

**Michael Michener,
Administrator, Foreign Agricultural Service**

On March 23, 2009, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack named Michael Michener as Administrator of USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS).

Michener has served in three U.S. foreign affairs agencies in the past 10 years. He has spent considerable time overseas promoting post-conflict stability operations, economic development and human rights. Most recently, he served as the Senior Democracy and Governance Advisor and Lead Planning Officer for the U.S. State Department's Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization. From 2005 to 2007, he served as the lead Iraq policy officer for the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, managing nearly \$400 million in assistance programs promoting democracy and human rights in that country. He also has experience working with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in Kosovo, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Michener was educated at the University of Maryland in Europe while serving with the U.S. Army. His hometown is New London, Iowa.

STATEMENT BY MICHAEL V. MICHENER
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS
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Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, I am pleased to come before you today to discuss the role of the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the Administration's strategic efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Background

USDA is committed to supporting President Obama's efforts to increasing government effectiveness and enhancing economic capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan. We recognize the critical role that agriculture plays in the economy and lives of the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and we look forward to participating in the President's strategy for the region.

Since 2003, over 50 USDA employees have volunteered to serve as advisors on Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and to Ministries in Afghanistan. These employees provide critical advice, guidance, and training to local employees of Afghanistan's Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (MAIL) and Provincial and District-level government officials, which strengthen the effectiveness of the government at the provincial and district levels and increases economic opportunities for Afghans who may otherwise join the insurgency. They provide guidance to PRT commanders on projects that directly impact the lives of Afghan farmers and improve economic growth and job creation in the region.

To implement the President's strategy, USDA is prepared to significantly increase the number of highly-skilled agricultural advisors serving on PRTs subject to availability of resources.

USDA PRT members offer subject-matter expertise in areas such as agricultural extension and education, crop production, plant protection, animal health and livestock management, agricultural marketing, irrigation, and natural resources management. They build the capacity of provincial level host country nationals to enable them to manage their own agriculture reconstruction and development according to their needs and ideas.

I would like to provide two examples of the kind of work carried out by our USDA advisors serving on PRTs in Afghanistan. I think that these examples illustrate the kinds of unique and relevant skills that our employees bring to the challenges of reconstruction and development and support for our counter-insurgency efforts in Afghanistan.

A USDA employee from the Farm Service Agency in Nevada worked with his Afghan counterparts to design and install six windmill-powered water pumps in the south of Afghanistan. These pumps revitalized a centuries-old irrigation system that now

provides water to farmers for livestock, vegetable crops and fruit trees, replacing the poppies which thrive in dry, rocky soil. Another USDA employee from the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Maryland worked with his Afghan counterparts to rebuild, equip, and operate the nation's only functioning soil testing laboratory at the Agricultural University in Nangarhar Province.

These are only two examples of the work carried out by USDA advisors in Afghanistan. The important point is that our advisors work to build the capacity of their Afghan counterparts while implementing projects that provide direct and immediate benefits to the people of Afghanistan. Many of our advisors find a great deal of satisfaction in the work. After they return to their home agencies, nearly all have helped to recruit other employees to serve on PRTs. Over a dozen USDA advisors have either volunteered to serve extended tours or have returned to Afghanistan for second or third tours. Six of these employees have also served as advisors in Iraq. There remains a high amount of interest and enthusiasm in the Department, as we receive about four applications for each vacancy on a PRT in Afghanistan.

Since 2003, USDA has developed systems for recruiting, selecting, training, deploying and supporting PRT advisors. The Department stands behind those who volunteer for these one-year assignments, and provides incentives and benefits packages based on those provided by the U.S. Department of State, U. S. Agency for International Development, and other agencies and departments. Newly selected advisors undergo three weeks of pre-deployment training at the U.S. Army's Camp Atterbury in Indiana. Previously, training was held at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina. This training covers medical combat life-saving, force protection, military – civilian coordination, mentoring and partnering with the Government of Afghanistan, and general simulation exercises. USDA also provides a Washington-based orientation program for new advisors as part of the pre-deployment training. We have developed standard operating procedures and PRT handbooks that employees use throughout their service. The new advisors also undergo an intensive orientation program upon arrival in Afghanistan.

During their year of service, USDA provides continuing support to our employees. All PRT advisors have access to a web-based portal to obtain timely and relevant technical information from other advisors, from specialists throughout the Department, and from faculty at the land-grant colleges and universities. We also bring together all of the advisors periodically for in-service training. Our program managers in Washington are in frequent contact with the advisors to help with technical issues, provide support with adjustment issues, or just to let them know that their sacrifices and hard work are appreciated. During service, the USDA advisors receive medical care through the State Department medical program or from the Department of Defense, depending on the location, timing, and the critical nature of the need. We facilitate communication with the families of the advisors, and provide evacuation in case of critical family emergencies.

A USDA PRT liaison based in the U.S. Embassy in Kabul provides overall management of the program in country. The liaison works closely with counterparts in other civilian and military agencies and ensures smooth interagency coordination for planning and program operations. PRT success is dependent upon coordinated interagency

cooperation both in the field and in Washington. USDA staff in Washington meets regularly with counterparts here to coordinate efforts and share lessons learned.

After service, USDA provides official recognition to our employees for their contributions to our reconstruction, development and counterinsurgency efforts in Afghanistan. Employees return to their home agencies, to the position they held prior to their assignment in Afghanistan. USDA holds an annual “lessons learned” event in which most of the returned advisors participate, and we have incorporated these lessons to make continued improvements to the program. USDA helps identify resources to help returned advisors, their families, and supervisors deal with readjustment or other issues.

In addition to PRT advisors, USDA has provided both long-term resident advisors and short-term technical assistance to Afghanistan’s Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Higher Education’s Colleges of Agriculture and Colleges of Veterinary Sciences. These ministry advisors provided technical assistance to their Afghan counterparts in the Ministries and colleges, and provided oversight for about \$16 million under Food for Progress that was used to construct provincial agricultural extension offices and teaching laboratories at Kabul University. Additionally, USDA continues to provide food aid resources. In Afghanistan, since 2006, we have provided \$25 million under McGovern-Dole to feed about 70,000 primary school students in Badghis and Ghor Provinces. Under USDA’s Faculty Exchange Program, six faculties from Kabul University’s College of Agriculture have been trained here in the U.S., including two faculty members that are here this year. Through USDA’s Norman Borlaug International Agricultural Science and Technology Fellows Program, we expect to train 120 agricultural researchers from Afghanistan during the next two years. In Pakistan, since 2006, USDA has provided about \$35 million under the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program that feeds more than 30,000 female students.

During the recent trilateral meetings, USDA made three commitments to further support our counter-insurgency efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan through government capacity building to enhance economic growth. We committed to form and support a Secretariat and three working groups in the areas of Food Security, Trade Corridors, and Water Management and Watershed Rehabilitation. We also committed to increase our Food for Progress programs for both countries, to generate additional funds to be used for projects such as construction of new agricultural extension offices to help the governments extend programs into the provinces. Finally, we committed to expand the numbers of training programs for Pakistan and Afghanistan through our Cochran Fellowship, Borlaug Fellowship, and Faculty Exchange Programs. USDA is working to identify the additional resources required to support these priority efforts.

We believe that USDA has developed the systems necessary to continue to provide a sustained level of skilled and highly motivated employees to serve as advisors on PRTs or in government ministries in Afghanistan. USDA is prepared to significantly increase the number of PRT advisors, ministry advisors, and other support that we can deliver to meeting this critical challenge to U.S. national security. Congressional support for the Administration’s budget and supplemental appropriations request is critical to ensure we can effectively stand up the civilian side of the counter-insurgency strategy, and have in

place the capabilities required to “hold” and “build” economic opportunities and governance after our men and women in uniform provide security for the population.

I want to thank you for allowing me to share with you some of the information about our programs, challenges, and accomplishments in Afghanistan and plans for meeting new commitments to both Afghanistan and Pakistan. I look forward to any comments or questions you may have. Thank you.