

News Release

For Immediate Release

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COMMISSIONER, GOVERNOR GET THE “SCOOP” ON NATIONAL AGRICULTURE DAY

Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Dr. Lester Spell, Jr. and Governor Kirk Fordice celebrated National Agriculture Day in Mississippi March 17 at the State Capitol. The two officials, joined by state lawmakers, citizens and representatives from more than a dozen Mississippi commodities celebrated the state’s largest industry by dishing out one of Mississippi’s favorite desserts – ice cream. Some of the ice cream served (mint chocolate chip & pistachio) was green, in honor of St. Patrick’s Day and Mississippi’s growing agricultural economy.

“Whether you are plowing a delta field, working in a Tupelo furniture plant or loading poultry onto a Gulfport ship bound for Russia, agriculture plays an important role in every aspect of our economy,” said Commissioner Spell. “The future of agriculture in Mississippi is as sweet as the ice cream we are serving today.”

Governor Fordice also recognized the importance of agriculture to the state. “Mississippi farmers are the foundation of our economy,” said the Governor. “Agriculture provides the largest workforce and continues to be a vibrant force for Mississippi’s economy. The success of this industry is a significant contribution to the Mississippi Miracle.”

Agriculture is the largest industry in Mississippi, with an economic impact to the state estimated at close to \$20 billion. It is estimated that one out of every three jobs in Mississippi is related to agriculture. National Agriculture Week, March 15-21, is focusing on the global challenges and opportunities for United States agriculture with the theme, “Growing Tomorrows.”

Facts about Agriculture in the United States*

Nearly 2,000,000 people farm or ranch in the United States

Almost 90% of U.S. farms are operated by individuals or family corporations

More than 15 percent of the U.S. population works in farm or farm-related jobs

42% of the total land area in the U. S. is farmland (945.5 million acres)

In 1900, the average farm size was 147 acres

In 1998, the average farm size is 491 acres

The top 5 U. S. agricultural commodities:

- 1. Cattle and calves**
- 2. Dairy products**
- 3. Corn**
- 4. Soybeans**
- 5. Hogs**

In 1960, one farmer supplied food for 25.8 people in the U.S. and abroad

In 1994, one farmer supplied food for 129 people in the U.S. and abroad

In the 1930's, before machines became available, a farmer could harvest an average of 100 bushels of corn by hand in a nine-hour day

Today's combines can harvest 900 bushels of corn per hour—or 100 bushels of corn in less than seven minutes

Amount of income spent on food for selected countries:

| | |
|-----------------------|------------|
| United States | 9% |
| United Kingdom | 11% |
| Japan | 17% |
| South Africa | 27% |
| India | 53% |

***Source: Agriculture Council of America web page (www.agday.org)**

Mississippi's Top 10 Commodities, 1997*

| Commodity | Value | Change from 1996 |
|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| 1.Broilers & Eggs | \$1,431,000,000 | Up 6% |
| 2.Forestry | \$1,220,000,000 | Up 3% |
| 3.Cotton | \$ 650,000,000 | Down 6% |
| 4.Soybeans | \$ 473,550,000 | Up 19% |
| 5.Catfish | \$ 266,132,456 | Down 3% |
| 6.Rice | \$ 157,030,000 | Up 20% |
| 7.Cattle & Calves | \$ 145,332,279 | Up 5% |
| 8.Corn | \$ 129,050,250 | Down 37% |
| 9.Milk | \$ 106,400,000 | Up 1% |
| 10. Hogs | \$ 48,677,773 | Down 3% |

*Data compiled by Mississippi State University Extension Service. "Change from 1996" figures come from comparison of 1997 estimates with 1996 actual dollar amounts compiled by USDA.