



*Cook County Farm Bureau's*

# Investment in Our Local Communities



2024 REPORT



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*As the county's largest general farm organization, Cook County Farm Bureau® is dedicated to bridging the gap between farmers and urban consumers. Through education programs targeting youth and their parents and programs designed to connect farmers with potential consumers, Farm Bureau members are actively engaging in conversations about food and the shared values between farmers and consumers.*

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URBAN  
GARDEN

## Cook County Farm Bureau Supports the Community

Throughout 2023, Cook County Farm Bureau® has remained engaged with and committed to partnering with and supporting local farmers, students, and other non-profits.



## Support for Farmers

Cook County Farm Bureau continues to support farmers through marketing enhancement programs like Live Local, Shop Local which offers farmers the opportunity to connect their farm business with local consumers while allowing consumers access to diverse local food and agricultural businesses located in their backyard.

Another consumer facing tool is Farm Bureau's Local Farm Products website search function. Through this tool, farm businesses are able to register their business and provide information on the products they have available for purchase. Common products include

vegetables, flowers, honey, hay, straw, and pumpkins. Both resources are designed to connect farmers to consumers and consumers to local produce.

These resources are both available at [cookcfb.org](http://cookcfb.org).

### Farm Advocacy

In addition to marketing tools, Farm Bureau supports local farmers through advocacy at the local, state, and national levels. In addition to advocacy, Farm Bureau leaders continue to advise the Assessor's office and the Department of Building and Zoning regarding agriculture and farms located within Cook County.

## Farm Property Assistance

For many decades, the Cook County Farm Bureau has assisted farm owners in filing property tax appeals and protests. The Illinois Farmland Assessment Act of 1977 specified that farmland is assessed based on soil productivity as opposed to fair market value in 101 Illinois counties. However, the Act excludes Cook County and does not specify how farmland in the county would be assessed. Farm Bureau leaders identified this oversight and immediately met with the Cook County President and Assessor to develop the Farmland Affidavit and valuation process. The Farmland Affidavit can be credited as one of the reasons that Cook County agriculture continues to flourish and grow today.

In 2023, Cook County Farm Bureau worked with the Assessor's office to modernize and streamline the farmland affidavit process. Prior to the change, the affidavit could only be submitted through mail or in-person. In addition to efforts on the farmland affidavit, Farm Bureau assists farmers in matters related to building and zoning permits and assessment.

## Cook County Board Recognizes and Celebrates Agriculture in the County

During the March board meeting, Cook County Commissioners approved #23-1426, a resolution celebrating the importance of agriculture in Cook County.

The resolution provides the following:

- Agriculture includes the growing, raising, and harvesting of crops for both human and animal consumption as well as the raising of livestock;



- Cook County is home to more than 12,000 acres of farmland;
- Agriculture contributes nearly \$20 million to Cook County economy;
- Over four percent of Cook County's total workforce is employed in an agricultural-related job including food handling and processing;
- Cook County agriculture includes vegetable, floriculture, grain, nursery, and row crop production as well as livestock;
- Cook County's agricultural landscape includes horses, ponies, mules, burros, and donkeys;
- According to the United States Department of Agriculture 2017 Census of Agriculture, Cook County is ranked second in the state for equine production with a sales volume of over \$1.5 million;

### Sponsors include Commissioners:

|                                     |                    |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Commissioner Scott Britton</b>   | <i>district 14</i> |
| <b>Commissioner Josina Morita</b>   | <i>district 13</i> |
| <b>Commissioner Sean Morrison</b>   | <i>district 17</i> |
| <b>Commissioner Dennis Deer</b>     | <i>district 2</i>  |
| <b>Commissioner Bridget Degnen</b>  | <i>district 12</i> |
| <b>Commissioner Bridget Gainer</b>  | <i>district 10</i> |
| <b>Commissioner Brandon Johnson</b> | <i>district 1</i>  |
| <b>Commissioner Donna Miller</b>    | <i>district 6</i>  |
| <b>Commissioner Kevin Morrison</b>  | <i>district 15</i> |
| <b>Commissioner Maggie Trevor</b>   | <i>district 9</i>  |
| <b>Commissioner Alma Anaya</b>      | <i>district 7</i>  |

- Cook County ranks twelfth in the state for nursery, greenhouse, floriculture, and sod production;
- Cook County is home to numerous examples of urban agriculture including the raising, cultivation, processing, marketing, and distribution of food in urban and suburban settings; and
- Urban agriculture generally involves outdoor and indoor vertical production, indoor warehouse farms, greenhouses, rooftop farms, hydroponic, and aquaponic facilities.

To see the complete language visit <https://cookcfb.org/ccfb/policy-and-priorities/urban-agriculture>.

### **Farm Bureau Resolution Addressing Food Waste and Resource Recovery Approved**

In December, Illinois Farm Bureau delegates approved Cook County Farm Bureau's resolution addressing the tremendous amount of food that is landfilled. In Illinois, twenty percent of the nineteen million tons of general landfilled waste is comprised of food.

Forty percent of all food in the United State gets wasted. One in seven Americans is food insecure. In Illinois, more than one million people struggle with hunger and food insecurity. While rescuing and redistributing surplus food is not a cure for hunger, it is an important stopgap in meeting immediate anti-hunger efforts.

In brief, the new policy provides the following:

We support:

- Implementing state-based liability protections for food donors and rescue organizations that expand and strengthen those provided by the

federal Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act. Food rescue includes donation or recovery of surplus food used for feeding hungry people.

- The USDA and the Food and Drug Administration clarifying food safety donation regulations for pre-cooked and pre-packaged food items.
- Updating USDA's definition of compost so that a greater number of potential buyers, including farms, golf courses, or other operations near waterways, are encouraged to purchase compost. Compost refers to a mixture of various decaying organic waste substances, such as food scraps, dead leaves, or manure, used as soil fertilizer.
- Streamlining and simplifying the permitting process for compost facilities, including those that accept landscape waste and food scraps. Food scraps include pre-consumer food scraps, which includes waste generated during the manufacturing and production of food prior to the item being sold and processed food scraps.
- A separate permitting pathway for anaerobic digestion of source-separated food waste that includes requirements similar to those imposed on composting source-separated food waste.





## Support for Urban Gardens

To support Cook County urban gardens and farms, Cook County Farm Bureau developed the Urban Garden Grant program. In 2023, leaders opted to increase the value of grants and awarded seven local grants at \$350 each for a total of \$2,450 to support the purchase of plantings, seeds, and garden materials.

Grant recipients include:

- Barn at Sexton Park Pollinator Garden, Evergreen Park for a pollinator garden to educate students and visitors on the importance of pollinators. Funds will be used to purchase pollinator plants, seed, and mulch.
- Dunning Community Garden, Chicago for expansion of an existing community garden and a dedicated “food bank section,” produce from this section will be donated to the St. Cyprian Food Bank. Funds will be used to purchase vegetable seedlings, compost and garden materials.
- Evergreen Park Youth Garden, Evergreen Park focuses on building the community and teaching youth to care for and grow produce. Funds will be used to purchase vegetable plantings, soil, compost, garden materials and tools.
- Lemont Township Community Garden, Lemont grows produce for Lemont area food pantries. Funds will be used to purchase soil, seed, vegetable seedlings, fertilizer and garden materials.
- Reavis EARTH Program Garden, Lansing is a hands-on learning school vegetable, herb and pollinator garden. Funds will be used to purchase soil, vegetable plants, seed, gardening tools.
- St Irenaeus Pantry Garden, Park Forest is a food production garden that provides the produce Saint Irenaeus Food Pantry. Funds will be used to purchase starter plants, seeds, fertilizer, soil and compost.
- Tri-Village Garden Club Food Pantry Garden is a collaborative garden serving Bartlett, Streamwood and Hanover Park. In 2022 the garden donated over 800 pounds of produce to their community food pantry. The garden seeks to expand in 2023 and will use grant funding to purchase vegetable plantings, soil, seed, and garden material.

# Support for Local Food Pantries

Together with partners, Cook County Farm Bureau donated much needed food staples to four Cook County food pantries. Donations were raised in celebration of Food Checkout Day. Food Checkout Day celebrates the healthy and nutritious food local farmers grow and raise by providing food or cash donations to people in need.

In light of the tremendous pressure created by inflation, Cook County Farm Bureau matched members' monetary donations. Over \$10,000 was donated to local Cook County pantries in celebration of Food Checkout Day this year and the healthy and nutritious food grown and raised by local farmers. The donations directly benefited the one in seven individuals in Cook County who are hungry.

## Partner food pantries:

- Alicia's House, South Chicago Heights
- All Saints Food Pantry, Palatine
- Niles Township Food Pantry, Skokie
- Together we Cope, Tinley Park

Chicago North, Chicago South, Chicago Northwest, and Orland Park COUNTRY Financial® representatives selected the partner food pantries.

For 20 years, Cook County Farm Bureau partnered with Ronald McDonald House Charities® of Chicagoland and Northwest Indiana. Through the generosity of partners for nearly two decades, Farm Bureau donated over \$145,000 and nearly 100,000 pounds of food.

In 2012, and again in 2021, Farm Bureau's food pantry efforts were



named a Summit Award winner by the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE). The Summit Award recognizes the positive impact that non-profit associations have on their community.

Food Checkout Day is possible only through the efforts of volunteers, including Farm Bureau leadership and committee members and Chicago North, Chicago South, Northwest, and Orland Park COUNTRY Financial representatives and staff members. Volunteers were integral to the success of the shopping spree portion of Food Checkout Day.

### Food as Medicine

Food insecurity is defined as the lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life. It affects approximately 33.8 million people in the United States and is linked to lower food quality and a higher probability of chronic disease diagnosis.

The Greater Chicagoland Food Depository projects that over 613,000 Cook County residents live in food insecure households. According to data from the Cook County Department of Public Health, the south and west suburbs of Cook County shoulder the greatest burden of low income and low food access, with over 35 percent of the population living in these land tracts are either low income or low food access.

To address these concerns, Commissioner Dennis Deer introduced Resolution 23-5456 recognizing the concept that food is medicine and the importance of access to high-quality food in the management and prevention of chronic disease and obesity and to:

- Create "Food is Medicine" advertising campaign.
- Build upon existing healthy food programs throughout Cook County Health System.
- Create a Food Security Program Manager within Cook County Health to prioritize equitable food security impact on health outcomes.
- Engage organizations that provide fresh produce for "Food is Medicine" programming.
- Create "Food is Medicine" educational interactive website.
- Create a "Food Passport" program in partnership with local restaurants.

Cook County Farm Bureau supported the resolution.



# Agricultural Scholarships

In 2023, the Cook County Farm Bureau® Foundation awarded \$11,000 to four students pursuing an agriculture-related degree. The scholarship program is designed to provide college students pursuing a degree in agriculture, agribusiness, or agriculture-related course of study. Scholarships are awarded on the basis of scholastic ability and financial need.

## Vocational Career Training

Beginning in 2023, the Foundation offered vocational agricultural training scholarships of up to \$1,250 for students enrolled in a vocational training program or at an Illinois Community College for Truck Driving Training, diesel mechanics, welding, or technology with a focus on an agriculturally connected career.

## Healthcare Continuing Education

In 2023, Cook County Farm Bureau expanded its efforts to provide support healthcare providers who provide mental health services to individuals in crisis.

*FarmResponse* on-demand training is a 3.5-hour continuing education course developed by national experts from the AgriStress Response Network. AgriSafe's *FarmResponse* course provides the full range of competencies necessary to provide appropriate mental healthcare for agricultural producers and their families. This knowledge is critical for a healthcare professional to effectively care for a farmer's total health.



Course learning objectives include:

- Identifying agricultural financial stress factors
- Naming work challenges inherent in different types of agricultural production
- Identifying the primary acute and chronic health conditions in individuals working in agriculture
- Identifying diverse cultures found within farming
- Identifying the impact of farming cultures on farmer mental health and health-seeking behaviors
- Identifying the special challenges faced by minority and marginalized groups in agriculture
- Identifying the impact of opioids and alcohol in the agricultural community
- Identifying suicide rates in agricultural populations
- Identifying risk factors for suicide, including access to lethal means
- Identifying strategies to support farmers and ranchers experiencing mental stress

Healthcare providers are eligible to complete the training and receive reimbursement of their costs from the Foundation.



## Agricultural Leadership

In addition to student scholarships, Farm Bureau provided two leaders scholarships to attend the Illinois Agricultural Leadership Program. This 19-month leadership program takes a holistic approach to addressing the food concerns of the global community- through agribusiness and commodity groups, on the family farm, at food production companies, through volunteer organization to feed underserved populations, and in location communities that nurture the lives of thousands of agricultural workers. To date, eight Cook County Farm Bureau leaders, with financial support from the Foundation have graduated from the IALP program.



## Conservation and the Environment

Farm Bureau understands the importance of pollinators to our food system and ecosystem. Farm Bureau leaders designed a multi-faceted pollinator project to communicate farmers' efforts to preserve and increase pollinator habitat as well as to illustrate the connection between pollinators and our food system to urban consumers. This project included the creation of a community pollinator garden at the Farm Bureau building; community presentations; and large-scale community education event hosted in conjunction with the Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago.

This project impacted over 200 individuals while engaging 13 Farm Bureau and 18 community volunteers and 8 community partners. Community partners included for-profit businesses, associations, local greenhouses, and a major zoological society.

In addition to community outreach, Farm Bureau offered a springtime pollinator seed sale for individuals interested in creating, preserving and restoring pollinator habitat. In collaboration with Illinois Farm Bureau® and Growmark, Cook County Farm Bureau was able to offer one-pound seed bags at a discounted price.

# Agricultural Literacy

Cook County Farm Bureau remains committed to educating youth about agriculture. During 2023, agricultural literacy presenters connected with over 25,250 Cook County students in over 1,130 classrooms in just under 255 schools.

Additional Agriculture in the Classroom programs include teacher workshops, Ag Days, STEM Nights, career days, and educational events.





## Support of local non-profits

As a non-profit itself, Cook County Farm Bureau is acutely aware of the power of non-profit associations and the tremendous outcomes that can occur when non-profit entities work together for a common outcome.

To that end, Farm Bureau financially supported:

- Animal Agriculture Alliance
- Chicago Farmers
- Cook DuPage Beekeepers Association
- Friends of Wagner Farm
- Greater Chicago Food Depository
- Illinois Agricultural Association
- Illinois Agricultural Leadership Foundation
- Illinois Corn Growers Association
- Illinois Farmers' Market Association
- Ronald McDonald House Charities® of Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana



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