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John Charles Wilson Receives Governor's Lifetime Achievement Award

MEMPHIS, TN --- John Charles Wilson, President of Agricenter International, received the **Robert Sparks Lifetime Achievement** award today during the annual Governor's Environmental Stewardship Awards Ceremony at Ellington Agricultural Center in Nashville. Governor Bill Haslam and Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation Commissioner Bob Martineau presented the award to Wilson whose efforts in conservation and environmental stewardship have made a long-term, positive impact on Tennessee's natural resources. The Memphis-Shelby County Office of Sustainability nominated and submitted an application on behalf of John Charles Wilson and is pleased that he has won.

"I am deeply honored to have been nominated for this award, and now to have received it, I am humbled to stand among so many others who have paved the way for all who share a passion to protect and care for the land that continues to provide so much for our country, especially for the farmers who work daily to provide food, fuel and fiber for our nation," said John Charles Wilson.

The Robert Sparks Walker Lifetime Achievement award is given to an individual who has devoted at least 25 years of effective and valuable service to Tennessee's environmental protection or conservation stewardship. John Charles Wilson has been an advocate for conservation stewardship in Tennessee for 40 years. Through his early work with a regional water quality study and no-till farming methods he displayed commitment to the land and to the environment. His commitment continues today in his role as public servant at the Agricenter where he has educated thousands.

Shelby County Mayor Mark H. Luttrell, Jr. stated, "I have known John Charles for 14 years through his work at the Agricenter and have always been impressed with his commitment to conservation and passion for educating the public on environmental and agricultural issues."

Throughout his career, Wilson has been pro-active in conservation and environmental issues at a local, regional and national level. He has been involved in the Shelby County Soil Conservation District since 1979, Tennessee Association of Conservation Districts, National Association of Conservation Districts, and State of Tennessee Water Quality Control Board. He regularly visits Washington DC and has testified before Congress on soil issues. He is an active member of the Memphis Agricultural Club, Tennessee & American Soybean Association, and West Tennessee No-Till Farmers Association.

Senate Majority Leader Mark Norris added, "John Charles Wilson's lifetime of service is not only with agriculture but water quality, soil erosion, and environmental education. What he has done in conservation is deserving of this award."

Wilson has garnered many honors in recognition of his conservation efforts beginning in the 1970s. Some awards include: Soil and Water Conservation Society of America's Outstanding Conservationist Award, Young Farmer of the Year for Tennessee, Progressive Farmer Magazine's first Environmental Stewardship Award winner and its' Man of the Year in Service, United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region IV Water Quality Award (for the Beaver Creek Study), Memphis Agricultural Club's Agribusiness Member of the Year, Memphis Business Journal's Who's Who Power Players in Agriculture. In 2014, Wilson was honored with placement in the prestigious Southeast National Association of Conservation Districts Hall of Fame for his lifetime commitment to conservation and agriculture.

Agricenter International is the world's largest urban agricultural research and education facility. Wilson has served as President of Agricenter since 2001 and uses his post to educate the public on agriculture's impact on society. Under his leadership, two global agricultural corporations invested \$20 million in high tech facilities on the Agricenter property. A startup company at Agricenter's research farm is operating one of the first commercial-scale processing facilities for sweet sorghum in the United States, manufacturing biofuels and providing the bi-product to local farmers as a high-value cattle feed. In addition, the one megawatt solar farm at Agricenter produces 1.6 gigawatt-hours of energy annually.

Wilson is passionate about environmental education and the importance of engaging school aged children with their food source. Each year, Agricenter hosts over 6000 children from across West Tennessee learn about sustainable agriculture and the importance of healthy eating. In addition, under Wilson's leadership, the West Tennessee Gleaning Network has partnered with the Agricenter to deliver excess produce to those in need. The vendors donate excess produce they do not sell at the market.

"Shelby County is fortunate to have John Charles Wilson here working with soil conservation and environmental education and we are extremely pleased he was recognized with this prestigious state-wide award," said Christine Donhardt, senior planner with the Memphis-Shelby County Office of Sustainability.

John Charles Wilson is known as the Agricultural Statesman of West Tennessee. His knowledge of agriculture in West Tennessee and throughout the Mid-South has benefited farmers and their families, educated children and the general public overall, provided food for the hungry, encouraged companies to expand their research, and demonstrated a servant leadership.

Wilson and his wife of 42 years, Susan Hall, still live on the farm where they reared their two children, Natalie and SY.

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