tripled, soy yields have doubled, and wheat yields are up 280%.

USDA touches the lives of every American, as well as people across the globe. We promote a sustainable, safe, abundant, and nutritious food supply. We revitalize rural communities by expanding economic opportunities. With the vast array of programs and services USDA manages, we are staying true to President Lincoln's vision of serving all people. USDA's People's Garden Initiative is named in honor of founder Abraham Lincoln.

Did You Know?

- There are 2.2 million farms in the United States, comprised of more than 922 million acres. The 2007 Census of Agriculture found growing racial and ethnic diversity among U.S. farm operators and the percentage of women farm operators is on the rise. The number of American Indian or Alaska Native farmers and ranchers increased 88 percent from 2002. USDA will soon conduct the 2012 Census of Agriculture, a complete count of America's farms and ranches and the people who operate them.

- USDA inspects all meat and poultry. Americans, on average, consumed 58.1 pounds of beef, 56 pounds of chicken, 46.6 pounds of pork, and 13.3 pounds of turkey in 2009.

- If you're watching your diet, ChooseMyPlate.gov is the place to go for science-based nutritional advice, including tips on how to make smart choices from every food group, find a balance between food and physical activity, and stay within your daily calorie needs. ChooseMyPlate.gov offers personalized eating plans at the new *SuperTracker* and interactive tools to help you plan and assess your food choices.

- USDA pioneered the effort to make wheat, rice, and cornstarch into biodegradable packaging and single-use items – a green alternative to petroleum-based products. USDA is a leader in helping Federal agencies use biobased products. This helps create jobs in rural America and reduces our dependence on oil.

- USDA's efforts safeguard American agriculture, trees, and other natural resources from invasive plant pests, diseases and harmful weeds. USDA improves the health, quality, and marketability of animals and animal products by working to prevent, control, and eliminate animal diseases.

- USDA developed and oversees the National Organic Program. You can be assured when you see the *USDA Certified Organic* seal that food conforms to consistent, national standards. There are about 17,600 organic farms and processing facilities in the United States. That is a 240 percent increase since 2002 when the National Organic Program began its oversight of industry. There are 28,779 certified organic operators across 133 countries.

- USDA conservation programs help farmers, ranchers, and other private land owners conserve natural resources – ensuring sustainable, productive lands that feed our Nation, prevent soil erosion, clean our air and water, supply fiber and forest products, and develop energy resources.

- There are 30 million acres enrolled in USDA's Conservation Reserve Program – the largest private land voluntary conservation program, which stops soil erosion, protects water quality, and provides wildlife a natural habitat.

- Nearly 80 percent of all fresh water crosses private land before reaching homes and businesses. USDA's planning with private landowners helps improve the quality of the water that enters our rivers, streams, and lakes, and ultimately flows through our faucets.

- USDA provides loans to nearly 110,000 farmers and ranchers to provide a safety net. As of 2010, USDA insured 255 million farm acres, totaling nearly 8 billion dollars in insurance premiums.

- Annually, USDA creates or saves about 70,000 jobs in rural America, enables 60,000 rural Americans to buy homes and helps more than 720,000 low-income rural Americans rent apartments or other housing.

- USDA's research helps Americans obtain high quality agricultural products and safe, abundant foods. Each dollar spent on agricultural research returns at least $10 in benefits to the economy.

- The USDA Extension Master Gardener Program has 87,236 volunteers; they provide workshops, develop demonstration and community gardens, and staff gardening hotlines. Not only can these best practices help you with your lawn and garden, they also help the environment.

- Agricultural trade is important to the U.S. and world economies. Every dollar of exports creates another $1.34 in supporting activities to process, package, finance, and ship agricultural products. U.S. agricultural exports, which reached a record $137.4 billion in 2011, generated an additional $184.1 billion in supporting business activity in transportation, distribution, food processing, and manufacturing. These exports are responsible for more than 1 million U.S. jobs both on and off the farm.

- USDA's 15 nutrition assistance programs serve one in five Americans each year. These programs include free and subsidized school lunches and breakfasts, the Emergency Food Assistance Program and SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

- USDA manages 193 million acres of public lands on 155 National Forests and 20 National Grasslands in 44 States and Puerto Rico, provides assistance to State and private landowners, and maintains the largest forestry research organization in the world.

- In 2010, the National Forests attracted over 170 million annual visitors, which alone sustained nearly 223,000 jobs, while contributing $14.5 billion annually to the U.S. economy.

- USDA provides funding to enable researchers throughout the United States to solve problems critical to our farmers, small business owners, youth, consumers, and others in rural areas and communities of all sizes.

For more info: www.usda.gov