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USDA Improves Forest Health by Harvesting Biomass for Energy

2014 Farm Bill Program Generates Renewable Energy, Helps Reduce Forest Fire Threats

WASHINGTON, Dec. 16, 2014 - Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced that more than 200,000 tons of biomass were removed from federal lands through the Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP). BCAP, reauthorized by the 2014 Farm Bill, provided incentives for the removal of dead or diseased trees from National Forests and Bureau of Land Management lands for renewable energy, while reducing the risk of forest fire. This summer, 19 energy facilities in 10 states participated in the program.

"This initiative helps to retrieve forest residues that are a fire risk, but otherwise are costly to remove," said Vilsack. "In just three months, working with private partners across the country, the program helped to reduced fire, disease and insect threats while providing more biomass feedstock for advanced energy facilities."

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm Service Agency administered the program earlier this year. Eligible farmers, ranchers or foresters participating in BCAP received a payment to partially offset the cost of harvesting and delivering forest or agricultural residues to a qualified energy facility. Up to \$12.5 million is available each year for biomass removal.

Key program accomplishments include:

In Colorado's Front Range, 18,000 tons of trees targeted by the USDA Forest Service to reduce forest fire threats were removed to generate energy. In California's Rim Fire area in Tuolumne County, nearly 100 percent of the USDA Forest Service's targeted 40,000 tons of forest residue was approved for removal and transport to energy facilities. In Arizona, 41,000 tons of forest residue in Apache and Navajo counties were approved for removal and transport to energy facilities. In Oscoda County, Mich., home of the Huron Manistee National Forest, 5,000 tons of forest residue were approved for removal and transport to energy facilities.

These accomplishments helped the Forest Service meet or exceed its restoration goals for Fiscal Year 2014, including reducing hazardous fuels on 1.7 million acres in the wildland urban interface and sustaining or restoring watershed conditions on 2.9 million acres, resulting in 2.8 billion board feet of timber volume sold. To further





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support this program, the Forest Service has entered into a three-year, \$1.5 million agreement to provide technical assistance to the Farm Service Agency as they implement BCAP on National Forest System lands. This will enable the development and execution of biomass sales, and help open and support new and existing markets for biomass products.

USDA will issue a final regulation this winter to incorporate BCAP updates established in the 2014 Farm Bill. The next funding opportunity will be announced once updates are incorporated.

BCAP was reauthorized by the 2014 Farm Bill. The Farm Bill builds on historic economic gains in rural America over the past five years, while achieving meaningful reform and billions of dollars in savings for taxpayers. Since enactment, USDA has made significant progress to implement each provision of this critical legislation, including providing disaster relief to farmers and ranchers; strengthening risk management tools; expanding access to rural credit; funding critical research; establishing innovative public-private conservation partnerships; developing new markets for rural-made products; and investing in infrastructure, housing and community facilities to help improve quality of life in rural America. For more information, visit www.usda.gov/farmbill.

Visit www.fsa.usda.gov/bcap or contact a local FSA county office at offices.usda.gov to learn more about BCAP.

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