



COOK COUNTY GO-OPERATOR

To serve all our members with meaningful and beneficial programs that reflect our agricultural heritage

Mark Your Calendar

January

- 22** IAA Credit Union Webinar for Small Business **PG 12**
26 Membership Monday **PG 12**
28-30 Everything Local Conference **PG 1**

February

- 17** CCFB Foundation Scholarship Application Deadline **PG 12**
21-22 Beginning Beekeeping Course **PG 12**
28 Community Urban Garden Grant Application Deadline

March

- 10** Workshop on Preparing Wills/Trusts **PG 12**

For participation details on these programs and activities, check out the related information in this publication, go to www.cookcfb.org, or contact the office at 708-354-3276. You can register for most programs by using the member service center at www.cookcfb.org.

Question of the Month

Who is the Cook CFB Young Leader that competed at the State Young Leader Discussion Meet in Chicago in December?

Call the Farm Bureau at **708-354-3276**, fax your answer to **708-579-6056**, or email to fbcooperator@gmail.com to enter the drawing for a \$25 gas card. (Please include name, FB number, and phone number)

December Winner: Mary Grace Crowley-Koch

Question: Cook County Farm Bureau welcomed a new member business and is pleased to announce what new member benefit? **Answer:** Chicago 24 Hour Towing

Word of the Month

Because we enjoy talking with our members, we are changing things up a little bit. Somewhere in each edition there will be a Word of the Month. We promise it won't be too hard to find!

Call in **any Tuesday** during the Month of January with the Word and you will be entered to win that month's prize.

We look forward to your call. Good luck!

December Winner: Joanne Keilman

December word was *Jingle-Bells* found on P3.



HERE'S TO THE NEW YEAR!

Cook County Farm Bureau Board of Directors reflect on an active successful 2025 year (See page 4 for highlights) and sets course for an even better year of serving members and delivering value!

Photo: Todd Price, Mike Rauch, President Janet McCabe, Mark Yunker, Greg Stack, Roger Freeman, Blake Lanphier, Jim Bloomstrand, Pat Horcher, Dan Biernacki, Vice-President Gerry Kopping (seated), and Secretary/Treasurer Ruth Zeldenrust (seated).

We look forward to serving all members in 2026!



Register Today for Everything Local 2026

Bringing together more people than ever from Illinois' local food, specialty crop, and farmers market supply chains. Aside from networking opportunities and an expansive tradeshow, you'll have the chance to hear from leaders invested in the specialty and local food markets, engage in breakout sessions tailored to your needs, receive one-on-one technical assistance from industry leaders, and participate in workshops that dive deep on a wide variety of production, operational and marketing topics.

Most importantly, you'll be a part of the largest Illinois gathering focused on bringing together all aspects of the Illinois local and specialty crop supply chain. The connections made here have the opportunity to benefit the local economies and food opportunities of communities across the state for years to come.

Farmers/Farm Owners are Reminded to Complete the Farmland Affidavit

Cook County farmers are encouraged to complete the Farmland Affidavit prior to January 31.

The Assessor's office will not mail out a copy or a reminder, and the filing can only occur online.

To file, visit:

<https://www.cookcountyassessor.com/farmlandaffidavit>

Cook County assesses a property according to its "Assessment Class" as defined under the Cook County Code of Ordinances. In order for a Cook County property to receive the special "farm" tax incentive, it must have been farmed for the two preceding years, and the owner must have filed the farmland affidavit prior to January 31.

For land that is new to the process, the farm owner must:

- Complete the Class Change/Farmland Application by January 31.
- Upload documentation to establish your farming activities for the current year and the two preceding years. Documentation may include farm-related insurance policies, leases, tax filings, rental agreements, contracts, or invoices.

Once the application is submitted, the owner should receive a confirmation email from the office that the application is under review and a decision regarding the property.

Additional information is available at <https://www.cookcountyassessor.com/farms>

Cook County Farm Bureau has worked with the Cook County Assessor's Office to revise and modernize the annual farmland affidavit. In addition, Farm Bureau has also worked to ensure that the information regarding the special tax designation process is readily available to farmers seeking the designation.

Cook CFB Master Member Club

(L-R) Blake Lanphier, Janet McCabe, Gerry Kopping, and Dan Biernacki were inducted into the Cook County Farm Bureau Master Member Club for 2025 by Cook County Farm Bureau Manager Bob Rohrer. Kopping achieved top point status by signing up five voting members.



Blake, Janet, Gerry, Dan, and Bob

Membership into the Master Member Club is accomplished by earning points by recruiting and reinstating voting and associate members during the year. Each received a gift card, and their names will be added to a wall display in the Cook County Farm Bureau boardroom.

Cook CFB Volunteer of the Year

Each year, the Board of Directors selects and celebrates a Volunteer who has made a major impact in the organization during the year as the Volunteer of the Year. Mr. Pete Soltesz was presented the Volunteer of the Year by President Janet McCabe as a result of his volunteer participation, leadership, event judging, and member engagement provided through the Commodities/Marketing Team.



Janet McCabe and Pete Soltesz

HOW FARM BUREAU SERVED YOU IN DECEMBER

- ▶ **By connecting with and engaging with elected county officials and staff so that they know the importance of Cook County agriculture and its impact on the local economy.**
- ▶ **Assisted members in completing their 2026 County Farmland Assessment applications.**
- ▶ **Connected members to local member ag businesses that sell Christmas trees, wreaths, poinsettias, and more to deck their halls through promotions and ShopLocal.**
- ▶ **Provided members with event and benefit saving ideas for holiday gift giving.**
- ▶ **Secured new and existing Exclusive Member Benefit Discounts for member use.**



Gratitude Journal

Each month, there are people that go out of their way to lend a hand to help with our cause in many ways, both big and small. We appreciate it greatly!

The Cook County Farm Bureau thanks...

- The many members who participated in the Question of the Month and the Ag Adventures Word Search throughout 2025.
- Delegates Janet McCabe, Gerry Kopping, and Ruth Zeldenrust and alternate delegates Dan Biernacki, Blake Lanphier, and Greg Stack for willingly giving their time and energy to serve Cook County Farm Bureau during the lengthy Illinois Farm Bureau Annual Meeting delegate session.
- The many member volunteers that met on December 10 to give their time, knowledge, expertise, and enthusiasm to the Action Teams, creating programs and activities for the benefit of the members of this organization. We look forward to a great 2026 program year!
- Members Donna Nykaza-Jones and Sam Jones for representing the Cook County Farm Bureau during the ceremonial coin toss prior to the Mt Caramel/Oswego high school football championship game.
- Members for the kind notes you send including Donna Tsevis, Ed Kuchta, Kim Morton, the Bridgeview Garden Club, Nick Nagele, and Janet Lence.
- Our Master Member Club inductees Gerry Kopping, Janet McCabe, Dan Biernacki, and first-time inductee Blake Lanphier for their efforts during the year to recruit new members.
- Our Volunteer of the Year Pete Soltesz on his service to the organization.
- The board, teams, members, and staff for a terrific 2025 program year that resulted in so many Illinois Farm Bureau recognition awards including the Pinnacle, Liberty Bell, and CAEs.
- The many Voting and Associate members who have renewed their memberships for 2026!
- Members Patricia Quetsch, David Geraghty, and Kayla Beigel who recently donated to the CCFB Foundation and to all of our members who have donated to the CCFB Foundation throughout 2025.

Co-Operator

Published Monthly

Cook County Farm Bureau

6438 Joliet Road, Countryside, IL 60525

(ph) 708-354-3276 (fax) 708-579-6056

(e-mail) ccfb@cookcfb.org (website) www.cookcfb.org



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Editor

Bob Rohrer

Copy Analyst

Ashley Christensen

Copy Development

CCFB Office Staff

Officers & Directors

Janet McCabe, President

Gerry Kopping, Vice President

Ruth Zeldenrust, Secretary-Treasurer

Dan Biernacki

Mike Rauch

James Bloomstrand

Patrick Horcher

Mark Yunker

Roger Freeman

Todd Price

Greg Stack

Blake Lanphier

Farm Bureau Manager

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Jill Drover

Kelli Villarreal

Bona Heinsohn

Debbie Voltz

Katrina Milton

Linda Tobias

Tim Rost

Julie Hespeneide

Affiliated Companies

Victoria Nygren Country Financial District Leader, Chicago North

Matt Huonder Country Financial District Leader, Chicago Northwest

Alonzo Nevarez Country Financial District Leader, Chicago South

Sharon Stemke Country Financial District Leader, Orland Park

David Swigart General Manager, Conserv FS

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Downwind

by **BOB ROHRER, CCFB MANAGER**

“Strategery”

“Failing to plan is planning to fail,”
Benjamin Franklin

“If you don’t know where you are going,
you’ll end up someplace else,”
Yogi Berra

“Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will
spend the first four sharpening the axe,”
Abraham Lincoln

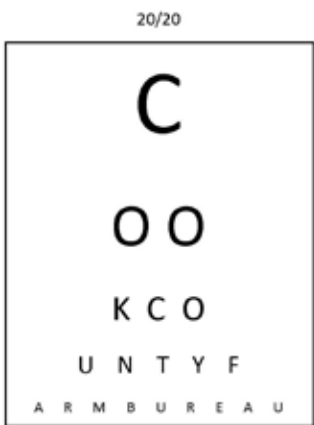
“I love it when a plan comes together,” *Mr. T*

Yes indeed, planning seems like a great idea **and then life happens.**

“Man plans. God laughs”
originating from a
Yiddish Proverb

In 2020, Cook County Farm Bureau was poised to celebrate its 100-year anniversary. It was going to be a very special observation! And then some mysterious virus called COVID-19 made an appearance. So much for those plans!

As we prepared for this impressive occasion, I penned a column for our anniversary book entitled “20/20 Vision”.



I wrote, “Farmers are visionary pragmatists with 2020 foresight. Farmers plant the seed with a vision, but the farmer does not simply leave the seed’s growth to chance. When you see change clearly, you can build the future you want. Much like farmers, the Cook County Farm Bureau organization and leadership will use visionary pragmatism to serve members for the next 100 years.”

But wait. What if you can’t see that change coming?

Man plans. God laughs.

Time traveling back to 2020, I would write that column about a farmer’s (and Cook County Farm Bureau’s) resiliency. Farmers plant a seed and then adjust the plan “on the fly” due to unforeseen drought, flood, energy crisis, legislative impacts, labor issues, war, low commodity prices, economic downturns, consumer choices, and devastating pests.

Since Covid, planning strategies for Cook County Farm Bureau have been



shaped by technology. Member expectations. New work landscape. Still, unforeseen events and actions continue to try to derail us.

Last year, the Cook County Farm Bureau membership model and plan was disrupted when COUNTRY Financial changed its 100-year-old membership guideline for access to preferred insurance products. This did not lead to our demise (despite knee-jerk speculation).

Like our farmers, Cook County Farm Bureau was resilient.

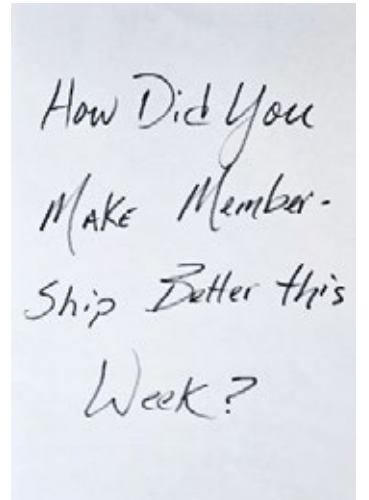
We made a new plan. Rolled up our sleeves. Worked hard. Now, a year later, check out our 2025 year-in-review (found on page 4).

It is stunning to see, in just this small sample, how many programs, activities, and great experiences your organization provided for members. And check out the “youth movement”! (The Board’s “Future Forward” initiative is a plan that is working, Ben Franklin.)

As we move into 2026, there are and will be a heaping serving of opportunities presented to members throughout 2026 and we expect to see you frequently this new year as we provide meaningful leadership opportunities, trusted information, and engaging experiences.

Oh....Let’s have some fun also!

I have a note on my wall that I look at nearly every day.



This simple note is targeted directly at me. A reminder to serve members through decisions, actions, communications, and plans. I need to be introspective, honest, and truthful in answering the question.

Cook County Farm Bureau will continue to plan the best ways to serve members. We will adapt. Just like a farmer. Just like our members. We will be resilient.

SEND YOUR RECIPE TODAY!

New Year – New Recipes Needed for the 2026 Recipe Collection

Do you have a favorite recipe using fresh, local ingredients that you would like to share? Please submit your recipe for our 2026 Recipe Collection! All submissions will be entered into a drawing for Farm Fund\$ for use at local member farm stands.

Deadline for consideration is March 25, 2026.

Email: membershipdebbie@cookcfb.org or ccfb@cookcfb.org

Mail: Cook County Farm Bureau, 6438 Joliet Rd Ste 101, Attn: Recipes, Countryside, IL 60525

Recipe of the Month



HOT HONEY

Ultimate QUESO

Cook DuPage Beekeepers Association

2025 Recipe Collection is Available!

To receive a copy of the 2025 Recipe Collection Booklet, call 708-354-3276, email: ccfb@cookcfb.org, or register from the MyIFB member center account.

INGREDIENTS

— MAKES 6 SERVINGS —

For Hot Honey Ultimate Queso:

- ¾ c cooked shrimp, diced into ½ in pieces
- ¾ c cooked chorizo, crumbled into ½ in pieces
- 6 T coarsely shredded jack cheese
- 6 T local hot honey
- cilantro leaves, as needed
- 12 c blue corn tortilla chips
- 3 ¾ c queso base

For Queso Base:

- 1 t sodium citrate
- 1 c whole milk
- 1 ½ c coarsely shredded jack cheese
- 1 ½ c coarsely shredded sharp white cheddar cheese
- 2 T Roma tomato, seeded and diced into ¼ in inch pieces
- ¼ c roasted poblano pepper, peeled, seeded, and diced into ¼ in pieces
- 2 T fresh cilantro, chopped

DIRECTIONS

For Queso Base: In heavy-bottomed saucepan, combine sodium citrate and milk. Bring to a simmer over medium heat, but do not boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and gradually add the jack cheese and sharp white cheddar, whisk constantly. Be sure the cheeses are fully melted before the next addition. When all the cheese is added, the sauce should be smooth and glossy. Add the tomato, poblano pepper, and cilantro. Stir to combine. Hot hold until further use.

For Hot Honey Ultimate Queso: Place a sauté pan on high heat. Add the cooked shrimp and chorizo pieces to the pan and heat through. Evenly distribute mixture between 6–8-oz. oven-proof casserole serving dishes. Ladle hot queso base over shrimp and chorizo. Top with jack cheese shreds. Brown the top of the queso in a salamander or cheese melter. To serve, drizzle queso with hot honey and garnish with cilantro. Place queso on serving dish and surround with blue corn tortilla chips. Serve immediately.

Looking Back: Snapshots of 2025 – What an Active Year!



In celebration of the healthy and nutritious food grown and raised by Cook County and Illinois farmers, Cook County Farm Bureau and COUNTRY Financial partnered with Hattie B. Williams Food Pantry in Oak Forest for Food Checkout Day.



A third-grade student pets a cow during Ag Day North, held at Historic Wagner Farm in Glenview.



Maverick gets a sweet treat from the Easter Bunny, a friend of Cook County Farm Bureau, during Member Appreciation Week.



AITC Summer Intern Libby Heenan (L) helped Elk Grove Park District event attendees make cow paper bags, a craft that taught about cow ear tags and dairy cow breeds.



Cheese 101 workshop - Meredith Meder from Full Circle Cheese taught members about different milk types and cheese styles as well as how to eat, buy, and store cheeses.



Cook County Commissioner Scott Britton (pictured right) presents Cook County Farm Bureau® leader Blake Lanphier (pictured left) with a resolution recognizing National Agriculture Day and celebrating Cook County agriculture's impact on the county's economy.



CCFB Board Member Jim Bloomstrand, center, was honored by Ag Literacy Team Chair Greg Stack, left, and Director of Agricultural Literacy Katrina Milton for his 24 years of presenting for our Agriculture in the Classroom Program.



Blake Lanphier (L), Young Leader Committee Chair and member of the Board of Directors, discusses the importance of engaging and involving young people in agriculture with Congressman Brad Schneider (R).

Cook County Farm Bureau leaders visit legislators at Illinois Capitol - (bottom to top) Theresa Johnston, Ruth Zeldenrust, Janet McCabe, and Cindy Gustafson



Jonny Poole delivers his speech on promoting the Young Leaders Committee to potential members interested in joining the committee during a leadership training where Young Leaders enhanced their public speaking skills.



Elijah Floerke (L) – CCFB Foundation's Howard Paarlberg Excellence in Agriculture recipient and Brigid Heller (R) – CCFB Foundation's Stuenkel Family Legacy Scholarship recipient



Zeldenrust Farm Market hosted a member "Make a Spring Planter" event at the greenhouse.



2025 Recipe contributor, member Michael O'Brien, was the winner of our Farm Fund\$ drawing.



Giant Pumpkin Contest 1st place winner Dave Wilkes poses with his 385 lb pumpkin



Agricultural Leaders of Tomorrow graduates: British Griffis, Kayla Biegel, and Katrina Milton graduated from Illinois Farm Bureau's Agricultural Leaders of Tomorrow (ALOT) program, a comprehensive leadership development course.



During one morning of Member Appreciation Week, President McCabe and Manager Bob Rohrer enjoyed coffee and conversation with members.



Leaders visit the nation's capital: Blake Lanphier, Bona Heinsohn, Cindy Gustafson, Janet McCabe, Ed Elfmann, and British Griffis (not pictured).



IALP Graduates: CCFB Foundation supported Illinois Agriculture Leadership Program graduates Jessica Biernacki (Agriculture teacher, Rich Township) and Angelica Carmen (Agriculture Sustainability, landscape design) as a part of the 2025 cohort.



Spring photo contest 3rd place winner: "First ripe strawberry picking" by Wanda Bruinsma



Cook CFB Young Leaders traveled throughout central and southwestern Illinois as part of this year's Illinois Ag Industry Tour. Back row pictured (L to R): Mariah Dale-Anderson, Justin Kopping, Stephanie Gregus, Jarrod Kopping, British Griffis, and Blake Lanphier. Front row pictured left to right: Greg Anderson, Carmen Trotta, Rebecca Biernacki, and Jessica Biernacki.



Michael T. Howard, founder of Eden Place Farms located in Chicago, took a moment to be photographed in their schoolhouse.



Students from Chicago High School for Agriculture Sciences (CHSAS) create a decorative pot planter using pansies, stock, and wallflower. 21 CHSAS students attended the 2025 Horticulture Farm Shadows Program at Ted's Greenhouse in Tinley Park.



11 teachers attended the Cook County Farm Bureau's Summer Ag Institute. The educators toured Route 66 by trolley, ate at the Billy Goat Tavern, saw Lake Michigan and the Chicago River on a Wendella lake and river architecture tour, and received a guided tour of the McCormick Bridgehouse Museum.



Heidi and Pearl were among 21 members attending a fun and festive Wreath & Bow Making class held at the Farm Bureau.

CCFB Impacts 2025 Illinois Farm Bureau Annual Meeting

Cook County Farm Bureau is coming off of a very successful year serving members that culminated in the Illinois Farm Bureau Annual Meeting held December 6-8 in Chicago. During the meeting, Cook County Farm Bureau leaders were involved in many ways and received many awards and recognitions.

On the delegate floor, Cook County Farm Bureau led a discussion on several policy resolutions including:

- Disposal of waste
- H-2A work program administration
- Involvement of members in Farm Bureau
- Regenerative agriculture

These proposals were adopted by the 300+ IFB delegates and will be used across the state to strengthen agriculture and consumer trust related to food. Throughout the day, Cook County Farm Bureau Leaders helped develop policy for the Illinois Farm Bureau in 2026.

Cook County Farm Bureau Leaders also helped elect a new Illinois Farm Bureau Pres., VP, and District 5 director.

On stage, Cook County Farm Bureau was recognized for success in several ways...

- The Pinnacle Award for the large County Farm Bureau group for the 5th consecutive year! The Pinnacle award is the highest

County Farm Bureau award recognizing complete and well-rounded organizational excellence including goals/objectives, planning, implementation, and results.

- The Liberty Bell award which goes to the County Farm Bureau with the most outstanding all-around policy development, information, policy implementation, and legislative programming. Special shoutout to the Governmental Affairs Team and staff member Bona!
- Activity of Excellence awards:
 - Farm Crawl BINGO for Consumers – Gold (Farm Income and Development category)
 - Urban Agriculture District - Gold (Local Affairs category)
 - Strength Over Silence – Gold (Health and Safety category)

Other Annual Meeting News...

- State Young Leaders Discussion Meet where Cook County Young Leader Jennifer Miller represented Cook County Farm Bureau in the statewide discussion meet.
- County leaders met with Congressman Bill Foster and Congresswoman Robin Kelly.
- County leaders participated in various Ag in the Classroom fundraising activities sponsored by the IAA Foundation.



Illinois Farm Bureau delegates elected Philip Nelson to serve as the 17th president of the organization. (Photo by Catrina Rawson)



Janet McCabe, Ruth Zeldenrust, and Gerry Kopping served as the Cook County Farm Bureau delegates at the Illinois Farm Bureau Annual Meeting.



Evan Hultine spoke to delegates after being re-elected Illinois Farm Bureau vice president. (Photo by Catrina Rawson)



Janet McCabe (C), Cook County Farm Bureau President, and Bob Rohrer (R), Manager with Illinois Farm Bureau President Brian Duncan (L) as he presented Cook County Farm Bureau with the Pinnacle Award for outstanding achievement of goals and objectives and the Liberty Bell.



Lu Ann Matejcek (R), District 5 IFB board member, reviews the 4 CAE awards presented to President McCabe achieved by Cook County Farm Bureau. Matejcek was re-elected District 5 IFB board member representing Cook, Will, DuPage, and Kendall-Gundy CFBs.



Jennifer Miller, Cook County Farm Bureau Young Leader, competes in the State Young Leader Discussion Meet

Jennifer Miller, Cook CFB Young Leader competed at the State Young Leader Discussion Meet in Chicago after advancing from the district contest earlier in the fall. Miller completed two rounds of discussion and highlighted

the contributions of Farm Bureau to the greater farm community and its impact in Illinois and beyond. Miller is currently at Southern Illinois University and is studying to be a dentist.

Planting Seeds

“Live a Little and Have Fun”



Katrina J.E. Milton

This year, my new year’s resolution is to get out and do more. As a Millennial, YOLO (you only live once) has always been a personal motto as well as, “The future starts today, not tomorrow.”

For years, especially post-pandemic, I only made small family trips: to Las Vegas, to New York, to Tennessee. I

renewed my passport in 2019 before the pandemic, but I haven’t had the chance to use it – yet.

That’s why, when I saw The Chicago Farmers were hosting a study abroad trip to Morocco in February 2026, I thought about it. I slept on it. I daydreamed about it. And finally, in August, I paid my downpayment and signed myself up to go.

I’ve always wanted to visit Morocco, but I never thought that I would have the opportunity to go. I didn’t know of anybody going on the trip, and I don’t know anyone in Morocco. My family and friends weren’t interested in joining, so I asked the travel group if they could find me a roommate. Luckily, they paired me with another female solo traveler. We met recently at a local Moroccan restaurant to chat and plan, and we are both looking forward to rooming together and becoming friends.

The trip itself sounds amazing! Highlights of the trip will include “exploring Morocco’s diverse agricultural practices, from citrus and olive cultivation to innovative farming techniques, experiencing the vibrant culture of Morocco, including visits to bustling markets and historical sites, and visiting the four imperial cities of Marrakech, Fes, Rabat, and Meknes, as well as Casablanca.” I’ll even be able to spend the night in a luxury glamping tent in the Agafay Desert with the opportunity to ride a camel (my favorite animal).

Agriculture employs about 40% of Morocco’s workforce and is important to the country’s economy. Morocco’s top crops include wheat, barley, sugar beet, olives, tomatoes, citrus fruits, grapes, and pulses (dried seeds of beans, peas, and lentils). Poultry, sheep, and cattle are the country’s top livestock. Argan oil, made from nuts of the argan tree, is native to Morocco.

I can’t wait for the 11-day trip and to learn more about another country and culture. I’ve already started shopping and packing, and I’ve been reading travel guides and watching travel documentaries. I look forward to trying traditional Moroccan mint tea and sampling a variety of spices. I hope to buy a unique keepsake from the marketplace, maybe a scarf or jewelry.

But most of all, I am excited to learn new things and have once-in-a-lifetime experiences. I’ll take lots of photos and take plenty of notes. I will also remember to live in the moment, make new friends, learn new things, and – most importantly – have fun!

I hope you take my column this month to heart and get out and do fun things. Try a new restaurant, read a new book, or go someplace new. As a Cook County Farm Bureau member, you receive exclusive discounts and deals, such as discount tickets to the Bulls, Blackhawks, Six Flag, Santa’s Village, Medieval Times, and AMC, Marcus Theater, and Regal movie tickets. For more information about membership benefits, visit www.cookcfb.org and select the Membership tab.

You don’t have to go to Morocco to have new and fun experiences. You can stay local and close to home. Bring family and friends or make new friends along the way. Be brave! Try new things and live a little in January and throughout 2026. And – most importantly – don’t forget to have fun!

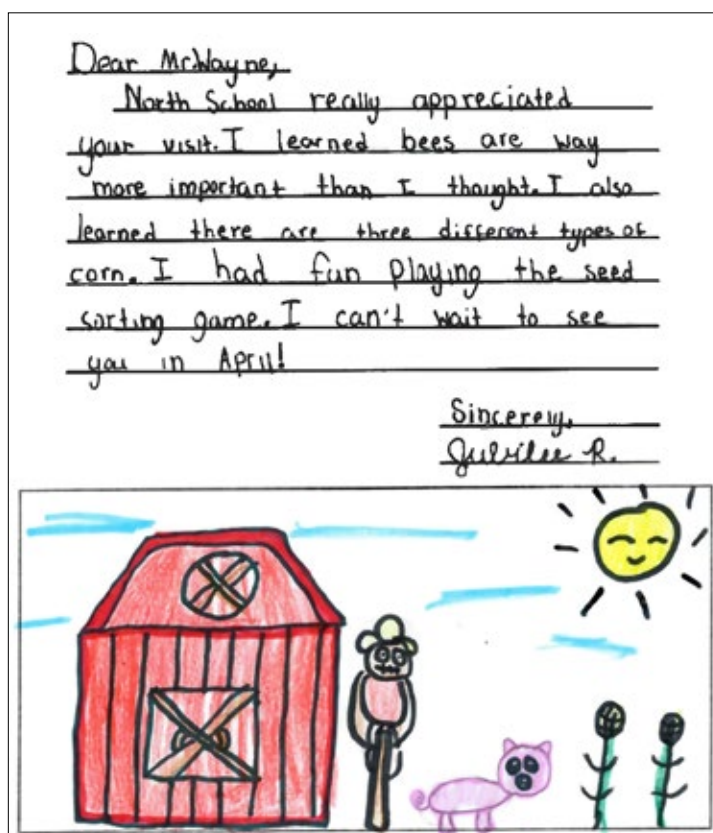
Katrina Milton, Director of Ag Literacy Katrina can be reached at aipc@cookcfb.org.



Students Show Their Appreciation for Ag Education

Jubilee, a 4th grader at North Elementary in Franklin Park, learned a lot from Intro to Illinois Ag while 3rd grader Raegan from Wentworth Elementary in Calumet City learned all about corn during our Taco Adventure presentation. There is still time to bring the wonders of agriculture to your Cook County classroom!

Book today at bit.ly/AgPlease or by calling 708-354-3276.



COOK COUNTY FARM BUREAU DIGITAL PUBLICATIONS



As a Farm Bureau member, you have access to great electronic publications at no extra cost!

In addition to the E-Cooperator, we also have several other newsletters. Interested in receiving these via email?

- **Urban Ag Newsletter** – Agriculture happenings in and around Cook County for urban and innovative producers.
- **The Member News** – Newsletter to CCFB leaders, affiliate companies, team members, volunteers, and staff.
- **Corner of Clark & Randolph** – Agriculture political news in Cook County.
- **Ag in the Classroom News to Use** – Information and resources for Cook County Educators.

To receive one of our digital publications, call us at (708) 354-3276 or email fbcooperator@gmail.com.



Ag Book in a Box:

An AITC Immersive Experience for Families

This winter, take time to slow down and enjoy meaningful moments with family with Cook County Farm Bureau’s Ag Book in a Box. Centered around the heartwarming story “Sleep Tight Farm” by Eugenie Doyle, this immersive book in a box experience brings agricultural learning to life with themed items, hands-on activities, crafts, and snacks. It’s a fun and educational way for families to connect over the seasons of farming and the importance of agriculture.



Request your box online at bit.ly/Agbookbox or by calling the CCFB at 708-354-3276.

CCFB Members: \$20 if picked up from the CCFB / \$25 if shipped
Non-Members: \$30 if picked up from the CCFB / \$35 if shipped

AGRICULTURE ADVENTURES FOR FAMILIES



Soup!

The word "soup" comes from the Old French verb "soupe," meaning "to soak," referring to bread (a sop) dipped in broth, which is commonly done with soups. The Old French "soupe" also has a Proto-Germanic root, "sup," which also gives us the word "supper," connecting the liquid food to the act of eating or drinking it, evolving from "suppa" (bread in broth) in Late Latin to the modern liquid dish.



Delicious READING CORNER

Match the Soup Activity *Match the soup to the country where it originated.*

Miso – dashi broth, usually made from seaweed and shavings of dried, fermented, and smoked tuna, mixed with a fermented soybean paste, with cubed tofu and sliced green onions added

Which soup is from **Greece**?

Pho (pronounced "fuh") – rice noodles and thinly sliced meat in a long-simmered bone broth, topped with fresh herbs and vegetables.

Which soup is from **Morocco**?

Gazpacho – a cold soup traditionally made from raw, blended vegetables like tomatoes, cucumbers, and peppers, with olive oil, vinegar, garlic, and bread for thickness

Which soup is from **Japan**?

Harira – tomatoes, lentils, and chickpeas, often including meat, such as beef, lamb, or chicken, and mix of spices and fresh herbs

Which soup is from **Spain**?

Avoglemono – made with egg yolk and lemon juice mixed with chicken broth, heated until they thicken, with chicken, orzo or rice, and herbs added

Which soup is from **Vietnam**?

Answers: Miso – Japan, Pho – Vietnam, Gazpacho – Spain, Harira – Morocco, Avoglemono – Greece

DID YOU KNOW?

The first soup was likely made 200,000 years ago by Neanderthals, who boiled animal bones. The earliest physical evidence of hot soup comes from pottery that dates to 20,000 B.C., found with scorch marks in the Xianrendong Cave in China.

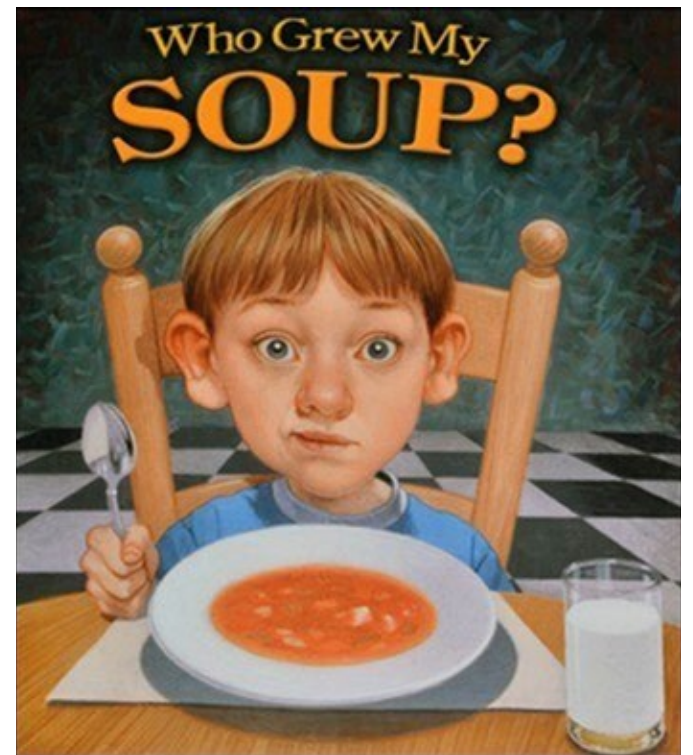


Image from <https://agclassroomstore.com/who-grew-my-soup/>

"Who Grew My Soup?"

Written by Tom Darbyshire,
Illustrated by C.F. Payne

A boy named Phineas Quinn refuses to eat his vegetable soup until he learns where the ingredients come from, leading him on a magical journey in a flying tomato balloon to discover the farmers who grow vegetables that make soup.

January Word Search

Last Month's Winner:
Don Cliff

Animal	L	Y	B	B	L	C	H	D	P	N	L	D	D	S	U
Boil	Z	A	C	R	I	R	K	B	O	G	J	R	I	P	P
Bone	H	Q	M	A	O	O	U	D	G	O	I	B	U	O	G
Bread	N	N	S	I	B	T	S	I	X	N	F	A	Q	O	D
Broth	L	D	G	S	N	U	H	P	K	Q	X	P	I	N	E
Dip	P	G	X	M	P	A	S	G	J	X	P	X	L	N	V
Drink	K	Q	W	P	S	V	S	X	O	K	Z	N	O	M	D
Eat	I	J	E	N	D	R	C	W	A	V	N	B	W	M	Q
Food	U	R	I	C	M	G	D	O	U	N	W	M	N	Y	P
Liquid	O	H	Y	Z	S	M	S	T	Z	L	K	K	T	A	E
Soak	I	T	F	E	X	P	E	L	B	A	T	E	G	E	V
Soup	Q	R	S	O	U	P	I	Q	F	K	D	O	B	M	I
Spice	A	T	V	C	Q	G	E	C	H	G	F	L	G	D	M
Spoon	R	I	M	A	B	C	Y	R	E	R	Y	W	S	W	V
Supper	I	X	O	B	R	E	A	D	W	F	Y	P	M	Z	U
Vegetable															

Name _____

Phone # _____

Membership # _____

Choose Your Prize Preference for If You Win:

If a choice is not made, movie tickets will be sent

Beggar's Pizza Gift Card 3 Movie Tickets

Delta Sonic Car Wash (Choose one option only)

Located on front of paper

Choose Your Prize: Word Search

Choices include a \$25 Beggar's Pizza Gift Card, Delta Sonic Car Wash (Two 10-min Interior Cleaning ONLY, NO WASH) OR **3 AMC Movie Tickets

*Additional charge will apply when using Interior cleaning for Full-sized Vehicles

**AMC Yellow tickets not valid in California, New York, & New Jersey.

Complete the Word Search puzzle for your chance to win! Winners will be contacted by mail.

MAIL TO:

Cook Co. Farm Bureau
Ag Adventures Word Search
6438 Joliet Rd
Countryside, IL 60525

FAX TO: 708-579-6056

EMAIL TO: FBcooperator@gmail.com

Complete and submit an entry every month all in 2026 and your name is automatically entered into an "End of Year" drawing for a gift basket full of ag themed goodies.

Deadline is the 20th of each month. **GOOD LUCK!**



Kitchen Legacies: Homemade Dishes Outlive Generations

Field meals deliver their own form of heroism, and Mom saves the day. She dishes out the seasonal suppers spring and fall with guidance from her sidekicks – women past and present who submitted their kitchen’s best recipes to a church cookbook. Leah’s fiesta bake, Marie’s orange salad, Debra’s pizza casserole and Ann’s marble squares have fueled our field crew for years.

Out here in farm country, the names of past landowners often carry forward, becoming part of the land’s identity long after ownership has changed. For instance, the “Lievens Back Bottom,” which my parents have owned half my life, was previously tended by the late Mr. and Mrs. Lievens. I’ll spare you 50 more examples. My point: the same goes for good, home-cooked food.

Thanks to small-town recipe books, home cooks earned their own version of legacy status without needing acreage on a balance sheet. Instead, they claimed a kitchen, embraced a passion and created recipes or refined family ones in 9x13 batches that fed and delighted the local masses.

Long before Google became a verb, churches published cookbooks filled with personal recipe submissions, each tied to a name. No digital versions exist of these limited-edition paper relics. There are no pictures. No reviews. Each recipe stands solely on the credibility of the cook who submitted it as a time-tested family favorite – and that alone serves as a built-in 5-star rating.

I have proof with Lorraine’s broccoli soup, Pam’s pizza crust, Lou’s cool cucumber pasta and Mary’s Thanksgiving dressing. Mom and I made 12 batches of Kathy’s hash brown au gratin for a farm wedding. I adore Susan’s corn casserole and chuck wagon baked beans. And Grandma’s published recipe for frosted banana bars is better than bread. It freezes well, too.

The book entries tell stories. Ingredients like strawberries, zucchini, rhubarb and blackberries signal home gardeners and wild blackberry pickers who love to cook. The salad section proves that Jell-O and Cool Whip absolutely qualify as salads by Midwestern standards.

I own hundreds of pages of local recipes in five cookbooks. Mom has a dozen. Grandma’s stash fills a cabinet, and my aunt collects them. The recipes are worth repeating, the novelty worth preserving and the pages a testament to the women who – in their quiet heroism – fed a community. And still do.

About the author: Joanie Stiers farms with her parents and brother in Knox County, where they grow corn, soybeans and hay, raise beef cattle and operate side businesses related to the family operation.

Practical Steps to Protect Your Identity, Finances, and Online Safety All Year Long



Jennifer Killian

As scams and fraud schemes continue to evolve, protecting your personal and financial information has never been more important. Whether you’re checking emails, shopping online, or interacting on social media, scammers are constantly developing new tactics to trick unsuspecting individuals. By making informed and proactive choices every day, you can significantly reduce your risk of falling victim to these deceptive practices.

Here, you’ll find practical resolutions to help you stay alert, protect your identity, and keep your finances secure throughout the year.

1. Resolve to stay vigilant with emails, texts, and phone calls. Be cautious when you receive unexpected messages from individuals or organizations. Remember that scammers can disguise messages to make them look like they’re from trusted businesses, government agencies, or reputable groups. Never click on links or download attachments in unsolicited emails or texts. If you get a call from an unfamiliar number, let it go to voicemail. If you do answer and something feels suspicious, hang up and contact the person or company directly using a verified phone number.

2. Resolve not to send money to anyone you haven’t met in person or respond to urgent payment requests. Avoid transferring funds to strangers, especially if they ask you to pay using gift card codes or payment apps like CashApp, Venmo, or PayPal. Once money is sent this way, it can’t be traced or recovered. Scammers often create a sense of urgency to pressure you into acting quickly, so always pause and carefully consider the situation before responding. Don’t let yourself be rushed into making a costly mistake!

3. Resolve to thoroughly investigate before making any online payments or purchases. Whenever you shop online or are asked to pay electronically, take the time to research the retailer first. Ask yourself: Do you know and trust this person or business? Is there a valid customer service number you can contact? Where is the company actually located? Will your payment be processed through a secure server (such as one with “https://...” in the web address)? Have you checked for any complaints or negative reviews from other customers?

4. Resolve to carefully consider when and how you share your personal details. Disclosing sensitive information to scammers can lead to identity theft. Never give out financial details such as CVV codes from

credit or debit cards, your birthdate, address, Social Security number, or Medicare number to anyone who contacts you unexpectedly.

5. Resolve to create strong, unique passwords for each account by using memorable phrases or sentences. If needed, download a reputable password manager app to securely generate and store your credentials. Using distinctive passwords or passphrases for every account makes it much more difficult for fraudsters to access multiple accounts if one is compromised.

6. Resolve to turn on two-factor authentication or use biometric security, such as fingerprint or facial recognition. By adding this extra layer of protection—especially for accounts tied to your finances or personal information—you can significantly lower the chance of unauthorized access.

7. Resolve to use good judgment when engaging on social media. Make sure your privacy settings are enabled to safeguard your accounts, and only connect online with people you know in real life. Keep your profile free of personal information and never reveal your home address or other sensitive details, even in casual online quizzes. Scammers often collect this data to impersonate friends or family and try to earn your trust. Also, be wary of making purchases from social media ads, sponsored posts, or pop-up deals. Remember: If a deal seems too good to be true, it’s probably a scam!

8. Resolve to regularly review your financial statements and actively monitor your credit. By checking your bank and credit card statements, you can spot unauthorized transactions early. Additionally, use tools like My Credit Score to keep an eye on your credit health and order a free annual credit report from each major credit bureau to identify any suspicious activity or errors. This proactive approach helps protect you from identity theft and financial fraud.

9. Resolve to educate yourself about the latest scams by regularly visiting the IAACU Blog The Money Rep and following updates in the Scams/Fraud section. By staying informed through these posts, you’ll be able to recognize and avoid new fraud tactics.

By making these resolutions part of your daily routine, you empower yourself to stay one step ahead of scammers and protect your financial well-being. Remember, vigilance and informed decision-making are your best defenses against fraud. We encourage you to share these tips with friends and family, helping create a safer community for everyone. If you ever have questions or concerns, reach out to trusted sources for guidance, your security is worth it!

COOK COUNTY FARM BUREAU® CELEBRATES FOOD CHECKOUT DAY 2026

SUPPORTING LOCAL FAMILIES, FOOD PANTRIES, AND COMMUNITIES

Cook County Farm Bureau® members and partners are once again celebrating the healthy, nutritious food grown and raised by local farmers- and sharing that abundance with neighbors in need.

Now in its 26th year, Food Checkout Day highlights agriculture’s essential role in feeding families and communities across Cook County. This year’s effort will continue the long-standing Farm Bureau tradition of giving back through food and cash donations to local food pantries.

Members who wish to make a monetary contribution can do so by completing the form. Donations may be directed to one of our partner food pantries:

Northfield Food Pantry, Glenview, serves between 850 and 900 families per month and has recently expanded its reach to meet growing community needs. Northfield Township includes all or parts of Deerfield, Glencoe, Glenview, Northbrook, Northfield, Prospect Heights, and Wilmette.

Respond Now, Chicago Heights, serves more than 22 Chicago south suburban communities and over 20,000 households. Through volunteers’ efforts they’re able to keep over 125 families in their homes, prepare more than 18,000 bags of food, and provide more than 133 local families with utility assistance.

FOOD CHECKOUT DAY 2026 • FOOD PANTRY DONATION

Food Pantry Name: _____

Your Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip Code: _____ Phone: _____

Email Address: _____



Please indicate if you’d like your donation to be designated to the Young Leader Hygiene Product Drive.

Please make checks payable to Cook County Farm Bureau. Checks should be mailed to Cook County Farm Bureau, 6438 Joliet Road, Countryside, IL 60525. All proceeds will be donated to Cook County food pantries. Donations will be accepted until March 2, 2026.

Manifolds, Manolos, and Manure

By Bona Heinsohn, CAE
CCFB Director of Gov. Affairs and Public Relations

A Chicago Charter: The Missing Piece in the Budget Debate



Bona Heinsohn

Unlike most major U.S. cities, Chicago does not have a formal charter; instead the authority of its leadership rests in the Illinois Compiled Statutes and its own municipal code. The 1870 Illinois Constitution placed municipalities under the Cities and Villages Act and thereby pausing municipal charters.

A charter could reduce ambiguity and more thoroughly define the powers of the mayor and city council. Arguably, it

could also create a system of checks and balances, better ensuring that the City Council has a more robust role in the budget process. A charter could also reduce executive overreach, improve governance, and address issues like term limits, council size, a city manager, and lasting structures would become possible.

A charter could also strengthen the City Council. Prior to the current administration, the City Council has historically functioned as a rubber stamp for the mayor's proposals. However, recently the council has clawed their way towards a more assertive budget role. In 2024, council members voted down the mayor's

proposed property tax. This year, the Finance Committee tanked the mayor's proposed budget and corporate head tax.

Speaking of the budget proposal. A poll conducted by Change Research in November found that 55 percent of registered voters trust their alderman and the City Council to handle Chicago's budget compared to just 14 percent who trust the mayor. To restate: nearly four-to-one registered voters trust the City Council over the mayor to handle the budget. However, without a charter the City Council has very little formal authority to do more than hold hearings on the mayor's budget proposal. However, the limited authority did not stop aldermen from rolling out an alternate budget proposal, perhaps marking the opening salvo in a historic power shift at City Hall.

That same poll conducted by Change Research asked registered voters if they trust the mayor on budget stewardship. Sixty-nine percent of those responding answered that do not trust the mayor to handle Chicago's budget. To repeat 69 percent do not trust the mayor as it relates to budget stewardship.

A couple of takeaways from the Change Research poll: a lot of residents, to the tune of 78 percent, are aware of the budget debate, and those same residents are more comfortable with the city council spearheading the budget and budget process compared to the mayor.

On the note of the budget: 68% of those responding to the poll indicated that they are opposed to the budget proposal as it stands. In November, the Chicago Finance Committee

overwhelmingly rejected the mayor's budget proposal. Aldermen expressed concerns over the mayor's proposed head tax.

Chicago's most recent head tax, the Employer's Expense Tax, was eliminated in 2014 by then-Mayor Rahm Emanuel. The Employer's Expense Tax was a \$4 per employee tax leveraged on Chicago employers with over 50 workers. Alderman Scott Waguespack has indicated that he's concerned that the current mayor's proposal would have a chilling effect on small and mid-size businesses, especially as the city continues to struggle post-pandemic.

Although Chicago taxpayers will bear the brunt of the mayor's budget proposal, this conversation and the conversation on municipal charters extend well beyond the city limits.



Farm Bureau Leaders Meet with Congresswoman Robin Kelly

Cook County Farm Bureau leaders met with Congresswoman Robin Kelly during this year's Illinois Agricultural Association® Annual Meeting in Chicago in December. Pictured with Congresswoman Kelly are Bob Rohrer, Manager; Greg Stack, Board Member; Karen Biernacki, volunteer; Dan Biernacki, Board Member; Congresswoman Robin Kelly; Janet McCabe, Cook County Farm Bureau President; Ruth Zeldenrust, Board Member; and Bona Heinsohn, staff.

Congressman Bill Foster Meets with Constituents at IFB Annual Meeting

U.S. Congressman Bill Foster joined constituents from the 11th District during this year's Illinois Agricultural Association Annual Meeting. Congressman Foster's district includes parts of Boone, Cook, DeKalb, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will Counties. Foster, a businessman and physicist, has been in the U.S. House of Representatives since 2013. He originally served in the U.S. House from 2008 until 2011 in the 14th Congressional District. Farm Bureau members discussed the importance of a new Farm Bill and the impact that trade and tariff negotiations are having on the farm economy.



Delegates Consider Cook Policy Submittals

At this year's Illinois Agricultural Association® Annual Meeting in Chicago, delegates throughout Illinois considered policy resolutions submitted by the Cook County Farm Bureau®.

Policy 79 Labor provided that Farm Bureau supports:

- Clarity in H-2A regulations and administration.
- Streamlining the H-2A application process by using electronic application filing.
- Allowing employers to file a single application for labor needs, even if labor needs are staggered throughout the year.
- Removing the "seasonality" requirement to make all agricultural jobs, including dairy, eligible.
- A quicker, less intensive application process for hiring H2-A workers if the farm has had no changes from the previous year.
- Administration and oversight of the H-2A guest worker program within the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).
- More flexibility for agricultural employers in the H-2A visa program.

Despite rising costs and regulations, the H-2A program remains critical to American farming. Rising costs of labor puts American farmers at a disadvantage in the global market. Many specialty crop sectors rely on H-2A workers to sufficiently staff their farms and maintain production, as mechanization is limited in the fruit and vegetable industries. The resolution was approved as amended.

In 2024, Cook CFB submitted Farm Bureau's first-ever regenerative agriculture policy. During the Resolution Committee meeting, county presidents felt that this topic deserved a deeper discussion than what could occur on the delegate floor. In that vein, a Regenerative Agriculture Working Group was created to discuss the topic and develop policy.

New policy regarding regenerative agriculture supports:

- Regenerative agriculture to improve soil health and function.
- Regenerative agricultural principles that focus on keeping the soil covered, minimizing soil disturbance, keeping living roots as often as possible, maximizing biodiversity and integrating livestock, within local context.
- Qualification for incentives being based on a menu of regenerative agriculture practices rather than a prescriptive list.
- Farm policy supporting voluntary adoption of regenerative practices.
- Education, outreach, and technical assistance around the value and implementation of regenerative practices.

The submittal was approved by Farm Bureau delegates.

Cook CFB also submitted a change to existing policy 17 Disposal of Waste, to support research into and the development of minimum standards for bioplastics, biodegradable, and compostable materials. The lack of federal standards for defining and regulating bioplastics not only encourages greenwashing but also creates significant waste management challenges. The policy was approved as amended.

The final Cook County Farm Bureau policy submittal addressed policy 84 Involvement of Members in Farm Bureau. The policy provides that Farm Bureau supports County Farm Bureaus creating a pathway to engage younger members in county activities, volunteer opportunities, and leadership. The submittal was approved by the delegates.

As a grassroots organization, members propose and develop the policy that guides the organization. **Members are encouraged to reach out to Bona Heinsohn at bona@cookcfb.org with ideas or suggestions for policy topics.**

COUNTRY Financial MONTHLY SPOTLIGHT

The following Agents/Advisors have been selected by the Country Financial District Leaders to represent their District for this month.

Orland Park Agency – Sharon Stemke, District Leader

JIM ANDRESEN - FINANCIAL ADVISOR

Jim takes pride in working hard to provide the best service for his clients. To be able to help them and his community is very important to him. He enjoys partnering with CCFB for Food Check Out Day. He, his staff and clients make generous donations each year of time, money, and food. In addition, Jim has served on his local school board for over 12 years, he has coached Lincoln-Way Rugby Club for over 8 years, serves on the board of his local football and cheer program, Illinois Jr. Celtics/Mokena Burros for over 16 years AND is an active member of Mokena Lions Club for over 16 years.



Please go to <https://cookcfb.org/membership/become-a-member/country-financial-connection> to view the full article.

17605 Oak Park Ave, Ste C, Tinley Park, IL, 60477
Office Phone 708-633-6490
Cell Phone 815-955-3556
jim.andresen@countryfinancial.com

with Country Financial since January 2003

Members Sam Jones and Donna Nykaza Jones Represent CCFB at Highschool Championship

This Fall, Message from Donna Nykaza-Jones: Good morning! I wanted to thank you again for getting us in for the representatives for Farm Bureau at the Mt. Carmel game. It was quite the experience! Now we just have to finish defrosting! Illinois Farm Bureau partnered with COUNTRY Financial to sponsor the IHSA state football championship games. This sponsorship provided the opportunity for local Farm Bureau leaders to be part of the coin toss ceremonies at midfield prior to each of the games.

Cook County Farm Bureau proudly lined up Donna Nykaza-Jones and her husband Sam to conduct the ceremonial coin toss prior to the large high school playoff championship at Northern Illinois University Huskie Field in Dekalb where 8A Oswego played Chicago Mt Carmel.



Sam and Donna, far right, observe the coin toss prior to the game.

During the December 3rd ceremony, the PA announcer also gave a quick introduction of the two members:

“Donna Nykaza-Jones and Sam Jones are long-time Cook County greenhouse operators and owners in the Steger area on Cook County’s south side. They have been active Cook County Farm Bureau members for nearly 50 years and come from a very involved Farm Bureau family including Donna’s parents, Ray and Edna Nykaza. Ray served as Cook County Farm Bureau President in the early 2000s.”

WORD OF THE Month

SNOW

Cook CFB Welcomes New Member Business and New Benefit for Members

Chicago 24 Hour Towing, Inc.
5332 N Elston Ave, Chicago, IL 60630
312-873-0058
Open 24 Hours A Day

Chicago 24 Hour Towing is offering CCFB members a **20% discount on any service.**

They service all of Cook County and offer towing, heavy duty towing, accident recovery towing, lock out, jump start, and tire replacement services.

When you call for service, identify yourself as a Cook County Farm Bureau Member to receive the discount.

Cook County Farm Bureau®

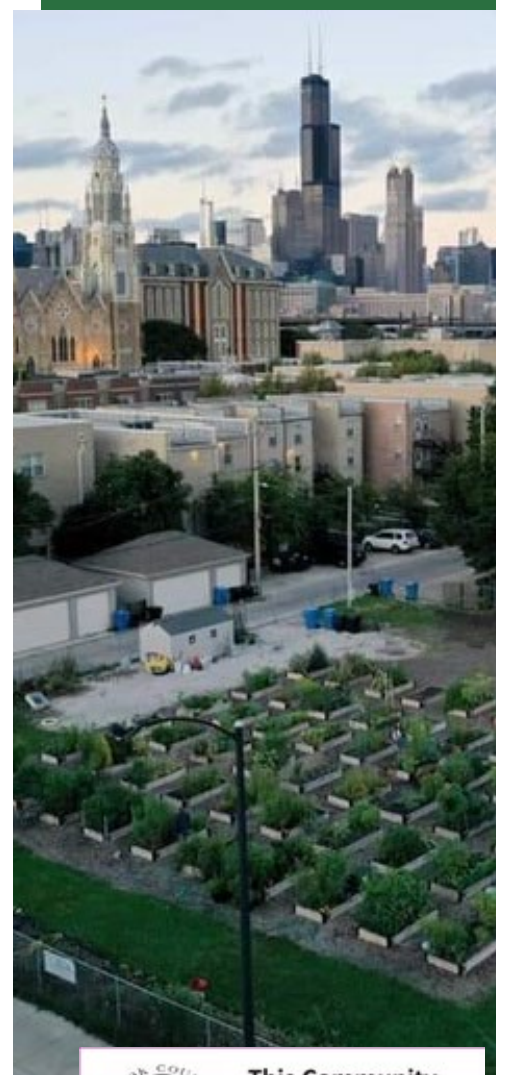
COOKFRESH COMMUNITY URBAN GARDEN GRANT PROGRAM

Supplemental funding for community gardens to be used for plantings, seeds, garden supplies and materials, in Cook County during the 2026 season.

Six (6) awards of \$350.00 each will be granted to community gardens in Cook County; grant funds must be used at select CCFB member businesses.



Grant application date deadline is February 28, 2026.



This Community Urban Garden is funded in part by a grant from:

Cook County Farm Bureau®
Commodities & Product Marketing Team

Grant Assistance/Clarification: Contact Debbie Voltz at 708-354-3276 or membershipdebbie@cookcfb.org

CLASSIFIED ADS

All ads that we receive for the Co-Operator are also listed on our website at cookcfb.org/stay-updated/classified-ads. If you have a photo of the item(s) that you are selling you can email it to us to include it on our 'Classifieds' page on our website only along with your ad.

Email your ad (and photo if you have one) to fbcooperator@gmail.com. Please be sure to include your full name, Farm Bureau number, and phone number. Deadline for Classified ads is the 17th of each month. Any ads submitted after the 17th will appear in the following month's Co-Operator. Members may run up to four non-commercial classified ads annually for free. Any ads submitted after the fourth, will be charged.

If mailing your ad, please mail to: Cook County Farm Bureau, Attention: Classified Ads, 6438 Joliet Rd, Countryside, IL 60525. You can also fax your ad to 708-579-6056.

FOR SALE

For Sale: 18 position ladder, 16 ft, asking \$100. Call 708-654-2010. Picture available online.

For Sale: I RIDE electric scooter new. Asking \$950, paid \$1,300. Weight 32 lbs. (base), length 38", width 19.25". Call 708-654-2010. Pictures available online.

For Sale: Craftsman 24" snow thrower. Electric start, 6 speeds forward, 2 speeds backward. Like new. Asking \$550 call Michael 847-404-4204.

For Sale: Wen standby generator. 4500 watts standby, 3700 watts running. New in box never opened. Asking \$550 call Michael 847-404-4204.

WANTED

Wanted to buy your H/O and N scale electric trains and H/O scale slot cars and tracks. I buy large and small collections. Turn those unwanted items into cash. **Give Ron a call at 630-272-4433.**

Wanted to buy BB guns, toy guns, rifles and pistols. BB, pellet and Co2. Also cap guns. **Call 312-438-8628.**

Wanted 1972 older cars, trucks, parts, unfinished projects, and 1967/69 Camaros. **Call 708-439-9770**

Wanted FOLD UP TABLES. **Call James 708-361-8230.**

FARM TO FRIDGE

ILLINOIS FARM BUREAU
Farm. Family. Food.™

Dairy cattle spend their life on the farm where they have access to barns that have sides to open in the summer to allow for cool breezes, and that close in the winter to keep it warm.

Once a cow is milked, the milk is taken directly to a cooling tank for food safety and quality assurance until it is tested for quality and purity and then picked up by an insulated milk truck.

At the processing plant, milk goes through two processes before it can be bottled: pasteurization, which kills any potential disease-causing bacteria, and homogenization, which prevents fat from separating and results in a smooth texture. It is then bottled as fresh milk or used to make other dairy products.

Milk and other dairy products are then loaded on refrigerated trucks and delivered right to your local grocery store.

ABC'S OF SPICES

We already gave you the ABC's of Food but the Cook County Farm Bureau also loves spices... All types of spices with all types of flavors. In this feature, we will be highlighting different types of spices, from A to Z. If you'd like a full list of the ABC's of Food, contact the CCFB office.

This month "S"	SAFFRON	
Saffron threads are the pungent stigmas of the light purple crocus flower, botanically classified as <i>crocus sativus</i> .		The spice has a deep orange-red color and a smooth, malleable consistency.
The flavor of saffron is unique, with bitter and earthy undertones mixed with floral honey highlights and a slightly metallic finish.	Saffron's cultivation is incredibly labor-intensive, and a pound of saffron requires over 70,000 blossoms.	
	SAFFRON IS THE WORLD'S MOST EXPENSIVE SPICE	
	Historically, saffron has been used to reduce pain and inflammation in the body.	
The most popular dish featuring saffron is Spanish paella.	Dried saffron threads are available year-round, with fresh threads harvested in the fall.	
	The growing conditions found in Iran make it the ideal place to produce saffron of the highest quality.	

Source: https://specialtyproduce.com/produce/Saffron_17987.php

Family Farm, and Food Bytes

High Tunnels Provide More Locally Grown Fresh Fruits, Veggies

(USDA News)

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service promotes seasonal high tunnel as a powerful tool. High tunnels are plastic-wrapped, metal-framed structures that are fairly easy and inexpensive to build. They are designed to extend the growing season into the colder months, helping to increase the availability of local produce, keep plants at a steady temperature and even conserve water and energy.

High tunnels are similar to greenhouses, except they are considered "passively heated." That means they do not require electricity to heat – only sunlight. The plastic on the frame actually provides enough insulation to add up to 12 extra weeks to the growing season, depending on location

NRCS helps farmers build high tunnels, providing technical expertise and funding. Local and regional markets often provide farmers with a higher share of the food dollar, and money spent at a local business often continues to circulate within community, creating a multiplier effect and providing greater economic benefits to the area.

For more information, contact your Cook County USDA Service Center at 815-485-0068 or visit nrcs.usda.gov

Pork Generates \$373 Million in State Tax Revenue

(FarmWeekNow)

The Illinois Pork Producers Association (IPPA) released a new economic impact report revealing pork production in Illinois generates more than \$373 million in tax revenue, underscoring the role pig farmers play in supporting local communities, strengthening

the state economy and driving rural development.

In addition to substantial tax contributions, the report shows pork production supports more than 57,000 jobs across the supply chain, from on-farm workers and feed suppliers to processing facilities, transportation companies, veterinarians, equipment dealers and small businesses.

For more information explore county-by-county economic data available at ilpork.com/ippa/pig-farming-by-county.

Illinois Unveils Plans to Celebrate 250 Years of American Independence

(Capitol News Illinois: republished with permission by FarmWeekNow)

Gov. JB Pritzker joined the Illinois America 250 Commission at Navy Pier to announce plans for commemorating the upcoming 250th anniversary of American independence.

Plans include uplifting local stories, tribal recognition, tourism and art.

Find more information at www.il250.org/events.

USDA to Purchase Fruit From Producers for Food Assistance Programs

(USDA News)

Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins announced USDA's intent to purchase up to \$30 million in fresh fruit from American farmers and producers to distribute to food banks and nutrition assistance programs across the country.

The purchases are being made through USDA's authority under Section 32 of the Agriculture Act of 1935 and will assist producers and communities in need. The administration's goal with this action is to bolster American prosperity by supporting American agriculture, rural communities, and those in need of nutrition assistance.

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service will purchase \$15 million worth of fresh oranges, \$10 million of grapefruit and \$5 million of mandarins to go toward USDA's Food and Nutrition Service assistance programs.

Programs, Workshops and Webinars

For Members, Farmers, Teachers, Landowners, Foodies, Business owners, and those that want new experiences and to have a great time!

REGISTER TODAY for the following great programs by calling the office at **708-354-3276** or at www.cookcfb.org

Membership Monday 2026

Are you a new or existing member interested in learning more about the benefits and programs a CCFB membership provides? Then join us to hear from CCFB staff who will highlight member programs, member benefits, and the website with Q&A.



LOCATION: Zoom; link will be emailed the Friday prior

TIME: 4:00-4:30 p.m. with Q & A **DATE:** Monday, January 26, 2026

REGISTRATION: Registration is required by emailing ccfb@cookcfb.org or calling the Farm Bureau at 708-354-3276

2026 Community Urban Garden Grant Program

All community-based urban gardens in Cook County are encouraged to apply for a \$350 grant for use during the 2026 growing season. Grant details and applications are being accepted through February 28, 2026. Grants awarded mid-March 2026.



APPLY ONLINE: <https://cookcfb.org/stay-updated-/events-and-programs/community-programs/profile/grants-1> (scan QR code) or by emailing: ccfb@cookcfb.org.



APPLICATIONS AVAILABLE: Friday, January 9, 2026

DEADLINE: Apply by Saturday, Feb 28, 2026

QUESTIONS: Call 708-354-3276 with questions or for a paper copy.

FREE IAA Credit Union Webinar for Small Businesses



IAACU experts will discuss a range of products and services to support small and medium-sized business owners, including COUNTRY agents, landscapers, construction and excavating contractors, tradespeople (e.g., plumbers, electricians, HVAC specialists), auto service providers (body work, repair, maintenance, tires), professional offices and services (attorneys, accountants, chiropractors, MDs, dentists), owner-occupied commercial real estate, and commercial farmers.

LOCATION: Zoom; link will be emailed the day prior

DATE: Tuesday, January 22, 2026 **TIME:** 5:00 p.m.

REGISTRATION: Call the Farm Bureau at 708-354-3276, online at the Member Center at www.cookcfb.org

Beginning Beekeeping Course at the CCFB



If you have never kept bees or don't have an apiary, attend to learn how to raise bees that thrive in a chemical free environment, produce an abundance of great tasting honey, and survive the duration of our Chicago winters. Classes are led by Kim Kulton, President of "Bee All About It". Kim operates a commercial beekeeping business producing honey, breeding queens, and rescuing bees. She's joined by Pete Soltesz, President of Cook DuPage Beekeepers Association.

LOCATION: Cook County Farm Bureau
6438 Joliet Rd, Countryside – Lower-Level Meeting Room

DATES: Saturday & Sunday, February 21 & 22, 2026 **TIME:** 9:30 am – 3:30 pm

REGISTRATION: Registration and payment is required in advance by credit card or check by calling 708-354-3276 or CCFB members online via Member Account at: <https://www.myifb.org/Account/LogIn?ReturnUrl=%2f>

FEE: \$125.00 for members of CCFB or CDBA. \$150.00 for non-members (ask how to join)

Workshop on Preparing Wills and Trusts and Transferring Non-Titled Property (Estate Planning and Trust Administration),



Presented by Thomas J. Olofsson, J.D., Estate Planning Attorney

Do you need to update your will? Do you know what to do to prepare a will and trust? Do you understand what probate court is? This program will provide the advantages and disadvantages of preparing a will and trust. The program will inform you what types of information you will need to gather and decisions you will need make before meeting with a lawyer to prepare a will or trust. Also, tips will be shared on what to look for in choosing a lawyer and where to locate a lawyer for this task.

LOCATION: Zoom (link will be emailed to all participants the evening before the class)

DATE: Tuesday, March 10, 2026 **TIME:** 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.

REGISTRATION: Call the CCFB at 708-354-3276 **FREE** for members (\$10 non-members)

2026 Foundation Scholarships Now Being Accepted

If you're looking to pursue one of the many careers available in the agriculture industry, Cook County Farm Bureau has scholarship opportunities to support your journey!

Careers in agriculture include farming, plant science, animal science, agricultural business, agricultural mechanics, food science, diesel mechanics, ag-related education, education, and/or rural mental health plus more!

According to the USDA's Economic Research Service, a total of 19.7 million jobs, or 10.3% of U.S. employment, is related to agriculture. Farming only made up 13.5% of agricultural employment, food service made up 53.4%, and food and beverage stores made up 16.5%. There are more than one million agriculture-related jobs in Illinois alone.

The CCFB Foundation scholarship application window for the 28th Annual "Farm and Food" Agricultural Scholarship Program is now open. The Foundation offers these scholarships to college students who are pursuing an ag-related career with the opportunity to start or continue their higher education. The scholarship applications are evaluated, scored and ranked for selection.

Howard Paarlberg Excellence in Agriculture (\$3,500) – This scholarship

will be provided to the individual with the top ranked application determined by the scholarship review committee with a focus on an agriculturally related career.

Stuenkel Family Scholarship (\$3,000) – This scholarship has been designed for individuals and CCFB members who are pursuing higher education with a focus on an agriculturally related career in the areas of technology, education, leadership development, and/or mental health.

"Farm and Food" Scholarships (up to \$2,500) – College scholarships will go to the top qualified applicants pursuing agriculturally related careers.

The Deadline for these Applications is February 17, 2026.

In addition to the "Farm and Food" Agriculture Scholarships, there are other scholarship opportunities available.



Visit www.cookcfb.org/foundation- or **scan the QR code** for more information on these scholarships and to apply.

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\$500 EXCLUSIVE CASH REWARD^{1,2}

on an Eligible New Ford Truck¹ or Ford Blue Advantage™ Certified Used Vehicle².

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Ford Super Duty