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Statewide Survey Released to Address Future of Agriculture in West Virginia

Charleston W.Va. -- West Virginia's abundant land holds promise for agricultural prosperity for the state and its people. To ensure this valuable industry thrives for years to come, agribusiness owners, retailers and other stakeholders are being asked to give their input.

The West Virginia Agriculture Advisory Board announced the first step in developing a five-year, strategic plan for agriculture. A statewide survey, as well as market analysis will be conducted to address the challenges and opportunities facing the industry. Commissioner of Agriculture Kent Leonhardt relaunched the board in July of 2017 which includes Governor Jim Justice and the Dean of WVU Extension Service Steve Bonanno.

"As laid out in code, the board was established with the founding of the WVDA to avoid duplication of services and determine the needs of the agricultural interests in the Mountain State," said Commissioner Leonhardt. "We want to understand what barriers exist to growing our agriculture-based businesses. We hope to find new market opportunities and avoid picking winners and losers arbitrarily."

The steering committee, as appointed by the Agriculture Advisory Board, hired Pittsburgh-based Fourth Economy to facilitate a six- to nine-month process to conduct the market analysis, as well as engage stakeholders in the development of a strategic plan for agriculture. The final plan will include prioritized, detailed strategies and potential resources to help grow and diversify West Virginia's agricultural sector.

"We know that agriculture has the potential to be a significant economic driver for our state," said Dean Bonanno. "We have resources to significantly change farming and agriculture in our state, but those resources have not been put to good use. Our partners want to work together to see our farming and agricultural resources become a major economic engine for West Virginia. The feedback we receive from our agribusiness owners and others via this survey will be key in developing this long-term strategy."

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The “Growing West Virginia’s Agricultural Economy” survey will be available starting Monday, August 6. Anyone connected to agriculture is welcome to take the survey, including but not limited to farmers, processors, producers, distributors and retailers. The survey can be taken online at www.wvagadvisory.com through Monday, August 20. Paper surveys will be available at partner agency offices and at the State Fair of West Virginia. Three survey takers will be selected at random to win a registration to the Small Farm Conference, registration to the Women in Ag Conference, or a Farm Bureau membership.

The West Virginia Agriculture Advisory Board Steering Committee includes representatives from the West Virginia Department of Agriculture, West Virginia Farm Bureau, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, West Virginia Conservation Agency, WVU Extension Service, WVU Davis College of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Design and West Virginia State University Extension Service. To learn more, visit www.wvagadvisory.com.

For more information, please contact Crescent Gallagher at 304-380-3922 or cgallagher@wvda.us.

The West Virginia Department of Agriculture protects plant, animal and human health through a variety of scientific, regulatory and consumer protection programs. The Commissioner of Agriculture is one of six statewide elected officials who sits on the Board of Public Works.

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