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USDA Strengthens Commitment to Military Families

Government-wide Initiative Addresses Challenges Facing the Military Community

WASHINGTON, Jan. 24, 2011 – In an effort to serve military families, the USDA is partnering with the White House to address the concerns and challenges of our military families. President Obama announced this government-wide initiative and released the report, “Strengthening the Military Family: An Interagency Review” today at the White House. The report highlights the enduring partnership between USDA and the Department of Defense on family and youth development programs.

“Military families face many challenges as a result of their commitment to our country, and I believe USDA’s programs can play a significant role in helping and supporting these families through their sacrifice,” said Deputy Agriculture Secretary Kathleen Merrigan, who represented USDA at the White House announcement. “We are committed to further strengthening our 25-year relationship with the Defense Department and using the resources of the Cooperative Extension Service to serve the entire military community.”

Four priority areas to address the concerns and challenges of our military families and commitments from various government agencies are identified in the report:

1. Enhance the well-being and psychological health of the military family.
2. Ensure excellence in military children’s education and their development.
3. Develop employment and educational opportunities for military spouses.
4. Increase childcare availability and quality for the Armed Forces.

USDA’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) has made several commitments to serving the needs of military families and youth. 4-H National Headquarters will enhance their partnership with active, Guard and Reserve military service branches to support 4-H clubs and activities for military children and youth. In addition, NIFA will collaborate with the Departments of Defense, Health and Human Services and Education to help increase the availability of child care spaces available through the country for Guard and Reserve families.

These commitments bring the expertise and resources of the Land-Grant University and Cooperative Extension System - youth development professionals, research-based curricula and high quality training and technical assistance - to the child and youth programs of the military. Meeting these commitments is already underway. In November 2009, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the formation of the USDA and Department of Defense Extension-Military Partnership to focus on three key areas: community capacity building in support of military families, workforce development and strengthening family, child care and youth development programs.

These efforts will be featured during the 2011 DoD/USDA Family Resilience Conference: Forging the Partnership, April 26-29, 2011, in Chicago. This joint conference will bring faculty and educators from the Land-Grant University System together along with DoD personnel who work to enhance resiliency for military youth, families and communities. With more than 1,800 helping professionals representing DoD, USDA, military services, land-grant universities and many other organizations in attendance, this joint conference will feature evidence-based programs that enhance family resilience.

The Family Resilience Conference is a collaboration between USDA's NIFA and DoD's Military Community and Family Policy. Information is available at <http://www1.cyfernet.org/partnership2011/>.

USDA has worked with DoD for 25 years, including partnership with all branches of the military - Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and the National Guard & Reserve. USDA began partnering with bases and installations across the country to address critical needs of military families, including needs related to health, nutrition, financial management, and family stress. The 4-H Youth Development Program is engaging youth living on military bases throughout the world. More than 20,000 youth participate in 4-H club programs on military bases and installations around the globe.

Through federal funding and leadership for research, education and extension programs, NIFA focuses on investing in science and solving critical issues impacting people's daily lives and the nation's future. For more information, visit www.nifa.usda.gov.

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