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## Dan Glickman

### Outgoing Secretary Says Agency's Top Issue is Genetically Modified Food

Bill Lambrecht / St. Louis Post-Dispatch 25Jan01

THE NEWS: THE AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT

Amy Plumley Veneman, the new secretary of agriculture, faces numerous problems as she takes office, including what to do about genetically modified food.

Glickman served on the board of Calgene, a company owned and operated by Monsanto Co. \* Bill Clinton's agriculture secretary, Dan Glickman, warned his replacement, Ann Veneman, that biotechnology policy may become her most difficult problem. But in her speedy confirmation, Veneman revealed almost nothing about her views.

Along with the keys to his office, the departing U.S. secretary of agriculture, Dan Glickman, gave advice about biotechnology to Ann Veneman, the Californian who replaced him.

Ready, he said, for a full-throated debate about genetically modified food that awaits you when you knock in the door.

Biotechnology is going to be thrust on her, as Dick Cheney would say, big time. Whether she wants it or not, it will be on her, like it was on me, big time," Glickman said, mimicking the voice of the new vice president during an interview with the Post-Dispatch.

The advice from Glickman and others has been mostly friendly. On her way to speedy confirmation, Veneman endured none of the ideological warfare that greeted some of Bush's appointees - notably John Ashcroft as attorney general and Gale Norton as interior secretary.

Indeed, Veneman's confirmation hearing last week had the tenor of a Farm Bureau ice cream social. Senate Agriculture Committee members refrained from grilling her, all but ignoring biotech and other troubling headaches that Glickman warned about.

Veneman sailed into her new job offering little more than bromides about common sense and cooperation.

"We hard-working men and women who provide our food and fiber have been tested by low prices, weather and other adversities," she said, giving little indication as to how she will proceed.

#### experienced policymaker

More than a few Midwesterners, members of Congress among them, groused initially that Washington's top farm job went to a lawyer from California rather than to a farmer from the nation's breadbasket. Charles Kruse, president of the Missouri Farm Bureau, was believed to be under consideration for the job.

"There were a lot of folks who believed that the secretary of agriculture should come from the middle of the country," Kruse said. "But I think that the agriculture community is going to get behind and try to help her. It doesn't matter where you're from."

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her detractors couldn't dismiss Veneman's experience. She was the No. 2 Agriculture department official in the administration of Bush's father a decade ago and she headed California's culture agency for a four-year period afterward. Veneman, 51, is the easy-going daughter of a ranch farmer, with a knack both for policy and for charming senators.

She may need her winning ways to handle farmers skeptical both of her and the direction of the department's farm policy. They worry that she is too aligned with the agriculture establishment to depart sharply from the Freedom to Farm policy, a deregulation effort that drove down crop prices to the lowest level in a generation.

Critics also wonder if she will aggressively regulate genetically modified crops and foods after having served on the board of Calgene, a California-based biotech operation owned by Monsanto Co.

The discovery last fall of adulterated StarLink modified corn in the food supply laid bare the gaps in U.S. regulatory system. The scorching news accounts showed, too, how unanticipated problems threaten consumer confidence in a new technology.

As a result of StarLink, Veneman will be pressed more quickly to answer vexing questions:

- How can widespread DNA testing be incorporated into an emerging two-track food system - one that is genetically engineered and one that is not?
- What kind of rules and liability might be established in cases of wind-blown pollen from genetically modified crops?

USDA Farm Bureau's Kruse didn't plant StarLink. But he has planted other varieties of corn engineered for insect resistance, and he believes that the future of farming lies in genetic engineering. He expects Veneman to be aggressive, he said, in answering the technology's critics.

"There are some people who would have you believe that we should stop anything remotely associated with genetically enhanced crops because we're going to have a monster tomato," he said.

Christison, of Chillicothe, Mo., president of the National Family Farm Coalition, is a leading critic of American farm policy. He said he was prepared to give Veneman a chance, but his views are exactly opposite that of Kruse when it comes to modified crops.

Christison wants the Department of Agriculture to stop promoting genetically modified seeds, which he insists have done farmers more harm than good. "There's no reason we need this kind of technology at this juncture in time. People around the world aren't accepting genetically modified food, and the government ought to stop propping up these biotech crops," he said.

#### **Cheerleader or regulator?**

Veneman must decide if she will be cheerleader or regulator of genetically modified crops. Glickman says she is uneasy playing both roles at the same time.

The Department of Agriculture is one of three federal agencies splitting the task of regulating food technology under a system that has changed little since the mid-1980s. The Environmental Protection Agency and the Food and Drug Administration share the duties.

The Agriculture Department decides which genetic experiments on crops can take place outdoors. It oversees field trials by companies before gene-altered food reaches the market.

In spite of the department's regulatory role, the biotech industry and many farm groups have expected Veneman to be a promoter of genetically modified food. Often it was, even helping to develop the "terminator," the controversial genetic technology that renders the seeds of crops sterile in order to force farmers to buy new seed.

**In the interview, Glickman recalled the boosterish climate. "What I saw generically on the biotech side was the attitude that the technology was good and that it was almost moral to say that it wasn't good because it was going to solve the problems of the world: to feed the hungry and clothe the naked," Glickman said. "And there was a lot of money that had been invested in this, and if you're against it, you're Luddites, you're stupid.**

**There was rhetoric like that even here in this department. You felt like you were almost an alien, disloyal, by trying to present an open-minded view on some of the issues being discussed. So I pretty much spouted the rhetoric that everybody else around here spouted; it was written into my speeches," he continued.**

In 1999, with European resistance to modified food mounting and a de facto moratorium on new introductions of crops taking shape on the continent, Glickman broke ranks. He had grown concerned that if the U.S. government was pushing genetic engineering without taking stock of consumer worries, American farmers, he worried, could be left in the lurch.

In one speech, at Purdue University, he asserted that the United States "can't force-feed consumers" around the world.

In another speech, delivered at the Press Club in Washington, Glickman advised biotechnology companies to consider labeling genetically modified food to help prevent consumer fears from

ading to the United States.

It was not what the heavily invested industries - or the White House, for that matter - had expected him to say. He purposely had not submitted his speech for approval beforehand, he added, because he knew it would be returned to him "sterile." Afterward, he felt the heat.

There were some people in this government who were very upset with me. Very upset. They thought I had changed our trade policy unilaterally. Like a lot of politicians, I wanted to be loved. So I was very worried about it," Glickman said.

Two days later, after encountering the president's wife, Hillary Rodham Clinton, at a state dinner in the White House, he breathed easier. Glickman continued the story:

She said, 'I saw the story about your speech in the New York Times.' I said to her, 'There were some people in the White House that didn't like it'. She said, 'I liked it.' So I knew I wasn't going to be fired."

Glickman thinks the federal agencies that regulate modified food ought to get together soon for what he called "a thorough review of how GMOs (genetically modified organisms) are regulated by our government. I think it does need further clarity."

### **the group is optimistic**

Veneman has not said publicly how she will proceed. Some of her past actions in Washington may offer clues. In 1992, as deputy agriculture secretary, she announced further streamlining of field-testing requirements that the biotech industry wanted and that skeptics considered deficient.

In 1998, testifying as California's agriculture secretary before a Senate subcommittee, she uttered a mantra offered by the government and industry justifying resistance to mandatory labeling. "Risk should be evaluated in terms of product, not the production method," she said with regard to genetically modified food.

Israel Phillips of the Biotechnology Industry Organization says that his trade group is hopeful, based on what members of Bush's transition team told him in private meetings. Noting Glickman's independence, Phillips said he hoped that Veneman operates in lock step with the White House, where he wants to see a strong figure in charge of biotech policy.

They did not coordinate well. ... It seemed like the left hand did not know what the right hand was doing," he said of the outgoing administration.

Harl, director of Iowa State University's Center for Agriculture and Rural Development, ranks genetically modified food at the top of his list of serious problems facing agriculture. He predicts that the future of food biotechnology - whether it becomes dominant or occupies a much smaller role - will be known in three to five years.

Veneman sat on a high-profile advisory committee put together by Glickman to give him advice on biotechnology. He has not heard whether it will continue but does not expect it to.

An early test for Veneman, he said, will be her decision on licensing the "Terminator" technology; the agriculture Department co-owns the patent with a Mississippi seed company.

Veneman will be looking, too, for what role, if any, Veneman takes in revamping the government's oversight. "I think that cooler heads and sounder minds understand that we need to take a new look on how we regulate GMOs," he said.

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