CROP HIGHLIGHTS

ACREAGE: Indiana's principal field crops totaled slightly under 12.0 million acres for harvest during 2016, up about one percent from 2015. All major crops saw decreases with the exception of soybeans which rose 140,000 acres to 5.64 million acres and winter wheat which increased nearly eight percent to 280,000 acres. Corn acreage for harvest fell to 5.47 million acres, down 10,000 acres from a year ago, and the lowest level since 2009. Alfalfa hay dropped 20,000 acres and other hay fell 40,000 acres. Peppermint acreage rose 1,500 acres to 11,500 acres while spearmint dropped 200 acres to 3,300 total

YIELDS: Conditions seemed to move between extremes again for Indiana's 2016 growing season. A strong El Nino in place over the winter created March conditions that were much warmer and wetter than normal, and prevented the early field preparations that kicked off the season in other years. More typical winter conditions, and some severe weather, took hold over the first half of April. Wheat, which had broken dormancy early and progressed rapidly during the early spring's warmth, suffered a setback. Anticipation was the only thing growing in mid-April when warm weather returned. Only one percent of the intended corn acreage had been planted by April 17th. The last week of April saw the first big jump in corn planting, when just under a fifth of the state's total acreage was planted in a single week. Cold weather, and even some frost, took over for the first half of May, slowing planting again and creating concerns for the emergence of late April's plantings. The planting of soybeans was also delayed. By mid-May, only 15 percent of total acreage had been planted, compared to a five year average of 31 percent. Conditions would flip again back to a warmer and drier pattern by the middle of the month. May ended with another surge in planting, with nearly a quarter of the state's corn acres going in during that final week. Corn planting was virtually complete at the end of the first week of June, when the crop was rated 72 percent good to excellent, a level that would only vary slightly over the season. On June 11th, when harvest had just begun, wheat was rated 72 percent good to excellent, showing that the crop had recovered well from the April cold snap. More than half of the state's total soybean acres were planted during the last week of May and first week of June, and planting was virtually complete by the 19th of June. At that point the soybean crop was rated 72 percent good to excellent, a level it would only vary from slightly as well. Favorable growing conditions set in by early summer, but the swing between wet and dry conditions would continue. Signs of stress due to the lack of moisture would be noted just prior to a shift that would bring rains, and often weeds. The return of wet weather slowed the start of wheat harvest. Opportunities for post-emergence fieldwork would often be cut short by the changes in conditions. Roughly half the corn crop was silking by mid-July, just prior to a heat wave that took hold from the 21st to the 25th. By August, a difference in conditions within the state would be apparent. Moderate drought appeared in northeast Indiana, while excess moisture soaked the southwest. Ear rot became more of a problem in areas where moisture was prevalent as corn neared maturity. While white mold became a concern, the onset of warm humid weather would have a different overall effect on soybeans. Conditions prolonged development and added yield potential. Warm overnight temperatures and an absence of frost contributed to the extended summer rally. This was not necessarily a gift to farmers, as green stems and wet soils presented challenges to harvesting operations.

At harvest, what would have seemed like a phenomenal corn yield ten years ago only seemed average. The statewide average corn yield of 173 bushels per acre was 15 bushels below 2014's record yield and 23 bushels per acre higher than that of last year. It looked like a great year for growers in the western part of the state; Warren County posted an average yield of 212.3 bushels per acre. Surrounding counties were above or near the 200 bushel mark. Yields in the northeastern part of the state, however, continued to be down from previous years. The average soybean yield of 57.5 bushels per acre was a new record high, at 7.5 bushels higher than the previous year. Tipton County recorded an average yield of 66.8 bushels per acre, and several central Indiana counties had yields over 60 bushels per acre. The winter wheat yield, at 81 bushels per acre was also a new high for Indiana. White County had the highest yield at 97.3 bushels per acre. The dry conditions that suppressed corn yields in the northeastern part of the state were not a factor for wheat that had matured before dry conditions set in. Alfalfa and other hay yield came in at 4.2 and 3.1 tons per acre respectively.

PRODUCTION: Indiana corn production in 2016 totaled 946 million bushels, 15 percent above last year's total of 822 million bushels. Indiana's soybean production totaled 324 million bushels, up nearly 18 percent from last year's 275 million bushels. The increase in wheat harvested acres combined with higher yields led to a 28 percent increase in production at 22.7 million bushels. All hay production at, 1.78 million tons, was up nearly 8 percent from the previous year.

"Farmers Feed the World"
Photographer ~~ Emily Dougherty
Age 18, Greenwood, IN