

NEWS RELEASE

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DirectAg.com Alliance with Royal Bank Financial Group Narrows Digital Gap for Nation's Farmers

(St. Paul, Minn., Jan. 6, 2000) -- DirectAg.com, the premier business-to-business Internet site serving the \$260 billion agricultural industry, today announced a new alliance with Royal Bank Financial Group to provide state-of-the-art electronic banking and financial services to U.S. agriculture producers.

As part of its alliance with Royal Bank, DirectAg.com will offer users a wide range of online financial services including banking, credit cards, bill-paying and discount brokerage trading. These services will be provided primarily through two Royal Bank companies: Security First Network Bank (SFNB), the world's first Internet Bank™, and Bull & Bear Securities, Inc., an online discount brokerage firm.

DirectAg.com, which debuted last August as the Internet's only comprehensive information source, community forum and marketplace expressly for farmers, expects the Royal Bank services to be available on the site in early 2000.

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“This new alliance brings a critical financial component to the DirectAg.com infrastructure,” says Kip Pendleton, president and chief executive officer of DirectAg.com. “Commercial producers will soon be able to log on to DirectAg.com and tap the services of a global leader in both financial services and agricultural banking. Our customers already rely on DirectAg.com for a broad array of product choices and delivery of timely, ag-specific news and information. With this alliance, they will also be able to finance e-commerce purchases, manage their investments and more. We believe this provides tremendous advantages for both DirectAg.com customers and businesses that market their products through the DirectAg.com platform.”

For Royal Bank Financial Group, this alliance supports the institution’s priority to expand its e-commerce businesses in the United States following its acquisitions of SFNB in 1998 and Bull & Bear Securities in 1999.

“We were attracted to DirectAg.com’s focused business model because it offers superior information and support to America’s farming community and complements SFNB’s commitment to provide outstanding financial services expertise,” said Eric W. Hartz, president of SFNB. “We look forward to a long and rewarding relationship that succeeds by providing farmers innovative financial products and services that satisfy their needs for convenience, efficiency and privacy.”

SFNB recently received its fourth consecutive No.1 online bank rating by Gomez Advisors, a leading independent consumer authority, and provides a broad range of banking services via the Internet (www.sfnb.com) and telephone, including 24-hour-a-day, 365-day-a-year customer service. Users can conduct transactions seamlessly between checking, savings, borrowing, and credit card accounts and can also create customized reports. Other services include unrestricted bill payment to third parties, up-to-the-minute account balances, real-time activity tracking, automatic categorization of expenditures, loan presentation, secure online customer care support and Internet stock portfolio tracking. SFNB uses one of the most technologically advanced security systems to ensure privacy and protection of customer information.

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Bull & Bear Securities, with approximately 25,000 accounts and \$320 million in investment assets, has access to every major U.S. stock, option and bond exchange. Its web site, www.bullbear.com, provides Internet securities trading featuring low flat-rate commissions coupled with real-time quotes, news, charts and free research. It offers access to more than 5,300 mutual funds, of which roughly one-third are no-load. Bull & Bear is registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission as a broker/dealer and is member of the National Association of Securities Dealers, Inc. and Securities Investor Protection Corp.

Royal Bank (NYSE: RY) is a global financial services group and a leading provider of personal and commercial banking, insurance products, wealth management and corporate and investment banking. The bank and its key subsidiaries Royal Trust, RBC Dominion Securities, RBC Insurance and Royal Bank Action Direct have approximately 52,000 employees serving 10 million clients through more than 1,400 branches and offices in over 30 countries. For more news and highlights from Royal Bank, visit the RBCF online newsroom at <http://www.royalbank.com>

Launched in August, DirectAg.com (www.directag.com), a comprehensive business-to-business Internet site, provides farmers with a broad offering of information and a growing number of ag products and services. Farmers can purchase name-brand, high-quality products and services from major agricultural suppliers at their convenience, any time of day or night. They can check out the latest ag-specific news and markets, in addition to sending questions to the site's Virtual Agronomist[®] from Agri-Growth[®]. DirectAg.com is in discussions with more than 100 leading agribusiness and financial companies, and plans to expand into other areas, including ag chemicals, farm equipment, parts, animal health and seed. The company is based in St. Paul, Minn.

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