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Ag Day 2016: Honors Stewards of a Healthy Planet

I have the tremendous opportunity to work with some of the greatest employees in the federal government and we have the pleasure to serve and *work for* the American farmer. On behalf of Indiana Farm Service Agency (FSA) employees, we all are proud to be partners with the men and women who farm in the great state of Indiana. Agriculture is an honorable profession and we are privileged to do our part to help. We salute you – *the American Farmer* – on National Ag Day, March 15.

National Agriculture Day – a day designated each year by the Agriculture Council of America to celebrate the accomplishments of agriculture. Indiana FSA joins the council in recognizing farmers for their contributions to the nation's outstanding quality of life. This year's theme is ***Agriculture: Stewards of a Healthy Planet***.

Agricultural producers are the original stewards of the land. They understand the fragility of the land and are well aware that there are increasingly fewer producers and fewer acres for production. They want to sustain it and protect what they have.

According to the 2012 Agriculture Census, there are 3.2 million farmers in the United States. These American farmers constantly seek new and sustainable ways to operate. Through these efforts, they preserve wildlife, protect water sources and reduce soil erosion. They also use precision production practices to greatly reduce their footprint on the environment.

Last year, 912 million acres produced food and fiber. Not only are American farmers, who represent one percent of the U.S. population, devoted to taking care of the land, but they're committed to feeding the nation and producing imports that help the country balance its trade.

Every year, farmers face challenges such as natural disasters, downturns in markets and plant disease, which can financially cripple their operations, but they persevere. During such times, FSA provides financial relief through various conservation, disaster assistance, commodity safety-net programs and low interest-rate credit outlined in the 2014 Farm Bill.

FSA's programs provide Indiana's 58,600 farms with the ability to lead the nation and rank among the top states in commodities, livestock and poultry. Agriculture has been an important part of Indiana's heritage since the first settlers discovered the rich farm ground in the heartland of the new territories. Covering more than 83 percent of our land, Indiana agriculture directly generates more than \$25 billion toward Indiana's gross domestic product.

I am honored to administer programs that enable our producers to manage their risks when the agriculture industry faces hardship. On behalf of the Indiana Farm Service Agency, I would like to thank American farmers for continuing to feed our nation and the world during every circumstance.

March 15 is National Ag Day. To find more Ag Day information and events, visit the sponsoring Agriculture Council of America at www.agday.org.

(Julia A. Wickard is the State Executive Director for the U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency in Indiana. She may be contacted at julia.wickard@in.usda.gov.)