

USDA ANNOUNCES AGREEMENT WITH MARRIOTT INTERNATIONAL TO BENEFIT MINORITY FARMERS

Partnership Key to Expanding Markets For Minority Farmers in the Mid-Atlantic and Southern States

Editors note: The following article is a press release highlighting a recent agreement with USDA and Marriott International to enhance produce market opportunities for minority farmers. Forwarded by Gordon Groover, Extension Economist Farm Management, AAEC Department, Virginia Tech.

WASHINGTON, Mar. 31, 2004-Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman today signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Marriott International, Inc. to enhance outreach efforts and expand sales outlets for agricultural commodities produced by minority farmers.

"This agreement represents a historic partnership to enhance market opportunities for minority farmers," said Veneman. "The training and technical assistance offered will help improve their business capacity, while providing a direct avenue for products to the hospitality industry."

"Marriott is very proud to be part of this program," said William J. Shaw, president and chief operating officer of Marriott International. "This is the beginning of an alliance that promises tremendous benefits to all, especially the U.S. minority farmer. Marriott looks forward to working with the farming community and the USDA to build on this relationship."

Under the partnership signed today, USDA will provide technical assistance and support for business capacity building to support start-up activities, facilities development and contract negotiations assistance. USDA will provide technical assistance to minority farmers in obtaining grants to establish centers for marketing and product development, value-added agricultural market development and rural business development.

Marriott will identify minority producers in the Mid-Atlantic and Southern states that are likely to benefit from a program designed to promote the sale of farm produce to Marriott and the hospitality industry and will aid in the development of appropriate organizations to facilitate production and sale of farm produce. Marriott, in conjunction with USDA, will facilitate and conduct a program of training classes with minority farmers concerning product needs, marketing, transportation and food safety requirements.

The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights will administer the agreement, in coordination with USDA agencies and through partnerships with minority serving institutions like the Council of 1890 Colleges and Universities. The implementation of this initiative will be evaluated to determine if the agreement can serve as a role model for other similar opportunities that could benefit minority or small farmers across the country.

Further information on USDA's Office of Civil Rights available at: www.usda.gov.

Originally printed in Virginia Vegetable, Small Fruit and Specialty Crops – March-April 2004.