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July 8, 2015

**NAITCO SPREAD AGRICULTURAL LITERACY MESSAGE
TO 500 EDUCATORS AT NATIONAL CONFERENCE**

LOUISVILLE, KY – About 500 educators from around the country learned the ‘Unbridled Possibilities’ of using agricultural concepts to teach reading, writing, math, science, social studies and more at the National Agriculture in the Classroom Organization’s (NAITCO) National Conference held at The Galt House Hotel June 16-20 in Louisville, Kentucky.

NAITCO, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Institute for Food and Agriculture and Kentucky Agriculture and the Environment in the Classroom, 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 equine, soybean and bourbon industries, 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 is proud to support 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.

“What better way to show educators how to use agricultural concepts to jazz up their classroom instruction than to showcase innovative teaching strategies in workshops, awards presentations and tours of agricultural operations,” said Lisa Gaskalla, president of the National Agriculture in the Classroom Organization. “Bottom line: We showed teachers that agriculture is a great way to teach core subjects and familiarize students with where their food, fiber and fuel come from.”

Of the 500 conference participants registered, more than half were teachers from around the country, many of whom received scholarships provided by CHS Foundation, Inc. and several Kentucky sponsors.

Recipients of the 2015 Excellence in Teaching about Agriculture Award, which is sponsored by the USDA-NIFA and Farm Credit, are:

- Florida STEM elementary teacher Christine Danger who uses agriculture to teach technology and engineering concepts by having students design vertical growing systems and irrigation systems for their school garden.

- Kentucky seventh grade science teacher Leslie Preston Meredith who features agricultural concepts to teach across the curriculum to foster in her students' minds a love of the environment and an appreciation of the importance of agriculture.
- North Carolina kindergarten-through-fifth-grade teacher Darlene Petranick who uses an 18-bed school garden to teach all subject areas at her school.
- Tennessee kindergarten teacher Rachel Parker Morris who features a new agriculture topic each week by teaching the alphabet with agriculture-related words or class stories, and participating in a year-long study that ends with a field trip to a local farm.
- Virginia kindergarten teacher M.K. Preston who tries to instill in students a love of and respect for agriculture and the environment through inquiry-based and hands-on activities, and involvement in the Belview Giving Gardens school garden laboratory.
- Utah fifth grade teacher Théo Anderson who created the "Hens for Hunger" service learning project to help her students make connections to agriculture by contextualizing core curriculum in science and social studies. Her students hatch chicks, raise hens, collect eggs and make donations to the local food pantry.

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

The recipient of the 2015 Ag Advocate Award, which is sponsored by the National Grange, is retired Minnesota extension agent Juanita Reed-Boniface.

She and her husband, Dick, have worked for years with a legion of volunteers who make classroom visits in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area, and have expanded their outreach to include programs with Minnesota Farm Bureau, Minnesota and American Cattlewomen, Minnesota State Fair, University of Minnesota 4-H, Minnesota Agri-Women and National Agri-Women and Project Food, Land & People.

A big 'thank you' goes to national conference sponsors American Egg Board, American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture, CHS Foundation, Inc., DuPont Pioneer, Farm Credit Council, Farm Time Network, Kentucky Farm Bureau, Kentucky Soybean Board, Kentucky Agriculture and Environment in the Classroom, Highlights, Longwood Gardens and Land O'Lakes, Inc. 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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