



# *Sliced Bread Or New Coke?*

**N**ew product introductions are always risky. The launch of this new magazine is risky, too. But the risks are worth taking. Consolidating the trio of venerable Economic Research Service periodicals into one web-linked publication may generate anxiety on the part of some long-time readers, but it provides a platform for serving our familiar audience in a more up-to-date way and a means to reach new readers. By way of introduction to the magazine, let me share with you the thinking that led us to this new venture.

**It's not about us** As researchers, we recognize we are true "supply-siders." We like to write long manuscripts and we want you readers to want to read them. But readers today expect timely information in manageable pieces. You have let us know you want reader-friendly formats both in print and on the web. We have tried to design this magazine with the reader, not the writer, in mind. We make every effort to avoid jargon and to write simply and concisely.

**To illuminate—not report—the news of the day** It's not our intent to report the news—rather, we relate ERS research to current events. While we plan as best we can, there is no guarantee that the publication of an economic research report exactly coincides with the headlines. Issues come and go. We believe we can improve the usefulness of our research by highlighting its relevance to contemporary events through the magazine.

**An end to balkanization** In publishing three magazines, we were compartmentalizing our readers. Certainly many have broad interests, but who wants to read three magazines from one Federal agency? And some parts of the ERS program weren't really well covered by the existing magazine spread—much of our work on natural resources, for example. By moving to a single magazine and linking to related material on our website, we can provide breadth but also continue to provide depth to readers with special interests.

**Into the electronic fold** The three periodicals were conceived at a time when mailing out hard-copy publications was our main means of communicating with the large non-academic segment of our audience. But with the advent of the Internet—and particularly the re-engineering of the ERS website in January 2001—the relationship with our audience changed dramatically. With electronic technologies, we can reach more people and deliver more products in a more timely way. It is time to bring our magazine publishing into the electronic fold, to take advantage of the richness of the ERS website. While hard copy issues will appear five times a year (February, April, June, September, and November, in sync with policymaking and market events), the e-zine is updated more frequently.

I'm hoping that you will find *Amber Waves* an engaging and useful addition to the portfolio of sources that provide information and economic analysis about food, farm, natural resources, and rural community issues. Please let me know your thoughts ([soffutt@ers.usda.gov](mailto:soffutt@ers.usda.gov)). The best thing since sliced bread? That is our sincere aspiration!

**Susan E. Offutt, Administrator  
Economic Research Service**