

USDA Deputy Under Secretary Addresses International Meeting on Science's Role in Safeguarding the World Food Supply

WASHINGTON, Jan. 14, 2014—A U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) official today pledged USDA's commitment to an international collaboration aimed at harnessing technologies to improve global food production and food supply monitoring worldwide.

Dr. Ann Bartuska, USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Research, Education and Economics (REE), made the announcement during the "Visualizing the World's Food Systems" meeting in Switzerland. The meeting focuses on the relevance of Earth observations to food systems, and the need to harness the power of remote sensing, monitoring networks, dynamic modeling and other technologies, linked to real-time data from public and private sources, to better manage risk and safeguard the world's food supply and food production capabilities. The meeting is cosponsored by the governments of the United States and Australia, the Commonwealth Scientific Industrial Research Organisation, the Open Geospatial Consortium, and the Group on Earth Observations Global Agricultural Monitoring (GEOGLAM) Project.

"A globally supported GEOGLAM will enhance USDA's capabilities, as well as agricultural missions worldwide, by improving crop statistical accuracy and assisting USDA's international activities related to global food security," Bartuska said. "It is essential that we collaborate on a global level on safeguarding the food system and strengthening agricultural productivity and resiliency." Bartuska told participants that USDA recognized the importance of this work and is willing to make a commitment of additional resources in support of the Group on Earth Observations and the GEOGLAM activities, based on funding and product availability.

The GEOGLAM project is a hybrid of USDA's Global Agricultural Monitoring (GLAM) system, a highly successful program created 10 years ago by USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and the University of Maryland. Research investments in the GEOGLAM project made by France, Canada and other members of the international community serve as an excellent foundation for this next commitment by USDA.

The Global Agricultural Monitoring system, GEOGLAM, the U.S. Group on Earth Observations and the leadership of the Group on Earth Observations worked with USDA, NASA and the University of Maryland's Department of Geographical Sciences to identify the critical need to improve the research and development targets of GEOGLAM. USDA's REE mission area—which includes the Agricultural Research Service, the Economic Research Service, the National Agricultural Statistics Service and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture—will play leading roles in the research and development plan for GEOGLAM.

Bartuska also said that USDA's REE mission area has appointed Debra Peters, senior advisor on sustainable agriculture in the USDA Office of the Chief Scientist, to be the primary point of contact for GEOGLAM for USDA-REE and the research and development effort. Peters will also facilitate coordination between the various USDA teams and other GEOGLAM team members in the United States.

Other key participants in USDA's GEOGLAM effort include Derrick Williams III, director of global analysis for USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service and co-chair of GEO's Agricultural Committee, and his colleagues Denise McWilliams and James Crutchfield; Brad Doorn of NASA, and Chris Justice of the University of Maryland, with direction from USDA's Office of the Chief Economist and the World Agricultural Outlook Board.

Concluding remarks at the meeting will be presented by Bartuska with an introduction by Peter Colohan of the Office of Science and Technology Policy of the Executive Office of the President.

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