

# Ag to receive \$28 billion in stimuli

By HAROLD HARPSTER

**T**HE \$787 billion stimulus package signed into law by President Barack Obama has everyone's attention — agriculture included. We're told we can monitor the spending, the progress and the results at the Web site [www.recovery.gov](http://www.recovery.gov).

This site's introduction says, to put it briefly, that the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (the stimulus package's formal name) "provides for unprecedented levels of transparency and accountability so that you will be able to know how, when, and where your tax dollars are being spent. Spearheaded by a new Recovery Board, this Act contains built-in measures to root out waste, inefficiency, and unnecessary spending."

U.S. Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack wasted no time in publicizing the intended use of about \$28 billion earmarked for USDA.

While details are still sketchy, here is a sampling of some of the initial projects:

### Rural development:

\$540 million is intended for water and wastewater infrastructure improvements in rural areas. Rural water and wastewater projects will result in funding some 400 projects, creating about 13,000 jobs.

### National Resources Conservation Service:

\$145 million has been planned for flood control. It'll fund easement programs to protect about 60,000 acres of "frequently flooded lands" nationwide.

### National Resources Conservation Service:

\$50 million is intended to renovate and restore watershed structures. It's expected to create 2,100 jobs in engineering, consulting and skilled construction fields.

### U.S. Forest Service:

\$100 million is planned for improving forest health and reducing hazardous fuel loads in national forests. In addition to improving overall forest quality, it's expected provide a future source of feedstocks for developing cellulosic bio-fuel.

### U.S. Forest Service:

A portion of the \$1.5 billion total allocated to the Forest Service is earmarked for improving natural forest infrastructure. That means improved roads, bridges, buildings and recreational facilities.

### Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program:

\$20 billion (about 70% of USDA's total) targets food assistance funding, including community food banks; the Women, Infants and Children's feeding program; and American Indian tribes. Families receiving food stamps will receive an average increase in their monthly food assistance of about \$80. Officials estimate that every dollar spent

### Key Points

- You can monitor stimulus package spending at [www.recovery.gov](http://www.recovery.gov).
- Food assistance accounts for 70% of USDA's \$28 billion share.
- Spending \$86,400 a day, you would need 24,955 years to spend \$787 billion.

on food stamps generates about \$1.84 in local economic activity.

### Hard to comprehend

It's hard to even comprehend the size of the stimulus package.

But we can understand this: If you spent \$86,400 a day, it would require 24,955 years to spend \$787 billion.

It may take years to even understand all the provisions of this legislation.

But right now, this is more interesting than watching beef prices.

We can hope that agriculture gets the money and uses it wisely, and that rural America is truly revitalized.

*Harpster is a Penn State animal scientist and a beef cow-calf producer.*



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