WASHINGTON, Dec. 13, 2004-Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman today announced a $5 million grant to support research to improve rice crops by using new genomic-based tools. The multidisciplinary team includes 14 institutions and will be coordinated by scientists at the University of Arkansas.

"USDA is committed to unlocking the benefits of genome research," said Veneman. "This grant will support critical research to better understand the genetic makeup of rice with the goal of improving milling quality and resistance to sheath blight disease."

"The final product of this grant should lead to development of improved U.S. rice cultivars, and the building of a community of researchers trained in the application of new genomics-based tools to address the issue of quantitative inheritance in rice," said Joseph J. Jen, USDA undersecretary for Research, Education, and Economics.

Included in this project will be a novel extension program to engage rice extension and industry personnel in agricultural genomics research and to explore the potential of the technology. Extension personnel will also educate the public on the merits of applying genome information to improve agricultural crops.

Funding for the research was provided by USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service's (CSREES) National Research Initiative. For more information about the genome project, see http://www.uark.edu/ua/ricecap.

The 14 institutions involved in the project include: the Univ. of Arkansas, USDA- Agricultural Research Service, Univ. of California- Berkeley, Kansas State Univ., Univ. of Missouri, Louisiana State Univ., Univ. of California-Davis, Ohio State Univ., Colorado State Univ., Noble Foundation in Oklahoma, California Rice Research Foundation, International Rice Research