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THE WHITE HOUSE

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Reform Agendas at the Departments of Agriculture and Homeland Security

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano today discussed their efforts to cut costs and make government more efficient and effective.

Listed below is an overview of the measures they have implemented at their agencies to save money and better serve the American people.

Reform Agenda at the Department of Agriculture

One of Secretary Vilsack's first actions was to ask each acting member of his sub-cabinet and in turn each staff person at the Department of Agriculture, to seek out, execute and report on "savings" each week. The following are specific examples of financial savings that have been or will be realized at the department.

The Rural Development Mission Area saved \$4300 in unnecessary travel to the National Cooperative Association Meeting in Hawaii, by simply redirecting staff assignments.

The Office of Civil Rights combined two costly training conferences and scheduled them for 2010, saving approximately \$89,000 for fiscal year 2009.

The Office of the Chief Financial Officer has partnered with US Bank to modernize and improve the utility payment processes by providing a web based transaction visibility and transparency to USDA and Agency stakeholders. This will aid in the tracking of payments, aiding in the recovery and elimination of improper late penalties and provide value added services to produce agency cost savings. The labor cost savings that will be realized for USDA in the first year will be \$670,500. Additional savings will be realized from the elimination of unused accounts through the use of this new system.

Rural Development has been utilizing Webex training in place of in-person training when possible to reduce unnecessary travel and per diem costs. The projected estimated annual savings is \$1.3 million.

The Office of the Chief Financial Officer National Finance Center has been selected to provide data center hosting services for USDA's new financial system, the Financial Management Modernization Initiative. Under this contract, NFC will be providing full hosting services to include hardware, system software, engineering services, system administration, security, operations and maintenance and disaster recovery. Estimated savings will be \$17.5 million.

Research Education and Economics mission area cancelled one, and greatly reduced the scope of another existing agreement for services that were no longer required, saving over \$400,000 that can be applied to mission critical operations elsewhere in the REE agencies.

During 2009, Rural Development anticipates the resolution of 16 EEO complaints as a result of settlement or alternative dispute resolution process. At an estimated cost of \$10,000 for processing per complainant, the savings are estimated at a total of \$160,000.

The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) has modified planned travel and conferences over the course of the next several weeks representing a cost savings of over \$30,000. These savings were attained primarily through the use of information technology, changing the number of staff travelling to a given event, or creation of training materials in-house rather than using a vendor.

Reform Agenda at the Department of Homeland Security

Secretary Napolitano ordered an Efficiency Review across the Department of Homeland Security last month – an effort that will make the Department work better by promoting efficiency, reducing duplication, and improving customer service in DHS functions.

Making government more efficient and effective is an important, non-partisan issue. Government has a responsibility to be a good steward of taxpayer dollars – Americans expect this, and this duty is reflected in President Obama’s goals for fiscal responsibility.

Ongoing examples have shown how even smaller efforts at DHS can find significant efficiencies:

Improving Customer Service – A radio frequency identification system that went live last week at the San Ysidro Port of Entry in California expedites the crossing of low-risk, pre-screened individuals, resulting in greater convenience for the public and more efficient time allocation for CBP.

Building Design – CBP is working with GSA on standardizing building designs for ports of entry, which will result in costs savings, as well as operational and maintenance efficiencies.

Technology – DHS Science & Technology partnered with Secret Service, industry, and academia to digitize over 9,000 ink samples improving investigation of criminal and terrorist activities and reducing matching times from days to minutes.

DHS is a young department with many opportunities for greater efficiency. Efficiency Review will look at improving efficiency on a number of fronts within the Department:

Use of contractors – The use of contractors is often not as efficient as the use of employees, and contractors are overused at DHS. There was a greater need for contractors while DHS was being established, but the Department will make an effort to transfer administrative and program management functions to employees.

Acquisition workforce – The Department will work to improve the procurement process by building a professional acquisition workforce with expertise, thus reducing reliance on contractors for program management.

Troubleshooting – DHS has established an in-house Operational Test and Evaluation (OTE) capability that will address operational problems and issues with user-friendliness, identifying and correcting them before a system is implemented, as opposed to addressing issues after the fact.

Independent cost estimation – DHS is also starting, for the first time, to do independent cost estimations for major acquisitions. This will help prevent delays and cost overruns by making sure costs are well-vetted and trade-offs are known early in a project, when schedules can still be set and adjustments can be made.

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