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Farmer Veteran Coalition Launches Homegrown By Heroes National Certification Label *Label Identifies, Promotes and Supports Agricultural Products Grown and Raised by United States Military Veterans*

Davis, Calif. (May 15, 2014) — The [Farmer Veteran Coalition](#) (FVC) announced today the national launch of the Homegrown By Heroes initiative. This product labeling program will allow farmers, ranchers, fishermen, and the like from all 50 states and U.S. territories who have served or are still serving in any branch of the U.S. military the ability to use the logo on their agricultural products. Consumers and businesses purchasing agricultural products will begin to see this logo at the point-of-purchase and on business signage, enabling them to select products that support our country's farmer veterans.

The Kentucky Department of Agriculture (KDA) created the Homegrown By Heroes labeling as part of its Kentucky Proud marketing program in 2013. More than 60 Kentucky farmer veterans have already registered their farms with KDA to use the Homegrown By Heroes label. At a bi-partisan [event](#) in Louisville on Veterans Day 2013, Kentucky's political and National Guard leaders joined Agricultural Commissioner James Comer as he announced a national partnership for FVC to launch the Homegrown By Heroes program outside of the Commonwealth.

"From the beginning of the Homegrown By Heroes program, we hoped that it would grow to a national scale so it could benefit veterans from every state," Commissioner Comer said. "Now, that hope has become a reality with the help of the Farmer Veteran Coalition and our other generous partners. With this initiative, we can give something back to those who have given so much in defense of our country."

Only 16 percent of America's population lives in rural areas, yet 40 percent of the men and women who serve in the U.S. military come from those same rural communities. The FVC recognizes the commitment of rural Americans to military service with the goal of developing viable employment and meaningful careers through the collaboration of the farming and military communities. Veterans possess the unique skills and character needed to strengthen rural communities, and food production offers purpose, opportunity, and physical and psychological benefits to those veterans. At a time when Post-9/11 veterans are experiencing a 9 percent unemployment rate¹ (compared to the national average of 6.3 percent), agriculture can be a meaningful solution for veterans returning home and looking to provide for their families. The Homegrown By Heroes label will afford consumers the opportunity to thank a veteran for their service by purchasing their farm products.

Mark and Denise Beyers are the first certified Homegrown By Heroes producers outside of Kentucky. The high school sweethearts entered the Marine Corps in 1998 and 1999, respectively. While serving in Iraq in 2005, Mark's team hit an improvised explosive device (IED), resulting in combat injuries that led to the loss of his right arm and right leg. Upon returning from service overseas, Mark and Denise built a thriving maple syrup business on their 15-acre property in upstate New York. The couple will use the Homegrown By Heroes label

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics [2013 Employment Situation of Veterans](#) – March 20, 2014

to help sell the maple syrup they produce on their farm as well as eggs and vegetables they will market in the summer.

“Farming and military service are more closely linked than one might think. Thousands of our service men and women leave the rural communities and farms they call home in order to serve our country in the military. Upon completion of their service, they often return home to resume work on the family farm,” said Michael O’Gorman, executive director of the Farmer Veteran Coalition. “Conversely, we work with hundreds of veterans with no agriculture background who, upon returning from service, see opportunity in farming and ranching and decide to embark on a new career path in agriculture. By supporting this label, we can help the veterans who are serving our country in a new way – by producing the food and fiber that feeds and clothes us all. At the same time, we’re helping thousands of young veterans find a new calling in a farming community whose average age is 58 years. ”

To qualify for the Homegrown By Heroes label, one must have served honorably or still be serving in any branch of the U.S. Armed Forces, and be at least 50 percent owner and/or operator of the farm business. Veterans of all eras are encouraged to apply. FVC staff assists applicants in developing food safety plans and, if needed, business plans. FVC is now accepting and processing Homegrown By Heroes applications, which can be completed at <http://www.hgbh.org>.

Farm Credit, the nation’s largest network of farmer-owned agricultural lenders, supported the national launch of the Homegrown By Heroes label with a donation of \$250,000. The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF), the National Farmers Union (NFU), and a wide array of other farm organizations also support the Homegrown By Heroes label.

About Homegrown by Heroes

Originated in Kentucky, Homegrown By Heroes is a marketing program that provides a distinctive label that farmer veteran’s may affix on their agricultural products to be displayed to the consumer at point of sale. The label informs consumers that a veteran who served our country in the military produced the product in the U.S. With the help of FVC, Homegrown By Heroes will positively influence the way consumers think and feel when purchasing agricultural products.

About Farmer Veteran Coalition

The mission of the Farmer Veteran Coalition (FVC) is mobilizing veterans to feed America. FVC works to develop a new generation of farmers and food leaders, and expand viable employment and career opportunities through the collaboration of the farming and military communities. Through mentorship, peer support, and career counseling, FVC supports veterans returning to or beginning careers in the food and farming industry. For more information, or to register with Homegrown By Heroes, please visit www.farmvetco.org.

About the Farm Credit System

For nearly a century, Farm Credit has been a national provider of credit and related services to rural America through its cooperative network of customer-owned lending institutions. Farm Credit provides more than \$200 billion in loans and leases to farmers, ranchers, rural homeowners, aquatic producers, timber harvesters, agribusinesses, and agricultural and rural utility cooperatives. For more information about the Farm Credit System, please visit www.farmcredit.com.

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