USDA

United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

MAR 29 2010

The Honorable Todd Staples
Commissioner
Texas Department of Agriculture
Post Office Box 12847
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Commissioner Staples:

Thank you for your letter of January 25, 2010, with a list of bioenergy projects, in follow up to our October 6, 2009, meeting in which we discussed issues of importance to Texas agriculture.

It was a pleasure meeting with you to discuss our shared commitments and vision for agriculture, particularly our mutual interest in supporting the growing renewable energy industry. On behalf of the Department of Agriculture (USDA), I look forward to partnering with you in the future on these important issues.

I share your enthusiasm for the collaborative data collection efforts of USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). In May 2010, NASS will conduct the first On-Farm Energy Production Survey, giving farmers and ranchers the opportunity to highlight their renewable energy practices using wind turbines, solar panels, anaerobic digesters, and other alternative energy sources. This is a chance for Texas producers and ranchers to show the Nation their continued commitment to the environment. Results of the survey will be published in February 2011.

I am also optimistic about the creation of the Texas Bioenergy Policy Council and the opportunities it holds for the renewable energy industry. As you know, Texas has the potential to be an important source of biofuel feedstocks, using crops such as sorghum and corn, oilseeds, and energy cane. USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) conducts research on the economics of bioenergy that directly addresses the dynamics of additional demand for biofuel feedstocks as part of complex, interrelated energy, economic, and land use systems. Questions such as "How do major policy and technological and economic risks and uncertainties affect markets for biofuel feedstocks?" are at the heart of ERS' research and can inform the Policy Council's deliberations.

You may also be interested to know that the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) has requested funds in the President's fiscal year 2011 budget to develop five Regional Feedstock Centers, including one in Booneville, Arkansas, that will help prospective biorefineries and local feedstock producers identify the best feedstock varieties and production practices for ensuring economic success and sustainability.

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Through these Centers, research partners can access resources across the nationwide network of ARS laboratories as well as those of ARS' partners. Likewise, you may be interested in initiating partnerships directly with ARS laboratories in Temple, Bushland, and Lubbock, Texas, all of which are part of the South-Central Feedstock Center in Booneville. I encourage you to contact Dr. Bob Fireovid (Robert.Fireovid@ars.usda.gov), National Program Leader for Bioenergy, should any of these opportunities be of interest to you.

Again, thank you for your letter, your interest in USDA, and your ongoing efforts to support the growing renewable field of renewable energy production. I look forward to working with you to achieve our mutual goals.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary