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STAR Tool Launches in Missouri for 2025 to Amplify Conservation Efforts and Connect Agricultural Producers to More Conservation Incentives

A newly developed STAR Tool has been launched in Missouri for the 2025 crop year by Missouri partners and Saving Tomorrow's Agriculture Resources (STAR), a national scale non-profit, to amplify state efforts to address Missouri's natural resource concerns and further empower and reward farmers making progress on their conservation journey – wherever they are. The STAR 1 to 5 rating system is used to evaluate conservation practices on individual fields using a locally-driven, science-based approach to effectively and efficiently scale grassroots conservation efforts by incentivizing and rewarding the adoption of practices that have relevance to producers and their supply chain partners.

Using the free, online STARtool.ag, Missouri producers can find out how their field ranks on a nationally recognized scale that evaluates their conservation progress. The STAR evaluation form typically takes just 10 - 15 minutes, and is tailored to the producer's crop type – available for corn/soy/row crops and wheat/small grain. Farmers receive a 1- 5 STAR score along with a field-level customized Conservation Innovation Plan (CIP); a field sign with their STAR rating; direct connections to unbiased technical support through local STAR Navigators; and opportunities to participate in cost-share and incentive programs.

"STAR is an easy, voluntary, and versatile tool to support conservation. It was created by farmers for farmers to help them make the most of limited resources and to make informed decisions," said Ryan Britt, Randolph County farmer. "The STAR Tool is a useful resource for producers to evaluate their current practices and determine the best practices to improve their STAR score, conservation impact, and their bottom line."

STAR has been available to farmers in neighboring Midwest states, but this year, field forms and scoring have been adapted more specifically for Missouri and the enhanced online STAR Tool features make it even more valuable – producers receive tailored and field-specific Conservation Innovation Plans (CIPs) with customized technical and financial resources and reporting formats for sharing progress with landowners and lenders. For a limited time, producers who complete a CIP will also be entered to win one of five \$50 gift cards. Each field with a completed CIP will be entered (one prize per producer, deadline is October 15th). Participation in STAR allows producers to see progress over time and the CIP will help producers ensure they are on track in meeting their conservation goals while balancing the economic viability of their operation. STAR is committed to protecting a producer's privacy – data is never shared beyond STAR without the producer's permission.

"Supporting Missouri farmers and ranchers is essential to continue to grow our agricultural sector and build our economy. STAR is a revolutionary new tool that

promotes sustainable agricultural practices and is a convenient and cost-effective resource to ensure our agricultural community is able to maintain productivity while protecting the land for future generations of Missouri farmers,” said Jim Boschert, Executive Director, Missouri Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

The MO STAR field forms and Conservation Innovation Plan design were developed collaboratively by key stakeholders in the state and the national STAR non-profit. Missouri STAR has been led by the Missouri Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD) as the MO STAR Affiliate and collaborative Steering and Science Committee made up of representatives from MO SWCDs, Missouri Department of Agriculture, Missouri Natural Resources Conservation Service, Missouri Department of Natural Resources, Missouri Corn Merchandising Council, Missouri Soybean Merchandising Council, Missouri Cattleman Association, The Nature Conservancy, American Farmland Trust, Missouri Fertilizer Control Board, University of Missouri Extension, and University of Missouri Center for Regenerative Ag, and has been guided by input from Missouri producers. The committees adapted the STAR framework to fit agricultural production systems and the different realities of farming specific to Missouri. This partnership will leverage existing conservation programs to provide additional technical and financial support for Missouri farmers as they transition their operations to include more conservation practices such as cover crops, reduced tillage, improved nutrient management, edge of field practices, and more diverse rotations.

“The Nature Conservancy in Missouri is excited to be a part of the STAR partnership, an effort that will help Missouri farmers achieve their conservation goals while maintaining or enhancing their operations profitability as they work to produce the food, fiber, and fuel needed for all forms of life,” said Kent Wamsley, Grassland and Sustainable Agriculture Strategy Manager, The Nature Conservancy.

Local, trained STAR Navigators provide one-on-one support and technical assistance to STAR participants as they enroll in STAR and explore planning and program opportunities. Recruitment and training for local SWCD staff to serve as MO STAR Navigators is underway and will provide Missouri farmers will enrollment assistance and direct technical support. Access to the STAR Tool administrative dashboard allows Navigators to streamline technical assistance to their clients, track participant progress, and access the state and locally specific resources database to learn about available technical and financial programs.

You can find the tool at startool.ag. Please email mostarcoordinator@outlook.com if you have any questions about the STAR Tool or need assistance in enrolling.

About Saving Tomorrow’s Agriculture Resources (STAR)

STAR is a national, not for profit organization working collaboratively with producers and partners across the country to support comprehensive conservation efforts through the design, adaptation and implementation of the STAR Framework. The STAR Tool provides simple and straightforward steps to increase voluntary conservation practice implementation on agricultural lands designed with producer needs in mind. STAR for Croplands is available to farmers in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Missouri, Washington, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah. STAR for Grazing Lands will be launched in September for ranchers in Washington, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Missouri. Read more at: www.STARconservation.org.