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## Celebrating Earth Day and Investing in Our Planet

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**Op-Ed by Julia A. Wickard**  
**State Executive Director, Indiana Farm Service Agency**

**Indianapolis, April 11, 2023** - As we celebrate Earth Day today, let's take a moment to commemorate the contributions of Indiana farmers to providing the food, fiber and fuel security of the United States.

This year's theme is Investing in Our Planet, and every day, the Farm Service Agency (FSA) works alongside producers to invest in the land. Agriculture has come a long way over the past 161 years when President Abraham Lincoln first created the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). In those days, 90% of Americans lived in the countryside. Now just 17% of us live in rural areas, with less than 1% as farmers, and one-tenth of that growing 80% of the food, fiber and feed that we consume and export. Yet we still grow plenty for our country, with enough left over to sell overseas.

Lincoln said that the best thing about the future is that it comes one day at a time. Similarly, each day, the work of an individual farmer combines into the achievements of generations and the strength of this nation. That spirit of cooperation finds its roots in the ethics of our immigrant ancestors, the earliest pioneers whose teamwork was the very essence of survival in the vast stretches of the American landscape.

Agriculture still depends on cooperation and consensus. At USDA, we work with thousands of farmers and rural communities every day, knowing that there is no limit to the economic potential of rural America. USDA invests in programs that provide farmers with access to credit, a strong farm safety net, and promote new markets for farm products, and carry out record soil and water conservation efforts.

USDA invests billions nationwide to help agricultural producers make conservation improvements on the land. Over the last several years, these improvements have lowered greenhouse gas emissions by the equivalent of 30 million metric tons per year of carbon dioxide – the same equivalent of taking 6 million cars off the road.

In 2023 and beyond, we will continue to build on this investment to support our producers who serve as the engine of our rural economy and who provide a safe, affordable and nutritious food supply for Hoosier families.

So, this is USDA's promise to you – you can count on us to work each day to engineer the strongest agriculture policies possible for your generation, policies rooted in common sense principles commonplace in rural America, so that when your grandchildren celebrate Earth Day years from now, they'll look back and remember that their strong rural economy began with you.

## **Farm Service Agency:**

1400 Independence Ave.  
SW Washington, DC 20250

## **Contact:**

FPAC Press Desk

[FPAC.BC.Press@usda.gov](mailto:FPAC.BC.Press@usda.gov)