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**NAITCO SPREADS AGRICULTURAL LITERACY MESSAGE
TO MORE THAN 400 EDUCATORS AT NATIONAL CONFERENCE**

LITCHFIELD PARK, AZ— More than 400 educators from around the country learned how to use agricultural concepts to teach reading, writing, math, science, social studies and more at the National Agriculture in the Classroom Organization's (NAITCO) National Conference called 'Blooming in the Desert' to be held at the Wigwam Resort held June 22-24 in Litchfield Park, Arizona.

NAITCO, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute for Food & Agriculture (NIFA) and Arizona Foundation for Agricultural Literacy, held three days of workshops that showed kindergarten through 12th grade teachers how to use agriculture to teach core subject areas. In addition, conference participants went on traveling workshops of nearby farms and university research facilities to learn about the fruit, vegetable and nursery production, among other stops.

The conference also honored several national teacher winners and a national Ag Advocate winner for the innovative ways they use agriculture to teach students about an important industry.

"The USDA-NIFA proudly sponsors the National Agriculture in the Classroom National Conference where K-12 general education teachers from around the country can compare teaching strategies that effectively use agriculture as a teaching tool," said Dr. Victoria LeBeaux, the USDA-NIFA's National Program Leader for National Agriculture in the Classroom.

"National Agriculture in the Classroom prides itself in being the only national organization that shows general education teachers in kindergarten through 12th grade how agriculture can be used in formal classroom instruction in its conference workshops, awards presentations and tours of agricultural operations," said Lorri Brenneman, president of the National Agriculture in the Classroom Organization. "Bottom line: We show teachers that agriculture is a great way to teach core subjects and familiarize students with where their food, fiber and fuel come from."

In addition, NAITCO rolled out at the national conference a new unit of K-12 activities tied to video outtakes from film *The Great American Wheat Harvest* called 'Harvesting: Crops & Careers.' Development of the lessons was a partnership between NAITCO, US Customer Harvesters, New Holland and *The Great American Wheat Harvest* film company Conjo Studios and can be found at www.agclassroom.org/teacher/themes.htm

Of the more than 400 conference participants registered, more than half were teachers from around the country, many of whom received scholarships provided by CHS Foundation, Inc. to cover their conference registrations.

The seven recipients of the 2016 Excellence in Teaching about Agriculture Award, which is sponsored by the USDA-NIFA and Farm Credit Council, are:

- Georgia first grade teacher Lauren Goble who educates her students about local agriculture with 'Thank a Farmer Friday' when students eat commodities from a nearby farm they learned about in class the week before.
- Oklahoma third grade teacher Lisa Storm who teaches her students Oklahoma history using developments in agriculture as the theme, healthy eating habits using cooking activities and local agriculture by visiting activity stations at 'Land Run Day.'
- North Dakota third grade teacher Cheryl Bombenger who uses a 'TADA' strategy (Teaching Activities Done Aesthetically) using agriculture as the theme in songs, stories and gardening to connect with students.

- Pennsylvania first grade teachers Shirley Hershey and Laura Shiplet James who use agricultural themes throughout the school year to educate their students about Pennsylvania farming including learning a Farm Fact every Wednesday, participating in the Mobile Ag Lab every January and participating in Farm Fest Day at the end of each school year to celebrate everything students have learned.
- Kansas K-8 teacher Ray Huff who uses agricultural projects such as building a pond on school grounds and developing a miniature tractor and a barn to teach the STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) subjects.
- New York secondary teacher Judiann Carmack-Fayyaz who developed a school garden and greenhouse program to teach food and agricultural literacy to her students in 6th through 12th grade.

In addition, American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture honored at the conference several teachers and agriculture industry educators for using agriculture as an effective teaching tool as part of its White-Reinhardt Fund for Education program.

Louisiana volunteer educator Denise Hymel received at the conference the 2016 Ag Advocate Award, which is sponsored by the National Grange. Hymel, a long-time Louisiana Farm Bureau and Agriculture in the Classroom volunteer, donated two-and-a-half acres of her sugarcane farm in 1999 to start a program called 'Fast Food Farm' where more than 75,000 students have learned about the production of vegetables and livestock first-hand over the years. Hymel has been at the helm from the beginning and hosts annual tours for fourth graders, provides a garden lab for nearby agri-science classes and provides meeting and event space for community groups such as FFA, 4-H, AITC, the Soil and Water Conservation District, Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts.

A big 'thank you' goes to national conference sponsors Agrium, American Egg Board, American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture, Arizona Foundation for Agricultural Literacy, Arizona Grain Research & Promotion Council, CHS Foundation, Inc., Cotton's Journey, CropLife America, Domino's Pizza Smart Slice, DuPont Pioneer, Evergreen Creations, Farm Credit Council, Hickman's Family Farms, Land O'Lakes, Inc., National Grange, Nutrients for Life Foundation, Protect the Harvest, Salt River Project, Tractor Supply Co., University of Arizona College of Ag & Life Sciences' Cooperative Extension Agricultural Literacy Program, US Farmers & Ranchers Alliance and 8 Point Promotions. Their support helped keep registration costs low so more teachers could attend.

NAITCO is a non-profit organization representing most of the state Agriculture in the Classroom programs around the country. Its mission is to educate K-12 teachers and students about the importance of agriculture by providing them with materials, awards programs and a national conference that demonstrate how agriculture can be used to effectively teach core subject areas.

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