

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20250

September 13, 1996

SECRETARY'S MEMORANDUM 9500-6

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

1 PURPOSE

The purpose of this memorandum is to state the Department's support for policies, programs, activities, and education in sustainable development, including sustainable agriculture, sustainable forestry, and sustainable rural community development, and to establish a mechanism to coordinate these efforts across the Department.

2 BACKGROUND

The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro focused on the sustainability of the world's natural resources and highlighted the need to link and balance environmental stewardship, economic development, and community vitality. Throughout the world, there are many instances where human-wrought pressures have resulted in environmental degradation through processes such as soil erosion and surface and ground water contamination. Compounding this situation, about 90 million people are added to the global population every year--mostly in developing countries--with the U.S. population increasing by 3 million each year. Within the next 40 years, the world's population is anticipated to reach 9 billion.

Domestically, as population increases and knowledge and technology continue to change agriculture and natural resources, the interrelationships among people, the economy and the land grow increasingly vital. These connections highlight the need to find a lasting balance between the economic, environmental and social components of the USDA mission. This need for balance underlies the central challenge of sustainability. Meeting this challenge is essential if USDA is to be a successful partner in sustaining the people and productivity associated with U.S. agriculture and natural resources.

In 1993, the President's Council on Sustainable Development (PCSD) began working to craft a national sustainability strategy for the United States. The definition of sustainable development in the report of the 1987 United Nation's World Commission on Environment and Development ("Our Common Future," commonly called the Brundtland Report) was adopted as the starting point: *"Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."* The March 1996 PCSD report, "Sustainable America--A New Consensus for Prosperity, Opportunity, and a Healthy Environment for the Future," includes recommendations for USDA to enhance its role, individually and in partnership with others, in sustaining the productivity and quality of agricultural and natural resource goods and services, the natural resource base and ecological systems, and the economic and social vitality of rural communities.

In addition, a Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, established in August 1995 to identify barriers and opportunities in USDA to achieving sustainable agriculture, recommended a USDA-wide statement of commitment to sustainability concepts and establishment of a coordinating mechanism, such as a council, to facilitate implementation of USDA efforts in sustainable development.

3 POLICY

USDA is committed to working toward the economic, environmental, and social sustainability of diverse food, fiber, agriculture, forest, and range systems. USDA will balance goals of improved production and profitability, stewardship of the natural resource base and ecological systems, and enhancement of the vitality of rural communities. USDA will integrate these goals into its policies and programs, particularly through interagency collaboration, partnerships and outreach.

4 ACTIONS ORDERED

a Director of Sustainable Development

The position of Director of Sustainable Development is hereby established in the Office of the Chief Economist. The Director will report to the Chief Economist and will lead and coordinate cross-mission area work in sustainable development and represent the Department in both domestic and international arenas on issues relating to sustainable development.

b USDA Council on Sustainable Development

There is hereby established within the Department a USDA Council on Sustainable Development. The Council will be chaired by the Director of Sustainable Development. The Under Secretaries for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services; Natural Resources and Environment; Research, Education, and Economics; Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services; and Rural Development, and the Assistant Secretaries for Marketing and Regulatory Programs, and Administration shall each appoint one member to serve on the Council. In addition, Administrators of the Agricultural Research Service, Agricultural Marketing Service, Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, Economic Research Service, Farm Service Agency, Rural Business-Cooperative Service, Rural Housing Service, Rural Utilities Service, Director of the National Agricultural Library; and the Chiefs of the Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, shall also each appoint a member to serve on the Council. Other agencies, as interested and appropriate, can also serve on the Council. The Council will meet at least four times each year, at the call of the Chair.

The Council will be the forum for policy and program development, implementation, and evaluation on issues relating to sustainable development, and will provide the framework and mechanism needed for integration across mission areas and program activities, such as research, management, technical assistance, education, and grant and loan delivery.

c Responsibilities of USDA Officials

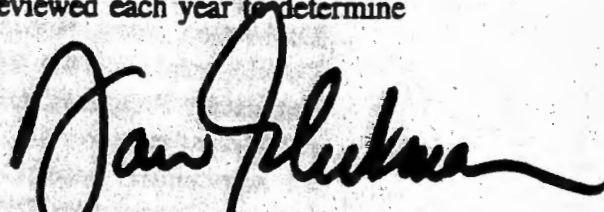
The philosophy, concepts and principles of sustainable development, involving the balancing of environmental quality, economic development, and the vitality of rural communities, shall be incorporated, as appropriate, into all appropriate Department regulations, policies, and programs, including strategic planning documents, work plans, and performance appraisals. Each agency head shall implement the programs for which the agency head is responsible in ways that are consistent with this policy on sustainable development. Activities involving more than one agency shall be coordinated through the USDA Council on Sustainable Development and the Department's Director of Sustainable Development.

5 EFFECTIVE DATE

The provisions of this Memorandum are effective immediately.

6 TERMINATION

This Memorandum shall remain in effect until the actions ordered herein have been fully implemented, and reviewed each year to determine progress on the actions ordered.



DAN GLICKMAN
Secretary