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For Immediate Release

Secretary Vilsack Urges Farm Country to Be Proactive in Keynote at the Farm Journal Forum

Philadelphia, PA (Dec. 10, 2012) — U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack started what he called “an adult conversation” with rural America during his keynote speech at the 2012 Farm Journal Forum in Washington, D.C., last week. The Secretary called on all of agriculture to embrace a more proactive message and approach when pursuing political interests. He suggested replacing “a preservation mindset with a growth mindset” by opening up to new markets, promoting global exports, welcoming diversity and choosing political battles more carefully.

Without a change in tone and strategy, Vilsack cautioned, rural America would continue to decline in political relevance: “Why is it that we don’t have a farm bill?” Vilsack said. “It isn’t just the differences of policy. It’s the fact that rural America, with a shrinking population, is becoming less and less relevant to the politics of this country, and we had better recognize that and we better begin to reverse it.”

The message was tough for some to hear, but the Secretary—who has made rural economic growth a cornerstone of his tenure at the U.S. Department of Agriculture—also spoke of his belief in rural America and its bright future. “We’ve got something to market here,” he noted. “We’ve got something to be proactive about. Let’s spend our time and our resources and our energy doing that, and I think if we do, we’re going to have a lot of young people who want to be part of that future.”

The Farm Journal Foundation hosted the Forum in partnership with Informa Economics to create the type of high-level policy dialogue that was spurred as a result of Secretary Vilsack’s speech. Like Vilsack, Senate Agriculture Committee Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.) and House Agriculture Committee Chairman Frank Lucas (R-Okla.) addressed the future of farm policy at the Farm Journal Forum and discussed recent progress in negotiations to pass a five-year farm bill by year’s end.

“We recognized a collective need for the agriculture community to be more forward-thinking in telling its story. The Farm Journal Foundation’s *Farmers Feeding the World* effort was launched to help fight hunger and highlight the contributions modern agriculture and rural communities make to the rest of society,” said Charlene Finck, president of the Farm Journal Foundation. “Secretary Vilsack’s speech at the 14th Farm Journal Forum reinforced our mission and our drive to bridge the information gap.”

Other speakers at the Forum included Thomas Dorr, former Undersecretary of Agriculture for Rural Development; Marshall Matz, Principal Attorney at OFW Law; Roger Thurow, Senior Fellow for Global Agriculture and Food Policy at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs; Bruce Knight, President of Strategic Conservation Solutions; Arlene Mitchell, Deputy Director of Agricultural Development for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; Kavita Prakash-Mani, Head of Food Security for Syngenta; Bob Thompson, Senior Fellow at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs; Randy Van Kooten, Iowa farmer; Robin Schepper, Senior Advisor of the Nutrition and Physical Activity Initiative at the Bipartisan Policy Center; Lisa Sutherland, President of LA Sutherland and Associates; Lindsey Palmer, Director of Nutrition and Community Outreach for the D.C. Central Kitchen; and Bruce Scherr and Jim Wiesemeyer of Informa Economics.

The Forum's premier sponsors were Farm Credit Services and SFP. Supporting sponsors of the event were BASF, Charleston|Orwig, CropLife America, Dow AgroSciences, DuPont, FMC, and Syngenta, in association with the *Farmers Feeding the World* initiative.

About the Farm Journal Foundation

The Farm Journal Foundation is a nonprofit corporation dedicated to sustaining U.S. agriculture's ability to serve the vital needs of a growing world population with education and assistance focused on the unique interests of people and organizations aligned with U.S. agriculture. The Foundation houses Farm Journal's myriad advocacy initiatives such as the *Farmers Feeding the World* campaign and elements of the Farm Journal Legacy Project. For more information, please visit www.FarmersFeedingTheWorld.org.