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AFRICA, U.S. EXAMINE WORLD COTTON TRADE, USDA'S PENN SAYS

Ministers complete U.S. cotton tour on eve of WTO talks

By Kathryn McConnell
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- West African agriculture and trade ministers have completed a tour of U.S. cotton research and production facilities intended to further their understanding of the U.S. position on world cotton trade, says Under Secretary of Agriculture J.B. Penn.

Absent such a African-U.S. dialogue, "all they [the African ministers] have is the stereotype of the U.S. and the U.S. position . . . [which is] that the U.S. is not being very flexible" on issues related to cotton, Penn said in a July 26 interview with the Washington File. Penn, under secretary for farm and foreign agricultural services, and Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman met earlier that day with the ministers from Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali at the conclusion of their one-week tour.

On July 25 the ministers met with U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick to discuss the cotton trade issue, Penn said.

"They now understand that [the stereotype] is not the case" and that the world cotton issue is "complex" and not just an issue of U.S. domestic supports, he said.

Just as World Trade Organization (WTO) farm talks were to begin July 27 in Geneva, the four countries

dropped a demand that cotton be a special item on the agenda. Instead, they have agreed to tackle the issue of rich countries' subsidies to their own cotton producers as part of the overall agriculture negotiations in the 147-member WTO.

Penn will be part of the U.S. delegation to the trade negotiations. Negotiators will attempt to reach agreement on a framework for new farm trade rules. The United States is seeking agreement among WTO members to end export subsidies, significantly reduce domestic farm support payments and increase market access.

Penn said the visiting ministers reported being impressed by the degree to which the public and private sectors in the U.S. agriculture industry interact. They said they want to build on their budding relations with government and business partners in the United States, the secretary added.

"While the structures of our cotton sectors are quite different, there are many areas where our governments and our business people could work together," Choguel Korkalla Maiga, Mali's minister of commerce and industry, said in a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) press release.

The ministers visited the "Research Triangle" area of North Carolina, met with U.S. cotton industry leaders, toured a company developing genetically modified cotton varieties in Memphis, Tennessee, and learned about cotton education and extension activities at Texas A&M University, according to a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) spokesperson.

The ministers said they were impressed by the "tremendous role" scientific research plays in improving fiber quality, production and processing technology in the U.S. cotton industry, according to Penn. They also were impressed by U.S. farmers' timely and extensive access to production inputs ranging from credit to machinery, seeds, fertilizer and technology, he said.

The ministers' tour came one month after a conference on agricultural technologies cosponsored by the United States and Burkina Faso was held in the West African country.

At that conference, West African ministers adopted a resolution calling for more research and investment in agricultural biotechnology and recommending the creation of a West African Center for biotechnology.

The ministers' tour will be followed by a visit later in 2004 to West Africa by a U.S. technical team to examine aspects of the region's cotton industry and recommend ways to modernize it, Penn said.

The secretary said the ministers' visit was one part of the U.S. government's "broader engagement" in Africa, which the recent enactment of a new "accelerated" African Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA). AGOA, originally enacted in 2000, offers trade incentives to African countries to continue their efforts to open their economies and build free markets.

"The U.S. remains committed to helping Africa raise agricultural productivity, spur economic growth and alleviate hunger and poverty, Veneman said in the press release.

The United States also is sending technical teams to African countries to help them develop biotechnology and modern sanitary and phytosanitary regulations, Penn said. Additionally, the new Norman Borlaug fellowship program for agricultural researchers will target African farmers and scientists in its initial years, he said.

Penn said other indications of the growing U.S. role in Africa are the new "trade hubs" established by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in three African countries -- Botswana, Kenya and Ghana. USDA is posting at each hub personnel from its Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to help the countries learn how to meet international SPS requirements for their exports, he said.

Another example of the U.S. commitment to Africa is the selection of eight African countries as among the first eligible to apply for supplemental aid funding from the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), Penn said. The MCA is administered by the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), a government body designed to help poor countries promote poverty reduction through economic. The MCA is based on the principle that aid is most effective when it reinforces sound political, economic and social policies.

The ministers said at their final briefing with Penn and Veneman that they had not been "fully aware of the international context" of the cotton trade issue, especially of China's dominance in cotton and textile trade, Penn said.

Learning about the scope of the international cotton market led the ministers to begin to examine how

modernizing their cotton industries could best complement China's production and that of other textile leaders, notably India and Pakistan, Penn said.

SUDAN STILL BLOCKING AID TO DARFUR, USAID'S WINTER SAYS

Senior U.S. official criticizes obstruction by Sudanese government

By Tara Boyle
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Nearly one month after Secretary of State Colin Powell and U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan visited Darfur, the government of Sudan continues to obstruct the flow of humanitarian aid to the embattled region, a senior U.S. official said.

Roger Winter, the head of the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), told the Washington File in an interview July 26 that even though U.S. aid workers are having an easier time getting visas and other documents needed to enter and travel through Sudan, humanitarian workers from other nations are still facing difficulties getting their vehicles and other supplies through customs.

"It is fair to say that some improvements have been made. I would suggest, however, that they're still all inadequate," Winter said. "I think a case can be made that [Sudanese officials] know they're inadequate, and they are taking a minimalist approach because they think they can get away with it."

Besides creating customs and logistical impediments, Sudan has also insisted that foreign health workers receive physicals from Sudanese physicians before entering Darfur, a policy that is slowing the aid process and will lead to unnecessary deaths, he added.

"The vast number of people who finally expire in Darfur won't die from lack of food; they die from their bodies [first] being weakened by lack of food, and then a disease gets them. So medical personnel are very important in this whole context," Winter said.

Winter gave the interview in advance of an August 3 trip to Sudan with U.S. Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist. Winter and Frist, who is also a doctor, will spend nearly a week in Sudan, visiting the capital, Khartoum, before traveling on to Darfur in the west and the war-ravaged southern region of the country.

The humanitarian crisis in the region began in 2003 after rebel groups in North Darfur attacked Sudanese military forces. Government forces and armed militiamen known as the Jingaweit responded by launching attacks against civilians and towns in the region, driving some 1.4 million from their homes.

As of July 27, USAID estimates that 2.2 million people have been displaced by the conflict, and experts predict that at least 300,000 could die from malnutrition and disease.

Winter, who has long experience with humanitarian disasters, has traveled extensively throughout Sudan. In his estimation, the Sudanese government's handling of the Darfur crisis mirrors its efforts to block humanitarian deliveries to southern Sudan during a famine in 1998.

"We've seen this before," he said. "When the world started fussing [in 1998], they dragged their feet, and finally, after the famine was in full bloom and basically guaranteed tens and tens of thousands of people were going to die, they lightened up. So the case can be made that this is not a new thing."

Meanwhile, in an "ill-advised effort" to respond to international pressure to rein in the Jingaweit attacks, the Sudanese government is trying to return people to their homes, Winter said. This effort is doomed to failure since "the population that was displaced doesn't necessarily feel comfortable about going back out into these rural areas where [the Jingaweit] are still around on their camels and horses," he said.

Although highly critical of the Sudanese government's management of the situation, Winter said he does not personally believe that the treatment of the people in Darfur, most of whom are black Africans, fits the legal definition of genocide.

"I would suggest that this has all the earmarks of an organized campaign of ethnic cleansing. Is it genocide, in the Rwanda sense of the word? My own view is that the answer to that is no," Winter said. "What was very

clear in Rwanda was that if you were a Tutsi and you fell into the hands of the Interahamwe you were going to die, 100 percent for all practical purposes. That is not the case here.”

Winter bases that analysis on his interpretation of the Darfur conflict as a struggle for domination over land and resources, rather than an effort to eliminate an entire ethnic group.

Nonetheless, Winter said, the crisis in Darfur requires urgent international attention and European, African and Muslim nations need to step up their assistance to the region.

“Whether you call it ethnic cleansing or whether you call it genocide or whatever you want to call it, why aren’t more [nations] stepping up to the plate? I don’t have a good excuse, because I don’t think there is a good excuse,” he said.

70 COUNTRIES IDENTIFIED AS POSSIBLE RECIPIENTS OF NEW U.S. AID

Eligibility to be based on progress with reforms, MCC chief says

By Kathryn McConnell
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) has identified 70 countries from which it will select those that may apply for funding from its supplemental foreign aid account in the fiscal year beginning October 1 (FY05).

The MCC board will subsequently determine which of these “candidate countries” will be eligible to apply for Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) funding based on their relative performance in ruling justly, encouraging economic growth and investing in programs that directly help their people, according to a press release issued after the MCC’s quarterly meeting July 20.

“We want a growth return on U.S. taxpayers’ dollars,” said John Applegarth, MCC chief executive officer, during a July 27 public forum.

Applegarth said each eligible country’s proposal to the MCC should include an explanation of how the country decided on the development priorities for which it seeks MCA funding. The MCC wants the content of proposals to clearly include input from civil society and business sectors and not just reflect the decisions of a small number of government officials, he said.

Proposals also should indicate how a MCA-funded project would not duplicate or obstruct a project funded by another donor, he said.

The MCA is based on the principle that foreign aid works best when a recipient country takes ownership of its development programs and creates an environment for economic growth, Applegarth said.

MCC staff recently visited all 16 countries eligible to begin receiving FY04 MCA funding to explain the consultative process to representatives of governments, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), private businesses and the media, he said.

As a result of those visits, he said, countries now have a better understanding of the flexibility they have in developing their priorities and of opportunities to try “something new and different” to achieve their development goals, he said.

The six-month-old MCC also has been meeting with other international donors to ensure aid efforts are complementary, Applegarth said.

Applegarth said that as the MCC moves forward it welcomes input from NGOs and other interested parties. The corporation also is stressing that its processes are transparent to the public.

“We need transparency to build confidence in what we’re doing and how,” he said.

The 2005 candidate countries have a maximum per capita annual income of \$1,465 and are legally eligible to receive U.S. aid, Applegarth said.

The countries are Afghanistan, Angola, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, China, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, India,

Indonesia, Iraq, Kenya, Kiribati, Kyrgyz Republic, Laos, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Moldova, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Nepal, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Philippines, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Timor-Leste, Togo, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, Uganda, Ukraine, Vanuatu, Vietnam, Yemen and Zambia.

U.S. PROVIDING EMERGENCY FUNDS FOR BANGLADESH FLOOD VICTIMS

Response to question taken at July 26 State Department briefing

The U.S. Embassy in Bangladesh has released \$50,000 in emergency assistance funds as of July 26 in order to provide food, transportation and operational support to the disaster relief efforts in flood-stricken areas of Bangladesh, according to State Department spokesman Richard Boucher.

Following is the response to a question taken at the July 26 State Department briefing:

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman
July 26, 2004

Question Taken at July 26, 2004 Daily Press Briefing

Flooding In Bangladesh - Request For United States Assistance

Question: Has the Government of Bangladesh requested U.S. aid for flood victims?

Answer: After consultation with the government of Bangladesh, the U.S. Mission to Bangladesh has requested funds to provide emergency assistance for the victims of flooding. An initial request of \$50,000 in Ambassadorial discretionary funds to meet emergency needs was approved and awarded to a non-governmental organization. These funds will provide food, transportation, and operational support for the distribution of food and survival packets to victims of flooding in the most affected communities.

Please Note: Most texts and transcripts mentioned in the U.S. Mission Daily Bulletin are available via our homepage www.usmission.ch. Select "Washington File" from the drop-down menu under "News."