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Ben Thomas of Environmental Defense Fund Joins Leading Harvest Board of Directors

WASHINGTON (Tuesday, July 6, 2021) – Leading Harvest, a leader in promoting sustainable agriculture through its universal [Farmland Management Standard](#), today announced that [Ben Thomas](#), Senior Policy Director for Agriculture at the Environmental Defense Fund, has joined its Board of Directors. Leading Harvest’s board is composed of three equally represented chambers – economic, environmental, and social; Thomas fills a vacancy in the environmental chamber.

“Ben Thomas’ background in agriculture, having grown up on a farm in Texas, his work in agricultural policy at both the state and federal levels, along with his passion for conservation and sustainable land management, make him a valuable addition to our Leading Harvest Board of Directors,” said Suzy Friedman, Vice President for Policy for the National Alliance of Forest Owners, a Leading Harvest board member and chair of the Board’s Nominations Committee. “Throughout his career, Ben has brought a collaborative approach to efforts to improve farming practices and achieve measurable, certifiable results. He will be a tremendous asset in advancing Leading Harvest’s mission.”

At the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), Thomas focuses on creating innovative and pragmatic solutions to address environmental risks from agriculture through collaboration with farming stakeholders and policymakers. Prior to joining EDF, Thomas served as the director of the Montana Department of Agriculture. He previously served as deputy undersecretary for Marketing and Regulator Programs at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) during Secretary Tom Vilsack’s first tenure leading the department. As chief of staff for the Farm and Foreign Services mission area at USDA, Thomas focused on implementing changes to farm programs, conservation programs and crop insurance provisions from the 2014 Farm Bill.

“Growing up on a farm in Texas, I learned early on that it takes more than hard work to get ahead. It also takes innovation, creativity, and teamwork. Leading Harvest’s Farmland Management Standard is bringing all that to farmers around the world, and I’m thrilled to have the opportunity to help them succeed,” said Thomas. “For too long, farms like the one I grew up on practiced conservation and sustainability, but did not have a common, certifiable standard to measure their operation. Leading Harvest is offering landowners the ability to demonstrate to the marketplace, consumers and the supply chain positive agriculture outcomes we all care about – from clean air and water to healthy soil, to biodiversity and productive relationships with farm workers the communities where we live and operate. This is not just good for the farmer – it is good for the land, environment and food we all share.”

Leading Harvest provides assurance programs comprised of standards, audit procedures, training and education, and reporting and claim offerings that are optimized for flexibility, scalability, and impact.

The inaugural Farmland Management Standard is designed by and for stakeholders and their diverse needs, ensuring that it is credible and readily available to everyone across the agricultural landscape and supply chain. The

organization also offers ongoing training and education that is rooted in sound sustainability principles, designed to address critical environmental and social issues, and create lasting results in communities.

In its first year, over 1.2 million acres spanning 29 states and more than 90 crop types were enrolled in Leading Harvest's Farmland Management Standard.

A photo of Thomas can be found [here](#).

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About Leading Harvest

Leading Harvest is a nonprofit organization committed to increasing adoption of sustainability practices in agriculture. It was formally organized in April 2020 by and for all stakeholders across the agricultural value chain—from farmland owners to companies to communities. More information can be found at www.leadingharvest.org.