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Every Day Is Earth Day On The Farm

I like to describe the American farmer as a true *environmental activist*. One who tills the soil and cares for the land for this – and future generations. As the annual Earth Day weekend is upon us, I want to pause for a moment and salute and thank the *first environmentalist* – the American farmer! These men and women, right here in Indiana, work day in and day out to conserve and protect the natural resources the other 364 days of the year, besides the “official” Earth Day.

As we reflect on the technological advances in agriculture, it is important to look back to the first Earth Day in 1970. We have continually learned better ways to protect the land, water and air we all depend on to live by using modern production tools such as global positioning satellites, biotechnology, conservation tillage and integrated pest management. Since that first Earth Day, Americans from every walk of life have joined forces to encourage better stewardship of our natural resources. American farmers daily live the message of “natural resource management” because they reside and work on the land. They sincerely depend on

the earth's productivity to support their families and to provide food, feed, fiber and fuel for the entire world. Farmers continually learn better ways to grow crops and seek improved methods for raising livestock. To assure an abundant food supply, sustainable fuel and fiber industry, we all know we must first conserve and protect the environment. Farmers appreciate the fragility of natural resources and know it is important to safeguard the environment for the generations to come.

Having grown up on the farm, I have a great passion for agriculture and the American farmer. However, since working for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency, it gives me an even deeper appreciation for those farmers who work closely with our Agency staff at the local level. A farmer's watchfulness and care of the natural resources and livestock that inhabit the earth, allows him to feed, clothe and provide the fuel, not only for America, but for the world. There are 6.5 billion people on the planet which is expected to grow to 8 billion by 2025. Today's farmer provides food and fiber for 144 people, up from 19 people in 1940. As we pause as a Nation to remember Earth Day, the farmer is always looking for better, cleaner ways to care for the entire globe.

While most Earth Day observers spend the occasional day outdoors, farmers spend a day indoors on the rarest occasions. Farmers understand the day-to-day rhythms of the Earth because they spend each day in nature. In fact, agricultural land offers 75% of the nation's habitat. Decisions by the American farmer are based upon the weather, the soil, the grass, the wind and the wildlife – and each of them is ever-changing. Conservation tillage, a method of farming that reduces soil loss on cropland while using less energy, has grown from 17% of the acreage in 1982 to 63% of the acreage today. Farm productivity has increased dramatically in the last 60 years while the use of resources, such as labor, seed, feed and fertilizer, has declined; leading to a shrinking environmental footprint for food and fiber production in the United States. This is why American agriculture is the envy of the world.

So, it is springtime in Indiana. For those in rural communities and living on farms, this means that preparation is well underway on Indiana farms to get into farm fields to begin planting the food bounty for our great nation. Just another reason to remember that every day is Earth Day on the farm!