

by UPI

WASHINGTON - Building a strong agricultural economy is the basis for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's \$95 billion 2009 budget, the department said Monday. The amount is about the same as the current Agriculture Department budget, said Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer in a news release. "(President George W. Bush's) agriculture budget supports his commitment to increase the competitiveness of agriculture, ensure the safety of the food supply and provide nutrition and housing assistance to those most in need," Schafer said. "This budget aims to enhance those programs" About 76 percent of the budget proposed by Bush, or \$72 billion, would be for mandatory programs, such as nutrition assistance, commodity, conservation and export promotion, Schafer said. The remaining 24 percent would be allocated for discretionary programs, including Women, Infants and Children, rural development loans and grants, research and education, conservation technical assistance, and national forest management.

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