

**For Release on December 6, 2017**

**Kokomo, IN** – The North Central Indiana Regional Planning Council (NCIRPC) hosted an Agribusiness Forum today on the Indiana University Kokomo campus. The Forum featured Connie Neininger, Economic Development Director for the Indiana State Department of Agriculture. Ms. Neininger presented information on the economic impact agribusiness has to the six-county region and highlighted the State’s Rural Ag Economic Development Model.

The Agribusiness Forum brought together agribusiness leaders, economic development, workforce and education professionals from Cass, Clinton, Fulton, Howard, Miami and Tipton counties. The region recently completed a five-year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy and Agribusiness was identified as one of the top strategic focus areas. Steven Ray, NCIRPC Executive Director, stated, “We recognize the value of the ag-sector at the local level. And through the planning process, we identified opportunities to further support our agribusinesses.” Today’s Forum is the critical first to strengthen the ag-related businesses across the region.

The Rural Ag Economic Development Model, developed through a partnership of the Indiana State Department of Agriculture and the Indiana Economic Development Association, provides an in-depth analysis of the ag-sector within a county or region to identify opportunities to foster economic growth. Shan Sheridan, Clinton County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director, stated, “Our region has a large agribusiness cluster that we want to support and promote. When we talk about economic diversification, our ag-sector is leading the way.”

The six-county region is home to 228 ag-related establishments providing nearly 10,500 jobs. With approximately \$3.5 billion in annual exports across the region, Christy Householder, Cass County Economic Development, stated, “Agriculture is a crucial piece of our local economic development strategy.” The NCIRPC Agribusiness initiative will lead to the development of a comprehensive and impactful regional strategy.

*North Central Indiana Regional Planning Council (NCIRPC) is a non-profit agency serving the communities throughout Cass, Clinton, Fulton, Howard, Miami and Tipton counties. NCIRPC serves local communities with the purpose of building stronger local communities and regional economies by enhancing the quality of life throughout the region. For additional information please contact Steven Ray at 765-689-4026.*