



National Agriculture in the Classroom Organization

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**NATIONAL AGRICULTURE IN THE CLASSROOM, NATIONAL GRANGE
SELECT 2016 AG ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR**

The National Agriculture in the Classroom Organization (NAITCO) and The National Grange selected Louisiana volunteer educator Denise Hymel as the Ag Advocate of the Year for 2016.

Hymel, a long-time Louisiana Farm Bureau and Agriculture in the Classroom volunteer, donated two-and-a-half acres of her sugarcane farm in 1999 to start a program called 'Fast Food Farm' where more than 75,000 students have learned about the production of vegetables and livestock first-hand over the years. Hymel has been at the helm from the beginning and hosts annual tours for fourth graders, provides a garden lab for nearby agri-science classes and provides meeting and event space for community groups such as FFA, 4-H, AITC, the Soil and Water Conservation District, Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts.

"The Grange was created in 1867 to educate and connect the American farmer and his family. In today's world it is even more important to educate Americans about the necessity and importance of agriculture in their lives," said Ed Luttrell, president of the National Grange. "The Grange is proud to sponsor the Ag Advocate Award to recognize volunteers who serve others through education, which is the heart and soul of our organization."

"National Agriculture in the Classroom and its state Agriculture in the Classroom programs depend on hard-working, dedicated volunteers like Denise Hymel," said Lorri Brenneman, president of NAITCO. "So it is with pleasure we honor Denise who goes above and beyond the call of duty to educate youth about the importance of our industry."

Hymel writes 'I have always felt a passion to educate youth and adults about how their food is grown. In this fast paced world today I felt it necessary to help our young people understand the intricacies of our food and farming systems.'

She grew up on a farm in a rural area in Louisiana along the Mississippi River, and participated in 4-H beginning at a young age. In the late 1990s, she spent two years developing what would become the Fast Food Farm. In addition to donating the land, she created the non-profit organization that would govern the operation. She serves as its unpaid executive director, and answers to a 12-member board of directors made up of teachers and community leaders.

Fast Food Farm grows potatoes, corn, tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, wheat and raises chickens, pigs, dairy and beef cattle. The goals of the educational farm are: Educate consumers about how their food is grown; create innovative educational materials for K-12 teachers and students; provide mentoring opportunities for students; and provide leadership opportunities for 4-H, FFA and Pro-Start students.

For the past 10 years, Fast Food Farm has hosted St. James Parish Ag Days in April and October when 1,600 students in kindergarten through fourth grade participate in hands-on activities about agriculture production in their community. In addition, it has received \$90,000 from agribusiness firm Mosaic to make physical improvements to the farm and its facilities and \$5,000 from a Farm-To-School grant to install hydroponics growing systems for nearby high school classes.

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