

### **Cuba grants usufruct to more farm land to individuals**

President Raul Castro has authorized Decree on putting vacant farmland in private hands. Aim of this step is to reduce dependence on costly food imports, reported Granma newspaper on July 18, 2008.

"The maximum to be handed over to individuals who do not hold land is 13.42 hectares, and for those who hold lands, as owners or designated workers, the amount can rise as high as 40.26 hectares," it said.

Previously, the only private landholdings allowed were small family plots held prior to 1959.

The government will make new land grants for 10 years, which can be renewed. Government agencies and cooperatives also may get 25-year grants. The grants cannot be transferred or sold to third parties.

"For various reasons there is a considerable percentage of state land sitting vacant, so it must be handed over to individuals or groups as owners or users, in an effort to increase production of food and reduce imports," the decree reads.

Raul Castro has told Cubans food production is a national security priority.

He recently told lawmakers that "all forms of property and production can coexist in harmony as none is in opposition to socialism."

Sources: AFP, Granma

### **Retired teachers will get full salaries**

On July 18, 2008 the Granma newspaper reported on new legislation regarding working conditions and wages for retired teachers and professors who return to the classrooms.

New Decree-Law No. 260 authorizes retired teachers and professors the full salary of any teaching job they may fill, plus their pension.

It is explained that this decree has been expedited for convenience until the new Social Security bill is approved.

The current Social Security Act establishes that retirees can participate in paid work on the condition that the total of their new salary and their pension does not exceed the salary they received prior to receiving their pension.

Source: Granma

### **Hold on US funds for Cuba democracy project lifted**

The chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee on July 22, 2008 lifted the hold he had placed on the U.S. Agency for International Development's \$45 million Cuba democracy program, saying steps are being taken to address corruption and mispending.

The Miami Herald reported on July 21 that Rep. Howard Berman, D-Calif., had put a hold last month on U.S. AID's 2008 funding for its controversial Cuba democracy program.

The program is aimed at bringing democracy to Cuba, but critics have said the bulk of the money has gone to Miami exile organizations and universities.

Two of the program's 11 grant winners are under investigation for misspending funds, including the Center for a Free Cuba, where an employee, who last worked at the White House, allegedly embezzled more than \$500,000.

A Miami organization, Grupo de Apoyo a la Democracia (Group in Support of Democracy), had its funding cut off after one of its employees charged \$11,000 in personal items to the grant, federal officials said.

U.S. AID ordered a top-down review of all the grants and promised to suspend any grants that show signs of misspending.

The Center for a Free Cuba's executive director, Frank Calzon, stressed that the misused funds were recovered with interest, and said members of Congress who are against Cuba policy were manipulating the media in an effort to smear him.

The center's funding is still suspended until his agency is fully audited, federal officials said.

Source: Miami Herald