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EIGHT TEACHERS SELECTED FOR THE 2021 NATIONAL EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING ABOUT AGRICULTURE AWARD

A California teacher of kindergarten through eighth grade students who teaches science and engineering lessons with a two-acre school garden, a Kentucky fifth grade teacher who uses agricultural themes to teach all subject areas and six other teachers from around the country have been selected as the 2021 National Excellence in Teaching about Agriculture Award winners.

The National Agriculture in the Classroom Organization (NAITCO), U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA-NIFA) and Farm Credit partner each year to honor teachers in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade (Pre-K-12) from around the country for the innovative ways they use agricultural concepts to teach reading, writing, math, science, social studies, STEM, STEAM and more.

"Many people think that agriculture teaches hard work and perseverance, and it does. But, these outstanding teachers recognize that agriculture also is fertile ground for teaching botany, biology, chemistry, finance, climatology, and arts, in ways that any age or level of students can understand, appreciate and apply to their daily life," said Dr. Carrie Castille, director of USDA-NIFA, which provides federal leadership and annual funding for NAITCO. "When a student makes that real-life connection to the lessons their teachers share, students continue to learn and absorb the true meaning of those lessons when they leave the classroom. Innovative teachers like these are often responsible for awakening a student's love of learning, nature and science."

"Honoring these innovative teachers for the ways they use agricultural themes to teach language arts, math, science, social studies and the STEM subject areas is the highlight of the year for National Agriculture in the Classroom and its Agriculture in the Classroom state member programs," said Tammy Maxey, president of NAITCO and programs director of the Virginia Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom.

"Teachers are key partners in agricultural literacy education, helping to shape the next generation of agriculture advocates through intentional and engaging activities," said president and CEO of the Farm Credit Council Todd Van Hoose. "Farm Credit is proud to honor these innovative educators and support their ongoing commitment to growing future leaders."

This year's winning teachers are:

- Christine Torosian-Klistoff, a kindergarten through eighth grade teacher at Fairmont Elementary in Fresno, CA, teaches her students important soil science and engineering lessons with a two-acre school garden in which they help test the soil pH, plant vegetables that do well in that type of soil and build an irrigation system, among other activities.
- Mary Lynn Hess, a STEM teacher at Goldsboro Elementary Magnet School in Sanford, FL, involves all the students at her school in math, science, engineering, health, physical education, and technology lessons using a fruit and vegetable school garden, a healthy eating initiative and an "Enabling Garden" that allows students with physical challenges to participate.
- Karen Garland, a kindergarten-fifth grade science teacher at Clark Creek Elementary STEM Academy in Canton, GA, uses a school garden to teach kindergarteners about the five senses, first graders about the

water cycle, second graders about plant and animal life cycles, third graders about habitat conservation and soil health, fourth graders about the weather and ecosystems and fifth graders about erosion and other destructive forces in the garden and classification systems.

- Kelly Gates, a fifth grade teacher at Pride Elementary in Madisonville, KY, introduces agricultural themes, speakers, farm tours and special events to teach her students about seed germination and plant life cycles, colonial era homesteading and farming, hybridization of daylilies and international trade, among other activities.
- Tonya Claybrook, a fourth and fifth grade teacher at Highlandville Elementary in Highlandville, MO, uses the “Fabulous Fowl” unit and a schoolyard chicken coop to teach students the parts of an egg, the life cycle of a chicken and responsibilities involved in caring for 12 hens throughout the school year.
- Martha McLeod, third through fifth grade outdoor science laboratory teacher at Fulton 3-5 Learning Center in Fulton, TX, involves her students in a schoolyard vegetable garden where each grade level investigates and selects a crop to plant and cares for it throughout the school year. She also has received a \$10,000 grant to build an outdoor classroom tied to the garden.
- Patricia Eshelman, a high school living environment teacher at Bolivar-Richburg Central School in Bolivar, NY, educates her students about agricultural concepts and careers by featuring guest speakers from all agricultural fields on “Farmer Fridays” and requiring students to maintain a school garden called the “Wolverine Environmental Education Center” where they are hired to take care of it through the summer.
- Tammy Will, an eighth through 12th grade teacher of chemistry, physical science, STEM, and general science at Morrison High School in Morrison, OK, develops and presents lessons and experiments on the chemistry of biodiesel made from soybeans, soil chemistry, the science and technology behind identifying and understanding GMOs and non-GMO food items, among many other agricultural concepts.

They will be honored at the 2021 National Agriculture in the Classroom Conference “Fields of Dreams” June 28-July 1 at the Iowa Events Center in Des Moines, Iowa.

USDA/NIFA provides leadership and funding for programs that advance agriculture-related sciences. It invests in and supports initiatives that ensure the long-term viability of agriculture. NIFA applies an integrated approach to ensure that groundbreaking discoveries in agriculture-related sciences and technologies reach the people who can put them into practice. To learn more about USDA/NIFA, please visit <https://nifa.usda.gov/>.

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NAITCO is a non-profit organization representing Agriculture in the Classroom programs in most of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Its mission is to educate Pre-K-12 teachers and students about the importance of agriculture by providing them with web-based materials, workshops and awards programs that demonstrate how agriculture can be used to effectively teach core subject areas. To learn more about NAITCO, please visit www.agclassroom.org.

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