

Cattle Business in Mississippi – February 2017
“Beef Production Strategies” article
Broad Overview of Government Agencies within the USDA

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2017 has certainly been a little unpredictable thus far. As I write this article, in mid-January, we've had snow and a couple days that bumped 70 degrees. The ryegrass in the front yard that was planted on December 1st is lush green and over 6 inches tall! It is definitely the bright spot in the subdivision! The cattle producer in me just cannot bring myself to mow it even though I know the neighbors probably lack the appreciation of this forage used for lawn grass.

I am anxiously waiting to hear who will serve as the United States Secretary of Agriculture in the Trump administration. While we all realize the importance of this position to agriculture, it is easy to forget all the responsibilities it entails. The most important role is that the Secretary of Agriculture administers the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The USDA is responsible for the development and execution of farming, agriculture, and food policy. Over 100,000 individuals are employed by USDA across the following seven agencies.

Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services

When it comes to production agriculture, our farm profits are at the mercy of the weather and the markets. The Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services agency is designed to assist America's farmers and ranchers in cases of uncertainty with the weather and markets. They deliver commodity, credit, conservation, disaster, and emergency assistance programs. Three agencies make up the Farm and Foreign Agriculture Services: the Farm Service Agency, Foreign Agricultural Service, and Risk Management Agency.

Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services

The primary mission of Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services is “to harness the Nation's agricultural abundance to end hunger and improve health in the United States”. Its agencies, The Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion and the Food and Nutrition Service, house federal domestic nutrition assistance programs and facilitate the formation of dietary guidelines, scientific research on the nutrition needs of consumers, nutrition policy coordination, and nutrition education.

Food Safety

The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is provided by the Food Safety agency. “FSIS enhances public health and well-being by protecting the public from foodborne illness and ensuring that the nation's meat, poultry and egg products are safe, wholesome, and correctly labeled and packaged.

Marketing and Regulatory Programs

Most beef producers are familiar with the marketing and regulatory division of USDA. According to USDA, “the Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP) facilitate domestic and international marketing of U.S. agricultural products and ensures the health and care of animals and plants”. This agency provides the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), and the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA). In a later issue of the *Cattle Business in Mississippi*, I will cover the Food Safety and Marketing/Regulatory agencies of the USDA in greater detail.

Natural Resources and Environment

Unlike the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) who writes and enforces regulations based on laws passed by Congress, the Natural Resources and Environment division works with farmers and ranchers to prevent damage to natural resources and the environment, restore the resource base, and promote good land management. As you would expect, this agency houses the Forest Service and the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Research, Education and Economics

This division is home to five well known services that include the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), Economic Research Service, the National Agricultural Library, National Agricultural Statistics Service, and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture. The Research, Education and Economics division is committed to maintaining safe, sustainable, and marketable agricultural products. By conducting integrated research, providing detailed analysis, and delivering consumer education, this division of the USDA also promotes strong communities, families, and youth.

Rural Development

According to the USDA website, the Rural Development division is dedicated to bettering the economy and livelihoods of citizens living in rural America. By providing financial programs to support critical public facilities and services, housing, health clinics, emergency service facilities and electric and telephone service, the Rural Development promotes economic progress by providing loans to businesses through banks and community-managed lending pools, while also assisting communities to participate in community empowerment programs.

As the Trump administration appoints people to fill the positions within the UDSA, we can hope that they all have a sympathetic ear to our industry. I hope to see you at Dixie Nationals!

If you would like to contact me, my email address is cobie.rutherford@msstate.edu and phone is 662-325-4344. For more information about beef cattle production, contact an office of the Mississippi State University Extension Service.

SOURCE: USDA.GOV