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■ DECISION MAKERS ■

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## Kenneth D. Ackerman

Administrator, Risk Management Agency

Ackerman's job at the Agriculture Department agency looks like one of the most boring political appointments in the federal government: managing relations with crop insurance companies. But the 1996 farm bill charged Ackerman with developing new forms of insurance to help farmers protect themselves against plunges in prices and awful weather. Rural America hopes he's writing a new program to stabilize the rural economy in times of trouble. Critics fear that he may be creating an entitlement that will expose the taxpayers to unlimited risks if crops fail.

Ackerman, 45, graduated from Brown University and Georgetown University's law school. He was a lawyer at the Commodity Futures Trading Commission and the Senate Agriculture Committee before he joined the Administration.

Ackerman's primary responsibility is to oversee the companies that insure crops and assess how they get along with farmers. When floods hit the Dakotas and Minnesota this spring, Ackerman flew there to assure farmers that Washington would stand behind policies that guarantee them payments if they are prevented from planting.

Private insurance companies have long found insuring farmers against most weather-related risks unprofitable. So for decades, the federal government has either provided or subsidi-

dized crop insurance to farmers through the old Federal Crop Insurance Corp. (FCIC). In 1994, as part of a plan to discourage ad hoc agricultural rescues, Congress decided to make disaster aid available only to farmers who take out crop insurance and transformed the FCIC into the Risk Management Agency.

Managing the traditional crop insurance program is simple compared with developing the new forms of insurance. Ackerman has authorized two companies to develop experimental insurance policies that—for the first time—would pay farmers if crop prices drop. Insurance executives have complained that Ackerman has been slow to tell them specifically what he wants. Ackerman has responded that he must protect taxpayers by thoroughly examining the insurers' proposals. The Chicago Board of Trade and other commodity exchanges have charged that the programs he's developing will encourage farmers to use crop insurance rather than investments in futures and options as their hedge against the risk of falling prices.

Ackerman's toughest watchdog may be Senate Agriculture Committee chairman Richard G. Lugar, R-Ind. Under federal law, any farmer who qualifies for federal agriculture programs is entitled to crop insurance. Lugar worries that subsidizing prices and guarding against the risks of bad weather over the long term will be enormously expensive. Lugar has questioned whether Ackerman has the authority to turn his risk-management experiments into national programs, but Ackerman and Agriculture lawyers say that the law already gives them that power.

## Madeleine K. Albright

Secretary of State

Albright is more than a mere Secretary of State. She's a star. Whether she's donning a cowboy hat or learning that she was born a Jew and her grandparents perished in the Holocaust or striding arm-in-arm with Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman Jesse A. Helms, R-N.C., the first woman to serve as Secretary of State has been a headline-grabbing departure from Warren M. Christopher, her dour, buttoned-down predecessor.

When people see her on the street, "they don't say 'Madam Secretary,' they call me 'Madeleine,'" she bubbled in a recent interview with *The New York Times*. She doesn't look or sound like a typical diplomat. She was embarrassingly bad in throwing the ceremonial first pitch of the Baltimore Orioles' baseball season but was lauded for it all over the nation's front pages.

"She has given foreign policy a human face, which is almost impossible to do," a Democratic congressional staff member said.

She's using her popularity as an asset in defining an unusually domestic role for herself as the nation's top diplomat. She has taken more domestic trips than foreign ones, trying to peddle the importance of foreign policy to an inward-looking public. Her hope is to bolster the public's support for paying up what Washington owes to the United Nations and for increasing the funding for the State Department, which has been reeling from years of budget cuts. Such steps would allow consulates to be



Richard A. Eiborn

**Albright:** She's giving foreign policy a human face.