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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**KANSAS AGRICULTURE EDUCATOR SELECTED
AS 2021 PARTNERSHIP IN AGRICULTURAL LITERACY AWARD RECIPIENT**

The National Agriculture in the Classroom Organization (NAITCO) and National Grange Foundation have selected Kansas agriculture educator Serita Blankenship as the recipient of its 2021 Partnership in Agricultural Literacy (PAL) Award, formerly known as the Agricultural Advocate Award.

Blankenship of Kansas Farm Bureau (KFB) won the award for her 20-plus-year commitment to educating Kansas students at the elementary and secondary level about the importance of agriculture with programs like "Be Ag Wise" and the rollout of the *Kailey's Agriculture Adventure* book series and related lesson plans. The "Be Ag Wise" program lasted more than a decade, was one of the largest, most successful projects Blankenship assisted in implementing, was a joint effort between Kansas Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom (KFAC) and KFB and provided workshops in four locations across the state each year where more than 1,000 educators learned agriculture theme-related lessons in a train-the-trainer format.

"In the short time I have been with the Kansas Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom, I have learned that Serita shares KFAC's passion for Kansas agriculture and commitment to increasing agricultural literacy," wrote KFAC Executive Director Nancy Zenger-Beneda in her letter of support. "Her guidance on our education committee and the agriculture education task force has been a big part of our successes."

"The Grange Foundation is proud to present this award each year, and winners like Serita Blankenship keep amazing us with their passion, creativity and impact on both the children and educators they serve," said Betsy Huber, Grange Foundation president.

"National Agriculture in the Classroom and state and territory Agriculture in the Classroom programs depend on educators like Serita Blankenship to deliver agricultural literacy outreach to students in innovative ways in their communities," NAITCO President Tammy Maxey said. "Her passion for reaching students with reading programs and involving older students to teach younger students is inspiring."

Blankenship helped distribute to educators the *Kailey's Agriculture Adventure* book series published by KFB. This series, written by Dan Yunk, consists of seven books and follows the travels of Kailey as she visits the farm to learn more about agriculture. Each book in the series has lesson plans, resources, activities, fun facts, and a glossary. Blankenship was an integral part of putting all of these pieces together, as well as getting the books and resources in the hands of Kansas teachers.

In addition, she has been implementing a "leading kids to agriculture knowledge" program in which she taught more than 380 high school student leaders the importance of agriculture and educating the next generation about this important industry. Many of those students were then able to take those lessons to elementary schools and teach younger kids about agriculture once again following Blankenship's "train-the-trainer" model.

Blankenship has served on the KFAC Education Committee and has been a staff liaison for the KFB's Women's Committee, whose volunteers promote agriculture education as one of their top priorities. She is the farm safety manager at KFB and has led thousands of students in hands-on, farm safety demonstrations over the years. She has also presented at many agriculture education venues in order to reach broader audiences, including during National Agriculture Hall of Fame events, American Royal BBQ Kid's Area, Kansas State Fair, K-12 schools, kids ag safety days, teacher in-service trainings, Kansas State Capitol South Step Friday events, and has appeared in several agriculture education spots with a celebrity chef on a local television station.

The National Grange Foundation supports youth development, promotes agriculture education and research, improves communities, and fosters culture, heritage, citizenship, and charitable activities. Founded in 1867, the National Grange was formed as a nationwide organization with a local grassroots focus. Its members are given the opportunity to learn and grow to their full potential as citizens and leaders. To learn more about the National Grange, please visit www.nationalgrange.org.

NAITCO is a non-profit organization representing state Agriculture in the Classroom programs in most of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. It provides web-based pre-kindergarten-12th grade lesson plans and companion resources, a national conference, national awards programs, and professional development opportunities for state and territory Agriculture in the Classroom programs. Its mission is to increase agricultural literacy through Pre-K-12 education. To learn more about NAITCO, please visit www.agclassroom.org.

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