

Dr. Mark Keenum

Under Secretary, Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services

Dr. Mark Everett Keenum was sworn in as Under Secretary on December 20, 2006. Dr. Keenum provides leadership and oversight for the Farm Service Agency, the Risk Management Agency and the Foreign Agricultural Service. The mission area, comprised of these three agencies, has a total operating budget of \$1.7 billion in salaries and expenses and approximately \$40 billion in program authority. The three agencies employ over 16,500 people at more than 2,300 offices nationwide and 98 locations around the globe.



The Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services mission area helps to ensure the well-being of American agriculture and the American public through efficient and equitable administration of agricultural commodity, farm loan, conservation, environmental, emergency assistance, and domestic and international food assistance programs. It provides and supports cost-effective means of managing risk for agricultural producers in order to improve the economic stability of agriculture. The mission area also represents the diverse interests of the U.S. food and agricultural sector abroad by managing the Department's international activities, addressing market access constraints, and working to expand markets for U.S. agricultural, fish and forest products overseas.

In 1989, Dr. Keenum joined the Washington, D.C. staff of U.S. Senator Thad Cochran as Legislative Assistant for Agriculture and Natural Resources. As Senator Cochran's advisor on agricultural affairs, he worked on numerous issues important to U.S. agriculture, including the 1990, 1996, and 2002 Farm Bills. From 1996 through 2006, he served as Chief of Staff for Senator Cochran. In this role, Dr. Keenum was the chief advisor to the Senator on political, legislative, and appropriations issues. He was also responsible for managing all administrative and legislative functions of Senator Cochran's Washington, D.C. office and three Mississippi state offices, including direct oversight of the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry and the U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations.

After completing his Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in Agricultural Economics at Mississippi State University (MSU), Dr. Keenum joined the MSU faculty as a Marketing Specialist with the Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service at MSU in 1984. Two years later, he accepted a position as a Research Associate with the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station at MSU.

In 1988, Dr. Keenum received his Ph.D. in Agricultural Economics from MSU and joined the faculty of the MSU Department of Agricultural Economics as an Assistant Professor/Economist. During his professional tenure at MSU, his primary research and extension work focused on the marketing and economics of aquaculture, specialty crops and forestry. From 1997 through 2006, Dr. Keenum also served as an Agricultural Economics Adjunct Professor at MSU and taught an annual course on agricultural legislative policy.

Dr. Keenum and his wife Rhonda reside in Fairfax County, Virginia, and have four children.