

## NEW VOLUNTARY PROGRAM TO PROTECT SOIL AND WATER ANNOUNCED

### From US Dept. of Agriculture

■(WASHINGTON) Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman last Friday announced proposed rules for a new conservation program to both assist farmers and ranchers and to streamline USDA's conservation services.

"The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) offers technical, financial, and educational assistance to protect and improve soil, water, and related natural resources. USDA is seeking public comment on these rules before finalizing the program. A series of public meetings will be held October 11-21 in all 50 states and Guam to discuss the EQIP program, changes to the

Conservation Reserve Program and other conservation programs. EQIP is available for public comment through November 25.

"From the outset, USDA has sought public input to ensure we craft the most flexible and successful conservation program to meet the needs of communities across the country," said Glickman. "I want to encourage farmers and ranchers, conservation districts, interested groups and anyone concerned about the protection of natural resources to take this opportunity to comment on the proposed rules. We want to ensure we begin with the best program possible that benefits everyone."

EQIP continues USDA's commitment to streamlining and improving its conservation services. Four conservation programs have been combined in EQIP: the Agricultural Conservation Program, Water Quality Incentives Program, Great Plains Conservation Program, and the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program.

In accordance with the 1996 Farm Bill, USDA may provide cost share assistance for up to 75 percent of the costs of certain conservation practices on family-sized farms and

ranches, such as grassed waterways, filter strips, manure management facilities, capping abandoned wells and wildlife habitat enhancement. Large confined livestock operations are not eligible for cost-share assistance to build animal waste management facilities. Incentive payments can be up to 100 percent of the producer's cost, for up to three years, for such land management practices as nutrient, manure, irrigation water, wildlife and integrated pest management. Total cost-share and incentive payments are limited to \$10,000 per person per year and \$50,000 for the length of a contract.

Greater emphasis will be given to areas where state or local governments can share in the cost of projects and where conservation improvements will help meet water quality and other environmental objectives.

Eligibility for EQIP is limited to persons who are engaged in livestock or agricultural production. Under the proposed rule, EQIP offers five- to 10-year contracts that provide incentive payments and cost-sharing for conservation practices important to improving and maintaining the health of natural resources.

## BORROWERS REALIZE GOALS THROUGH LOANS

### From US Dept. of Education

■(WASHINGTON) When Temple University students David Germroth and wife Rebecca Hudson earned graduate degrees in political science, they realized a dream, with a \$70,000 price tag. Even with two incomes from professional careers, their \$1,200 monthly student loan payments kept them ineligible to buy a home.

Thanks to the William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan Program, David and Rebecca have reduced monthly loan payments by using a repayment option based on what they can afford. They are taking longer to repay their loans, with annual adjustments to payments based on income rise or fall.

The standard repayment plan calls for borrowers to pay a fixed amount each month — at least \$50 — for up to 10 years.

Under the extended plan, loans may be repaid over 12 to 30 years rather than the standard 10 year fixed amount.

With the graduated plan, payments are lower at first and increase every two years over a period from 12 to 30 years.

Direct lending is the process whereby the federal government makes loans directly to students through schools, bypassing more than 7,000 private lending institutions and 36 guaranty agencies.

This is the third year of the direct loan program. Approximately 1.7 million borrowers finance college through direct loans at more than 1,600 schools in the U.S.

Students interested in obtaining more information about direct loans and other federal financial aid for college should contact the Federal Student Aid Information Center at 1-800-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243).

## INITIATIVES TO ASSIST THE NATION'S DISABLED WORKFORCE

### From US Dept. of Labor

■(WASHINGTON) Last week, Labor Secretary Robert B. Reich announced plans to turn the nation's One-Stop career centers into model facilities for providing access to millions of disabled Americans who are seeking work.

"This nation depends upon all of its workers and it is important that we make the workplace more accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities," said Reich. "By increasing the accessibility of the nation's existing and future One-Stop career centers we can better insure inclusion for all workers," said Reich.

Reich made the announcements at the dedication ceremony of Gallaudet University's Kellogg Conference Center, a state of the art technological resource offering continuing education and career planning for the deaf community.

The Labor Department initiatives to increase employment access for people with disabilities involve not only developing technical assistance on disability issues for states operating One-Stop career centers but also addresses plans for the Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics to conduct further study,

jointly with the Census Bureau, on the employment experience of Americans with disabilities.

In efforts to increase accessibility for people with disabilities seeking assistance at One-Stop career centers across the country, the Department has identified funds to help states with technical assistance on disability issues. Models for improved access to one-stop centers will be developed with nearly \$300,000 in funding.

Of the 29 million Americans of working age (21-64) with disabilities, only 52.3 percent are employed, according to Census Bureau data. A 1994 Harris Poll found that 79 percent of individuals with disabilities, who are not working, want to work.

*"Anybody who has ever lived . . . under a dictatorship which cannot be removed without bloodshed will know that a democracy, imperfect though it is, is worth fighting for and, I believe, worth dying for."*

Sir Karl Popper  
'Popper on Democracy'  
The Economist  
April 23, 1988