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Honoring America's Farmers on National Ag Day – March 18

March 31 Deadline for New Safety Net Program Quickly Approaching

For more than 40 years we have celebrated National Ag Day as a time to pause and honor the American farmer. Today, our farmers are the most productive and efficient in the world with each one helping feed more than 155 people. We thank you, as well as everyone who plays a key role in producing the food, fiber and fuel our country and the world depends upon.

This year National Ag Week is March 15 – 21 and is highlighted by National Ag Day on Wednesday, March 18.

And there is another very important date in March I want to remind farmers about this year. March 31 is the last day to make several important choices on federal safety net programs that could make a big difference on farms through 2018. The 2014 Agricultural Act, or Farm Bill, was signed into law on February

7, 2014 by President Barack Obama. Since that time, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) has been working on the rules and regulations to govern one of the largest agricultural public policy reforms in decades.

FSA is urging farmers and landowners across the nation to finalize their decisions by March 31 on updating crop yield histories and reallocating base acres for new safety net programs established by the 2014 Farm Bill, known as Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC). Updated yields and base acre reallocations could help improve a farmer's potential to recover payments when a weather disaster or unexpected changes in the marketplace negatively affects their income.

March 31 is also the last day to decide which program – ARC or PLC – is the right one for their operation. Each program provides unique protections. The best choice will depend on factors specific to their individual farm.

FSA, in cooperation with a number of universities, has provided online Web-based tools, found at www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc to help make this important decision. The online tools have already helped more than half a million farmers so far. Over 400 farmer meetings have been held in Indiana, alone.

If you have not yet considered your ARC or PLC options, take the time today to explore the web tools and then contact your FSA county office if you have questions. Celebrate Ag Day and Ag Week with the peace of mind knowing your farm will be protected as you make plans to enter the fields this spring.

If you don't make a decision by the March 31 deadline, then you will be assigned Price Loss Coverage, the default program, and lose payments for losses incurred in 2014. However, if you complete your ARC or PLC election by the deadline, you will be protected against 2014 price or revenue losses.

Don't let this opportunity slip by. Finalize your yield or base acre decisions, complete those conversations between landowners and producers, and conduct your final reviews to determine how ARC or PLC can help you. Avoid that end-of-the-month rush, and make an appointment today. Your Indiana FSA county staff is standing by ready to help.

(Julia A. Wickard is a third-generation Angus cattle producer and resides on her family farm in the great State of Indiana. She serves as the State Executive Director for the U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency in Indiana and works for farmers every day. She may be contacted at julia.wickard@in.usda.gov)