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**FLORIDA AGRICULTURE IN THE CLASSROOM CELEBRATES
30 YEARS OF AGRICULTURAL LITERACY IN FLORIDA SCHOOLS**

GAINESVILLE – Florida Agriculture in the Classroom, Inc. (FAITC) is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. In honor of the special occasion, the non-profit organization will hold a Farm-to-Fork dinner Thursday Nov. 3 at Sunny Acres Lodge in Polk City.

The event called ‘Boots, Barns and Books’ will feature Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services’ Chef Justin, a special video of FAITC’s history, a clay shoot and a buggy ride of the scenic location in Polk County.

“We’re very proud of how the organization has grown over the years,” said Tamara Wood, chairman of Florida Agriculture in the Classroom and representative of Florida Citrus Mutual on FAITC’s board of directors. “We’re reaching more K-12 teachers and students with our popular elementary school reading program Florida Agriculture Literacy Day, school garden curricula *Gardening for Grades* and *Gardening for Nutrition* and school garden mini grants and school garden teacher workshops and farm tours.”

FAITC estimates it reaches an average of 6,000 Florida teachers and 160,000 Florida students in kindergarten through 12th grade each year.

FAITC began in the 1980s with other state Agriculture in the Classroom programs at the request of then U.S. Agriculture Secretary John Block. He recognized the importance of educating teachers and students in K-12 general education classrooms about agriculture by infusing agricultural concepts into reading, writing, science and social studies instruction. Because Americans were becoming so removed from the farm, he asked states to create Agriculture in the Classroom programs to help address the issue.

Florida agriculture industry leaders accepted the challenge, and incorporated Florida Agriculture in the Classroom on Aug. 12, 1986 with three board members - Kelvin Robinson of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), Elin Oak of the Florida Phosphate Council and Polly Golden of the Florida Beef Council.

“I’m just so appreciative of the entire industry that got behind Florida Agriculture in the Classroom and kept it going and I look forward to more good things to come from it in the future,” said Kevin Morgan, assistant to the president of Florida Farm Bureau who was one of FAITC’s first board members.

In the mid-1990s, FAITC got a boost when the Florida agriculture industry worked together with the help of Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association’s Butch Calhoun to create the Ag Tag specialty license plate.

“Getting the Ag Tag license plate was a huge effort on the part of so many in the industry,” said Joan Kyle, long-time treasurer of FAITC and a representative of the Florida Fertilizer & Agrichemical Association

on its board of directors. “The level of support I received from the agricultural community for the Ag Tag was amazing.”

In fact, the Ag Tag celebrates its 20th anniversary this year, too. With every purchase of an Ag Tag, \$20 goes to FAITC to support its programs.

Florida Agriculture Literacy Day got its start in 2004, and before long FAITC began writing its own children’s books with the help of the FDACS’ Division of Marketing. It launched its school garden program with the development of school garden curriculum *Gardening for Grades* in 2011 and *Gardening for Nutrition* in 2014 and offering of \$500 school garden mini grants each school year. *STEMming Up Gardening for Grades*, a secondary school garden curriculum, will debut in 2017.

FAITC continues to offer professional development workshops to teachers around the state throughout the year, and ties lesson instruction in the morning to crops teachers see in the afternoon on farm tours.

Next school year, FAITC will partner with international agribusiness company Agrium to host two ‘Seed Survivor’ mobile learning trailers that will visit elementary schools around the state to educate students about seed germination and plant growth. In addition, it will introduce Agrium’s new ‘Journey 2050’ educational platform that uses a farming game to educate students in 7th through 12th grade about what sustainable farming means.

In the meantime, for more information about FAITC’s 30th anniversary dinner ‘Boots, Barns and Books,’ please visit its website at <http://faitc.org/30th/>

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