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USDA announces hurricane assistance

On Jan. 26, 2006, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) unveiled five new programs to help farmers recover from the 2005 hurricane season. These programs will distribute \$250 million from Section 32 funds for crop disaster, livestock, tree and aquaculture assistance.

The following is a breakdown of the five programs, according to the official USDA fact sheet:

√**Hurricane Indemnity Program (HIP)** – HIP will provide payments to farmers who received crop insurance or Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) payments as a result of the hurricanes. Payments will be 30 percent of the crop insurance indemnity or NAP payment and will be capped at 95 percent.

√**Tree Indemnity Program (TIP)** – TIP will provide flat payments per acre for the replanting and rehabilitation of perennial orchards, vines and bushes that produce an annual crop. Tiers will be established to determine the level of damage. Timber losses are not included in this program.

√**Feed Indemnity Program (FIP)** – FIP will provide payments to eligible owners and cash lessees of certain types of forage-based livestock for feed losses. To be eligible for payments, producers would self-certify their feed losses.

√**Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP)** – LIP will provide payments to producers whose livestock died as a direct result of the hurricanes. The payment will be based on 75 percent of the average sales price for each category of livestock. Payments will be included for contract growers of livestock, such as poultry, who lost livestock.

√**Aquaculture Grants** – USDA will provide block grants to states adversely affected by the hurricanes in 2005 for aquaculture losses. Aquaculture producers not covered by other disaster programs will be eligible for these funds.

In addition to the new programs, the 2006 Defense Appropriations Act provides: \$199.8 million for the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), \$404.1 million for the Emergency Forestry Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and \$300 million for the Emergency Watershed Program (EWP).

The ECP program has been expanded to include poultry, nursery and oyster producers. Cost-share assistance has increased from 75 percent to 90 percent. ECP funding includes \$20 million to aid poultry growers who suffered additional losses to poultry houses not covered by insurance. The CRP program will include a pilot project for merchantable timber losses of private timber producers with at least a 35 percent loss of merchantable timber.

The EWP program will provide cost-share assistance for cleaning up structures on private land and to reimburse private forest landowners for costs of downed timber removal.

Both the ECP and CRP programs are administered by the Farm Service Agency. Producers can sign up for ECP now. CRP sign up dates have not been announced. The EWP program is administered by the Natural Resources and Conservation Service (NRCS) and funds are available now.

The Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation Public Policy Department will issue additional information when funds for all programs are made available. Signup dates for these programs will be announced as program regulations and eligibility criteria are finalized.

County presidents to meet in Jackson

County Farm Bureau presidents from across the state will participate in a leadership training program to be held Feb. 7 at the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation Building in Jackson. Topics will include policy development, parliamentary procedure, duties and responsibilities of the board, bylaws and legal documents and effective communication skills.

Registration will begin at 8:30 a.m., and the program will get underway at 9:30 a.m. The day-long event will close with the annual Legislative Reception to be held at Dennerly's Restaurant, beginning at 5:30 p.m.

For more information, contact Regional Managers/Commodity Coordinator Assistant Nancy Britt at 1-800-227-8244, ext. 4230.

Winter Commodity Conference

The annual Winter Commodity Conference will be held at the Jackson Hilton on Feb. 8. Registration will begin at 7:30 a.m., and the conference will get underway at 8:30 a.m.

Speakers will include Joel Yelverton, Mississippi Association of Supervisors/Assistant Director; Frank McCain, Director of Property Tax; Senator Jack Gordon, Chairman of the Appropriations Committee; Lester Herrington, Tax Consultant; Dr. Mark Keenum, Chief of Staff for Senator Thad Cochran; and Derrick Surrette, MFBF Public Policy Director.

Commodity Breakout Sessions will be held following lunch.

For more information about the conference, contact Regional Managers/Commodity Coordinator Assistant Nancy Britt at 1-800-227-8244, ext. 4230.

Southern Region Women's Meeting

The Southern Region Women's Multi-State Meeting will be held in Jackson on April 10-12 at the Jackson Hilton on East County Line Road.

The theme of the event, which will be hosted by the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation Women's Program, will be "Planting Seeds to Harvest Leaders."

Conference registration fee is \$125 per person and room rates are \$91.77, including tax, single/double.

See the upcoming issue of *Mississippi Farm Country* for more details.

Robert Jarratt succeeds Jim Jenkins

Effective Feb. 6, 2006, Robert Jarratt will assume the management duties of the Mississippi Farm Bureau insurance operation. Jarratt succeeds Jim Jenkins as Vice President of Mississippi Farm Bureau Casualty Insurance Company and Vice President-State Manager of Southern Farm Bureau Casualty Insurance Company. Jenkins will retire April 1, 2006.

Jarratt and wife Ann come to Mississippi Farm Bureau from Florida Farm Bureau, where he was the Executive Vice President and CEO of the Florida Farm Bureau Insurance Companies.

Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation President David Waide says the experience that Jarratt brings in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina will be a vital part of the Mississippi insurance operation as it meets the needs of Farm Bureau members.

"Join me in wishing Mr. Jenkins the very best as he commences his retirement years and in welcoming Mr. Jarratt to the helm of the Mississippi Farm Bureau insurance operations," Waide said.

Teacher to win trip to AITC Conference

Each year, the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation Women's Program sponsors an essay contest that gives teachers an opportunity to talk about how they teach agriculture in their classrooms.

The contest winner receives an expense-paid trip to the National Ag In The Classroom Conference, which this year will be held in Atlantic City, New Jersey, on June 20-24. The winner will also be asked to participate in the Mississippi Farm Bureau Women's Leadership Conference in 2007.

This grant-funded contest was established by the Mississippi Farm Bureau Women's Program to enhance the Ag In The Classroom Program.

For more information, contact your County Women's Chair or Clara Bilbo, Women's Program/Ag In The Classroom Coordinator, at 1-800-227-8244, ext. 4245.

AITC Workshops are set for June

The 2006 Agriculture In The Classroom Workshops have been scheduled as follows: June 6, Bost Extension Center, Mississippi State University, Starkville; June 7, Mississippi Farm Bureau Building, Jackson; and June 8, Covington County Multi-Purpose Building, Collins.

For more information, contact Clara Bilbo, Women's Program/Ag In The Classroom Coordinator, at 1-800-227-8244, ext. 4245.

Beef Verification Solution is a comprehensive livestock data program

As a service-to-member program, the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation recently signed on as a partner with Beef Verification Solution, a comprehensive and confidential information system for livestock data collection, management and communication.

"Farm Bureau members will be able to use the data collected in BVS to help them make better herd and animal management decisions and increase profitability," said Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation President David Waide.

For more information, contact Regional Manager/Beef Commodity Coordinator Jon Kilgore at jkilgore@msfb.com. Also, see the upcoming issue of *Mississippi Farm Country*.

Choice Hotel Savings Plan

The Choice Hotel Savings Plan is Farm Bureau's newest service-to-member program, offering any member of the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation 20 percent off the published rack room rate at any participating brand hotel location. This discount is based on availability at any Comfort Inn, Comfort Suites, Quality, Sleep Inn, Clarion, Main Stay Suites, Econo Lodge and Rodeway Inn.

Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation members can make their hotel reservation online at choicehotels.com or by calling 1-800-258-2847 and providing the customer service representative the assigned Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation discount number: 00058432.

Call Member Benefits Coordinator Dedra Luke for more details at 1-800-227-8244, ext. 4169.

FB Connection direct payment plan

Members who use the Farm Bureau Connection long distance service now have the option of having their monthly payment deducted automatically from their checking or savings account.

For more information about this feature, contact Member

Benefits Coordinator Dedra Luke at 1-800-227-8244, ext. 4169.

Public relations, information programs receive recognition

Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation's public relations and information programs received the Award of Excellence and the President's Award during the 87th Annual Meeting of the American Farm Bureau Federation in Nashville, TN.

The Award of Excellence is presented to outstanding programs serving Farm Bureau members during the previous year. The President's Award is presented to the "best of the best" programs in each of the given program areas by membership category size.

The public relations and information programs are responsible for the following: a television show entitled "Agri-View: A Look Around Mississippi;" the MSFB Web site; "Ag News by Email;" press releases and video news releases; *Mississippi Farm Country* magazine; *Grassroots Leader* newsletter; and Desktop Publishing.

BIF Annual Meeting

The Beef Improvement Federation's (BIF) 38th Annual Research Symposium and Annual Meeting will be held Tuesday, April 18, through Friday, April 21, 2006, at the Pearl River Resort in Choctaw, Mississippi. The theme of the meeting will be "21st Century Genetics – Rising to the Challenge Southern Style."

For more information, contact Jane Parish or Blair McKinley, Department of Animal and Dairy Sciences, Mississippi State University, at (662) 325-7466 or 662-325-3691 or email jparish@ads.msstate.edu or bmckinley@ads.msstate.edu

Upcoming Special Events

Mark your calendar for these upcoming Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation special events: Food Check-Out Day in Mississippi, Feb. 15; Washington D.C. Tour, Feb. 13-15; Day at the Capitol for State Women's Committee, Feb. 16; Super Bulldog Weekend, April 7-9; and Youth Safety Seminar, July 10-13.

Emphasis to be placed on Worker Protection Standards in 2006

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) adopted the Worker Protection Standard (WPS) in 1992 to better inform farm owners and laborers and to protect them from the potential risks associated with pesticide handling. The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce's Bureau of Plant Industry administers the WPS in Mississippi.

Starting in spring or early summer, the BPI will be shifting its inspections emphasis from compliance education and assistance to enforcement. This means that owners and operators of farms, forests, nurseries, and greenhouses need to take actions to ensure compliance with the WPS.

You can get compliance information from BPI's Web site at: www.mswnps.org. If you need further information, you can contact Steve Moore, BPI, at 662-325-7761, or Mike Blankenship or Brook Stuart, MFBF, at 1-800-227-8244, ext. 4242.

Conservation Pocketbook now available

In the ever-changing world of production agriculture, conservation programs have begun to play a major role in agricultural production practices. Conservation programs help producers conserve and improve the environment in which they are working.

Mississippi Farm Bureau realizes the need for producers to utilize these programs. To address these needs, Farm Bureau has put together a pocketbook that includes all major conservation programs. There is also a list of county offices of the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

A copy of the pocketbook can be downloaded at www.msfb.com, or if you wish to have a pocket-size copy, contact Brook Stuart at 601-977-4243.

Natural Resource Enterprises the focus of two one-day workshops

Two one-day Natural Resource Enterprises workshops have been scheduled for March for landowners interested in earning additional revenue from their land. The first will be held March 2 at Lake Hall Farm in Lake Village, Chicot County, Arkansas. The second will be held March 8 at Cypress Lodge Outfitters in Kilmichael, Mississippi, in Montgomery County.

Registration is limited to 75 people; a fee of \$20 applies. For more information, visit: www.wildlifeworkshop.msstate.edu or call 662-325-3174.

Application deadline for value-added producer grants is March 31, 2006

The USDA Rural Development office is currently accepting applications for funding for projects eligible under the Value Added Producer Grant program. Applications are being accepted until March 31, 2006.

Grants may be used for planning activities and for working capital for marketing value-added agricultural products and for farm-based renewable energy. Eligible applicants are independent producers, farmer and rancher cooperatives, agricultural producer groups and majority-controlled producer-based business ventures.

For more information about the program, contact Kenneth C. Randle, Cooperative Specialist, at 1-662-312-9450, or email him at Kenneth.randle@ms.usda.gov. The Web site for the value added producer grants is <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/coops/vadg.htm>

Southern Bio-Products Conference

The 5th Annual Southern Bio-Products Conference will be held at the Golden Moon Casino at the Pearl River Resort in Philadelphia, Mississippi, on April 3-4, 2006.

The theme of the general session is biomass utilization and recovery in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. This annual conference is hosted by the Mississippi Biomass Council and sponsored by several organizations around the state, including the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation.

Interested attendees, presenters and exhibitors may contact Brent Bailey at 601-977-4248 for more information or visit

www.ms-biomass.org for conference registration. Earlybird registration ends Feb. 20.

EPA to implement Endangered Species Pesticide Program

The Endangered Species Pesticide Program (ESPP) is designed to assist the Environmental Protection Agency in communicating to producers and applicators any pesticide label restrictions resulting from impacts to species listed under the Endangered Species Act. The goal of the program is to communicate these restrictions without placing unnecessary burdens on producers or other pesticide users.

Any pesticide product for which a geographic use restriction is necessary will contain a statement on its label that use of the product may have effects on listed endangered species in some locations. The label will direct the user to check and see whether the county in which the product is being applied has an Endangered Species Protection Bulletin that contains any use restrictions.

Bulletins will be developed on a county-by-county basis, describing any use restrictions for applications in that county. Bulletins will be at county scale, with specific geographic areas indicated where use limitations exist. Absence of a label statement will generally mean there are no restrictions.

The pesticide user or applicator is responsible for obtaining the bulletin and following its instructions. Failure to follow the bulletin instruction constitutes a violation under FIFRA. Although no bulletins are currently posted, EPA officials are currently finalizing bulletins for many areas across the U.S. Bulletins will be enforceable six months after

being posted. Mississippi could potentially have eight counties with areas of concern. You can visit www.epa.gov/espp/ for more information or contact Brent Bailey at Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation.

\$400,000 available in grants from Mississippi Technology Alliance

The Mississippi Technology Alliance (MTA) Strategic Biomass Initiative (SBI) has issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for biomass commercialization projects from private companies, non-profit organizations and individuals based in, or with ties to, entities in Mississippi. SBI's goal is to accelerate the commercialization and deployment of suitable biomass technologies in the state of Mississippi.

Projects will focus on conversion of biomass to energy and biomass to chemicals with the objective to evolve these projects into financially viable commercial enterprises within two years or less. Qualified applicants may tap into additional funds by partnering with Mississippi-based research universities for conducting applied research and development for overcoming technical challenges for near-term commercial technologies.

Applicants have until Feb. 16 to submit their projects, after which, projects will only be considered based upon funds availability. For more information on the RFP, please contact Lauren Michaud at 601-960-3655 or lmichaud@technologyalliance.ms

SBI is funded by the U.S. Department of Energy. Complete details of the RFP are posted on MTA's Web site at: www.technologyalliance.ms



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