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NEWS RELEASE
March 21, 2017

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WEST VIRGINIA OBSERVES NATIONAL AG DAY

Charleston, W.Va. – Today, March 21st, marks the 44th anniversary of National Ag Day. Around the country and in West Virginia thousands of people are celebrating the importance agriculture has in our daily lives. The theme for this year's celebration is "Agriculture: Food for Life."

"Everybody has to eat every single day and that is what this year's theme is highlighting," said West Virginia Commissioner of Agriculture Kent Leonhardt. "Without food there is no life, and without farmers there is no food. That's why we are putting such an emphasis on agricultural education opportunities in West Virginia."

Using the "Food for Life" theme, the West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA), orchestrated a poster and essay contest. Hundreds of WV students interpreted the theme and submitted entries with Marley Heath of Morgan County winning the poster portion and Micah Allen of Randolph County, winning top essay.

"We see reaching our students through promotions like Ag Day or with other classroom measures, like changing STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) educational programs to become STEAM (incorporating hands-on agricultural elements), as all great tools in ag education," continued Commissioner Leonhardt. "We hope to open their eyes to a multitude of career paths in the agriculture arena."

National Ag Day is a project of the Agriculture Council of America (ACA). The goals of the event are to promote a better understanding of agricultural production, to build appreciation for the role American agriculture plays in our nation's economy, and to increase awareness of the career opportunities in a variety of agriculture-based industries.

"The agriculture industry has an ever-growing age gap. Farmers are becoming older and older and we are not replacing them with the next generation," stressed WVDA Deputy Commissioner Joe Hatton. "We need to highlight to our public-school students the importance of agriculture and the career opportunities that are available."

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service (USDA-ERS), there are about 2.6 million direct, on-farm jobs, but there are an additional 16 million jobs in related industries. Potential agricultural professions include farm production, management and marketing, commodities brokering, engineering, genetics, food science, food processing, food distribution, agriculture education, energy, conservation, regulatory, retail sales and veterinary medicine, among many others.

In West Virginia, agriculture generated nearly \$740 million in receipts in 2015. It ranked ninth in apple production, 11th in peach production, 14th in turkey production and 18th in broiler (meat chicken) production. For more information, visit www.agday.org.

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