

Ag Day celebration features producers, industry & students

By Sara Wyant

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Washington, March 18. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack kicked off a series of Ag Day celebrations with a heartfelt message to a group of FFA students and other dignitaries gathered in the atrium of USDA's Whitten Building Thursday morning. While outlining a series of issues in Rural America today, he



he encouraged the young people in the audience to confront those challenges head on and try to reverse some of the current economic trends. (See photo at left of Vilsack speaking, courtesy of USDA.)

“We know that in the course of my lifetime, we've seen fewer and fewer farmers. When I was born in 1950, farmers were 15% of America's population. Today it's less than 1%,” the Secretary explained. He said the loss

of population in Rural America creates a series of economic and political problems, but also threatens this country's core value system.

Vilsack's challenge to those who represented a new generation of agriculturists was the first of many during a day filled with speeches, lunches and a lot of good dialogue with industry leaders to celebrate “Abundant, affordable, amazing” American Agriculture.



Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Blanche Lincoln shared stories about her farm upbringing and the importance of modern food production and healthy diets.

“Viable production agriculture is absolutely essential,” she emphasized.

USDA Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan welcomed the crowd for dinner and outlined some of the progress that USDA is making to support all types of agriculture. Veteran farm broadcaster Orion Samuelson moderated the events, sharing some of his best Ole and Lena jokes with the diverse crowd. The morning, noon and evening events were sponsored by the Agriculture Council of America. <http://www.agday.org/index.php>

Here are a few photos taken during the National Agriculture Day celebrations:



Photos from left to right:
Row #1: Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and Agri-Pulse Editor Sara Wyant, Vilsack addresses FFA members from around the U.S. for Ag Day (Photo: Bob Nichols, USDA)
Row #2: CAST President-Elect Tom Redick and American Soybean Association First VP Alan Kemper; Corn Refiners Assoc. President Audrae Erickson and American Farmland Trust President Jon Scholl.
Row #3: AFA Young leaders Kelly Moger, Colorado State and Tryston Beyer, Univ. of WI. River Falls, talk with Agriculture Council of America Chairperson Linda Tank.

Photos below (clockwise): Photo #1: Veteran farm broadcaster Orion Samuelson moderated the Ag Day events and was joined on stage by Agri-Pulse Editor Sara Wyant and former Secretary of Agriculture John Block. ADM's Anthony Reed and CHS's Karla Farnsworth, Iowa Pork Producers Association's John Weber, Sam Carney (who was recently elected as NPPC president) and IPPA CEO Rich Degner; Photo #4: CHS's Bob Looney and Roger Olson, National 4-H Foundation.

