



STATE OF MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE
ANDY GIPSON
COMMISSIONER

Column

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 21, 2022

American Agriculture Fueling the Economy
By: Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson

On March 22, we celebrate National Ag Day and recognize the contributions of agriculture that provide food, fuel, fiber, and shelter to our communities. In Mississippi, agriculture - the state's largest industry - makes an enormous impact on our economy. In 2021, the farm-gate value of agricultural commodities produced in Mississippi was \$8.3 billion, which set an all-time high record. With 34,700 farms in the state covering 10.4 million acres, the agriculture industry employs nearly one-fifth of our workforce.

Farmers and ranchers work tirelessly year-round to provide a safe, abundant and affordable food supply along with countless other products that we use in our daily lives. We see and consume the fruits of their labor (sometimes literally fruits) at the grocery store, farmers markets, and restaurants. Sometimes we take for granted the abundant, affordable food; but, in a crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic, we are reminded of farmers' invaluable contribution to society. When society shut down, our farmers kept working so we could keep eating.

As stewards of the land, farmers and ranchers are true conservationists. Our connection to and respect of the land, often passed down over generations, is not only sentimental and moral, but also essential to making a living. For many in agriculture, the land represents the biggest capital investment of the business. By adopting new agricultural technologies such as precision agriculture and seed technologies, farmers better safeguard their land, make better profits, and increase yields while using with fewer inputs, including water. With fewer acres available for food production, increasing yields has led to each American farmer feeding 165 people rather than just 25 people in the 1960s.

Successfully producing the food supply is more than just planting seeds and harvesting a crop. Farmers battle uncertain weather, fluctuating market prices, inflation and rising input costs, and many other challenges. This year as our farmers in Mississippi enter planting season and begin to get back into the fields, they find themselves with even greater challenges due to the Russian invasion of the Ukraine.

We have all watched in horror at the scenes coming out of Ukraine. This evil invasion by Russia of Ukraine - the 'breadbasket of Europe' - is not only killing Ukrainian civilians but will contribute to more death around the globe as those in poverty lose access to food or the food becomes unaffordable. While

Ukrainian farmers are fighting the Russian invaders, they are not able to harvest wheat and barley, they are not planting corn and sunflowers, and more people around the world will go hungry.

We're blessed in the United States to be net exporters of food. We will have plenty of food in Mississippi. But even so, Mississippians and all Americans will experience cost increases as agricultural inputs including fuel and fertilizer increase in price due to inflation, greater demand, and the lack of Russian and Ukrainian exports due to sanctions and port closures. We all need Washington to pursue policies to make America energy independent again, address inflation, and retreat from environmental regulations and decisions that only increase costs to farmers while lowering food productivity during this global crisis.

As we recognize National Ag Day, and Ag Day in Mississippi with the proclamation by Governor Tate Reeves, we remember that food security is national security. We must never be in a position where we are dependent on our enemies for sustenance. American agriculture fuels the economy and feeds our families, and I encourage all our government officials in Washington and Mississippi to join with me to pursue policies that facilitate agriculture and reject laws and restrictions that hurt the freedom to farm.

###

Contact: Paige Manning, Director of Marketing and Public Relations
Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce
(601) 359-1163/(662)312-5897
E-mail: Paige@mdac.ms.gov

Photo Attached:

