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WVDA to Honor Women in Agriculture at the State Fair of West Virginia

Charleston W.Va. -- This year's honorees for West Virginia Women in Agriculture are outstanding in their fields. Commissioner of Agriculture Kent Leonhardt will recognize the recipients on Sunday, August 12th at 2:00 p.m. at a reception during the State Fair of West Virginia. From a goat farmer to a veterinarian, an agriculture grant writing specialist to a farm-to-school proponent, the women come from diverse backgrounds.

"Women have always played a vital role on the farm. Their contributions to our country's agricultural heritage can't be understated," Leonhardt said. "This year's honorees are wonderful examples of the American entrepreneurial spirit."

The West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA) began honoring Women in Agriculture in 2010. Since then 46 women, including this year's honorees, have been recognized for their significant contributions to the agriculture industry.

Miriam Leatherman

Buena Vista Farm - Hardy County

Miriam Leatherman has served the agriculture community faithfully for many years. Along with her husband George, she operates Buena Vista Farm located in the Old Fields area of Hardy County. The farm consists of 198 acres of prime farmland, which also includes poultry houses and a beef cattle operation. In 2011, Miriam began strawberry production on the farm. What started as a ¼ acre plot has now increased to over ½ acre. These berries are sold locally to various schools, as well as through pick-your-own on the farm. Miriam began strawberry production to provide nutritious food for locals, as she served as the WVU Hardy County Family and Consumer Science Extension Agent from 1982-2011 as well as previously holding

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that same position in Monongalia and Harrison counties. As of 2014, Miriam has expanded her operation by growing asparagus and salad greens, as well as producing value-added products such as strawberry syrup and pumpkin butter. Miriam is a role model for the agriculture and conservation community and is very committed to serving the residents of Hardy county and surrounding areas. When asked for advice to give other women in agriculture, she stated, “It’s important to find your growing niche.”

Lynn Benedict

Walnut Fork & Paisley Park Alpines - Greenbrier County

Since 1973, Lynn Benedict has raised Alpine and Nubian dairy goats in Greenbrier County. Upon her beginnings in agriculture, Lynn has since co-founded the Mountain State Dairy Goat Association, been a leading factor in the beginnings of the dairy goat show at the State Fair of West Virginia and served two three-year terms on the American Dairy Goat Association board of directors and is currently chair of Advanced Judges. Beginning in 1975, Lynn has participated in ADGA (American Dairy Goat Association) national shows. She began exhibiting in 1988 and in that year her Nubian doe was Reserve National Champion. She has competed in National shows across the country and over the years her Alpine goats have won many awards. Some of her breeding stock have been sent to Canada, Mexico, the Philippines and the Dominican Republic. Lynn’s farm consists of three fenced-in acres that includes a goat barn with electric milking machines. Her herd is at about twenty goats. Her loyalty and care for her goats combined with community services makes her an ideal woman of agriculture. When asked for advice to give other women in agriculture, she suggested, “Make sure you love it because it takes lots of work.”

Jewel Plumley

Veterinarian - Raleigh County

Raised on a sheep and beef farm in Raleigh County, and a daughter of a WVU Extension Agent and Elementary School Teacher, Jewell Plumley knows the value of agriculture to West Virginia. As the first woman to be the West Virginia State Veterinarian and Director of the Animal Health Division, Dr. Plumley has made a huge impact on the agriculture industry for many years. Throughout her years of service as a veterinarian she strived to help farmers across West Virginia to improve their management and herd health. Endlessly devoting her time to helping 4-H and FFA students in a variety of areas, Jewell has always devoted her time to educating youth on animal health practices. Dr. Plumley was honored as one of six women in the United States as a state veterinarian during her career. As someone who has devoted her life to animal health and well-being, Dr. Jewell Plumley has helped so many people grow in the agriculture industry, proving her as a true woman of agriculture. When asked for advice to give to other women in agriculture, her words were simple, “Go for it.”

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Cynthia ‘Cindy’ Martel

WVDA Marketing Specialist - Fayette County

Handling everything from community and rural development to grant writing and administration, Cynthia “Cindy” Martel has made a huge impact on West Virginia agriculture. Cindy was hired as a Marketing Specialist with the West Virginia Department of Agriculture in 1994 and was the first to encourage the WVDA to get behind the agritourism movement. However, her involvement in agriculture started before her employment with WVDA. Cindy grew up in Vermont, raising and showing sheep, helping her on her grandparent’s dairy, doing a little maple syrup and being an overall “farm kid.” She didn’t know it then, but her rural background would go on to shape the rest of her life. After attending the University of Wisconsin-River Falls for her bachelor’s degree in Ag Business, Cindy moved to West Virginia in 1988. Cindy and her family operated Red Roof Farms, Inc., a gourmet food company in Fayetteville, WV. She has been a leading role in the growth of West Virginia’s maple syrup industry, co-administrator of West Virginia’s Produce Safety Grant and much more. Cindy is an inspiration to many. Agriculture isn’t just a job, it’s her passion.

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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