



COOK COUNTY GO-OPERATOR

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

VALENTINE'S Dinner Date

WINNER: Carol Falk

Mark Your Calendar



March

- 19 On the Road Webinar **PG 4**
- 23 Membership Monday **PG 12**
- 24 National Ag Day

April

- 11 - 12 Beginning Beekeeping Course **PG 12**
- 20 - 24 Member Appreciation Week **PG 1, 12**
- 21 Horticulture & Wellbeing Event **PG 12**
- 22 Earth Day Party **PG 12**
- 27 Soap Making 101 **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 ?

What world-known doctor recently stopped in to Glenview's Wagner Farm to speak on livestock behavior and to sign books?

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)

WINNERS: January: Joyce Holste February: Roberta Vondrak

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 March with the Word and you will be entered to win that month's prize. We look forward to your call. Good luck!

January Winner: Richard Schultz
January word was Snow found on PG 10.

February Winner: Mary Gavenda
February word was Beekeeping found on PG 7.

Member Appreciation Week 2026: Monday, April 20 – Friday, April 24

YOU, THE MEMBER, ARE OUR MOST VALUABLE ASSET of the Cook County Farm Bureau.

We truly appreciate our members, and during our Member Appreciation Week, we want to provide some extra love to say thank you for your membership, your involvement, your interest, and your support.

Daily Free Membership Drawing:

We love our members and to show our appreciation, members are automatically entered into our daily raffle for a free membership. Winners will have their 2026-2027 renewal dues paid – no entry needed – we got you entered!

Daily Grand Prize Drawing:

Get entered today (1 Winner Each Day from Entry Form)

- "Rainy Day Fun" - \$50 Barnes & Noble gift card & \$50 Culver's gift card
- "Grocery Giveaway" - \$100 Grocery store gift card

- "Family Fun" – 4 Santa's Village tickets
- "Discover Local" - \$100 gift card to a local member Ag Business
- "Your Friday Just Got Better" — \$100 VISA gift card

Stop by this week for Member Events!

Check page 12 for details

Tuesday – Member Horticulture & Wellbeing

Wednesday – Earth Day Party

Thursday – BINGO

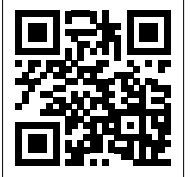
Friday – Ask a Farmer and Coffee with Bob

Friday, April 24, come have coffee and conversation with Bob Rohrer, Manager of Cook County Farm Bureau and author of the monthly Downwind column. Please bring your compliments, comments, and complaints with you. Bob is truly

looking forward to talking with all the members who are able to attend. You and your feedback are very welcome!!! We will have refreshments and giveaways for those who come to visit! We hope to see you here!

Must be a member paid in good standing to enter. Scan the QR Code above to Renew Now!

Entry form can be mailed to the office, faxed to 708-579-6056, emailed to fbcooperator@gmail.com, or at <https://bit.ly/4b1EMeT>. One entry per member; entries received will be submitted for a chance at all drawings and will automatically roll over to the following day's drawings, if not selected.



Questions??
Please call us at 708-354-3276! We look forward to serving you!

Member Appreciation Week Entry Form

Monday, April 20 – Friday, April 24, 2026

Name _____

Email _____

Phone # _____

Member # _____

Due to delays at the Post Office, we realize the past couple issues of the CoOperator have been late in being delivered to members.

We apologize for the inconvenience. Please know that we are continuing investigation and communications with the Post Office regarding delivery delays.

WE THANK AG FOR THAT.

ILLINOIS HAS OVER **71,000 FARMS**



ILLINOIS IS **#2** IN CORN PRODUCTION IN THE U.S.



75% OF ILLINOIS LAND IS FARMLAND



AG IS ILLINOIS' **#1** INDUSTRY



NATIONAL AG DAY MARCH 24



For Cook County Statistics, go to: <https://cookcfb.org/discover-local/resources/ag-resources>



Cook CFB Members Harvest Success at This Year's Young Leader Conference

As Cook County Farm Bureau's Young Leader program continues to grow and thrive, four leaders traveled to East Peoria for this year's Young Leader Conference. Pictured left to right are Justin Kopping, Addison McLaughlin, Elijah Floerke, and Giovanni Rendina. Both Floerke and Rendina are collegiate Farm Bureau members.



The Latest Episode of Taking Stalk with Illinois Farm Bureau Is Out!

Ep. 35 – Cooking Up Connections with Chef Stephanie Izard

Listen: [FarmWeekNow.com/podcasts](https://farmweeknow.com/podcasts) (or wherever you listen to podcasts)

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...

- Kayla Biegel for braving the cold and participating in the Center for Democracy event on food justice.
- Everyone and especially Blake Lanphier, Kayla Biegel, Cindy Gustafson, Andrew Smits, Carl Smits, Matthew Smits, and many other Cook County Farm Bureau members who attended this year's Everything Local Conference in Springfield.
- Ag in the Classroom presenters, Mike Galassini, Wayne Kolweier, Sarah Koukol, Kathy Lesser and Betsy Yager for braving the sub-zero temperatures to bring the wonder of agriculture to Cook County classrooms.
- The Urban Garden Grant selection committee for reviewing applications and selecting the 2026 Urban Garden Grant recipients.
- Lauren Lysy for recruiting new members to the Farm Bureau.
- The donors that have supported the Food Checkout Day food pantries this year and so many years in the past.
- The many Cook County Farm Bureau volunteers who met February 11 during the Teams meeting, focusing on membership value.
- The many members who are participating in the Ag Adventures Word Search, Word of the Month and the Question of the Month.
- Staff member Bona Heinsohn for serving members for 18 years in a quality manner. We wish you well!

HOW FARM BUREAU SERVED YOU IN FEBRUARY

- ▶ **Engaged with numerous State senators and representatives regarding pertinent issues in agriculture.**
- ▶ **Educated many students on how agriculture helps keep them warm during the winter.**
- ▶ **Raised money for non-perishable food and hygiene products for Cook County families in need during this year's Food Checkout Day and Young Leader Hygiene Drive.**
- ▶ **Provided members with a new and improved discount portal, BenefitHub.**



Co-Operator

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| <p>Editor Bob Rohrer</p> | <p>Copy Analyst Ashley Christensen</p> | <p>Copy Development CCFB Office Staff</p> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <p>Officers & Directors Janet McCabe, President Gerry Kopping, Vice President Ruth Zeldenrust, Secretary-Treasurer</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%; font-size: small;"> <tr> <td>Dan Biernacki</td> <td>Roger Freeman</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mike Rauch</td> <td>Todd Price</td> </tr> <tr> <td>James Bloomstrand</td> <td>Greg Stack</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Patrick Horcher</td> <td>Blake Lanphier</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mark Yunker</td> <td></td> </tr> </table> | Dan Biernacki | Roger Freeman | Mike Rauch | Todd Price | James Bloomstrand | Greg Stack | Patrick Horcher | Blake Lanphier | Mark Yunker | | <p>Farm Bureau Manager Bob Rohrer</p> <p>Office Staff</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%; font-size: small;"> <tr> <td>Jill Drover</td> <td>Katrina Milton</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Kelli Villarreal</td> <td>Linda Tobias</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bona Heinsohn</td> <td>Tim Rost</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Debbie Voltz</td> <td>Julie Hesperheide</td> </tr> </table> | Jill Drover | Katrina Milton | Kelli Villarreal | Linda Tobias | Bona Heinsohn | Tim Rost | Debbie Voltz | Julie Hesperheide |
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| Patrick Horcher | Blake Lanphier | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Mark Yunker | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| Bona Heinsohn | Tim Rost | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Debbie Voltz | Julie Hesperheide | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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Downwind

by BOB ROHRER, CCFB MANAGER



“Bye Bye, Mickey”



The Farm Bureau has given me so much throughout the years. One of those gifts has been the opportunity to go to places I likely never would have traveled to see. A recent example is Anaheim, California. Anaheim played host to the American Farm Bureau Federation Annual Convention in January, and I was fortunate to be one of the Cook County Farm Bureau attendees, traveling to sunny California in the winter.

The city of Anaheim, while having a thriving convention industry and a “ducky” hockey team, is best known for being home to a mouse. That mouse goes by the name of Mickey and is the “spokesanimal” for a little company called Disney. I somehow, through 60+ years of life and raising a basketful of children, successfully avoided spending time at the happiest place on earth. My impressive winning streak ended in January following the convention with a side trip outing to Disneyland. I put on my brave face.

While Disneyland was a nice experience, this column is not dedicated to Disneyland nor Mickey. Instead, I’d like to talk about Mickey’s friends... lesser known and nameless.

I have written about Bob versus Nature on previous occasions. From the farm to the present, nature always battles me. I lose. I thought some of that battle had ended when my wife and I downsized, moving from our property with a wooded lot and pond to a townhouse in-town. I would be wrong.

Upon returning from Anaheim, my wife and I discovered some’s suspicious activity occurring in our pantry. While we were gone, something had appeared to sample some bags of crackers, Twizzlers, and chocolate snack treasures. Also, some suspicious tiny nuggets” that looked like mouse droppings were in the neighborhood.

A few stale crackers... Not an issue.

Twizzlers and chocolates... Now, we had a problem. My mild-mannered wife’s foot came down. Bait traps appeared. Bye bye, Mickey.

(For the rodent lovers, you might want to close your eyes and scroll down a bit.)

Night one. Snap.

Night two. Snap.

Night three. Snap.

Night four. Snap.

Night five. Snap.

I wanted to set up a trail cam. Was a rodent convention declared at our house while we were at the AFBF convention?

My mind kept reverting to a conversation I had recently with a rancher named Bill who used to ride the range and was a rodeo cowboy in

his youth. I asked him, “What is your biggest fear?” thinking he would say stampedes or flash floods. Huh... mice? Bill went on to tell me that he had several friends die of Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome due to mice. I had to look it up.

Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome was discovered in 1993. It’s a lethal disease spread through defecations by infected mice, and other rodents and humans contract it by breathing in contaminated air.

As a result, I have never scrubbed more frequently and held my breath longer than while attempting to eradicate the “convention” in our townhouse.

Rodents, including mice and rats, can devastate food and feed. The International Food Safety and Quality Network estimates over 20% of the world’s food supply is believed to be contaminated by rodents. A much smaller percentage in the U.S. but still a significant concern.

I remember my dad, the Farmer, worked hard to prevent rodents from gaining a foothold on the farm. He knew the potential damage and destruction wrought on the family’s food and livestock feed but also from rodent’s constant chewing of structures, equipment, and electrical wiring.

I read the book, “If you Give a Mouse a Cookie,” repeatedly to the kids when they were little. We have a romantic and innocent vision of furry little creatures frolicking in green pastures. We, in urban areas, frequently forget their destructive nature.

Protecting our food supply, locally and globally, remains vital as a society. Our insignificant experience with mice in the pantry is a reminder that protecting the food supply can be a matter of life or death. Farmers are tasked with producing the ingredients for great food (including crackers, Twizzlers, and chocolate). Thank you, farmers, for doing it on a grand scale in such a quality manner. My wife and I and many of God’s creatures find what you produce quite tasty.

* * *

I want to express both congratulations and best wishes to Bona Heinsohn, Director of Governmental Affairs/ Public Relations for the past 18 years. She has been named Manager of the Kane County Farm Bureau, and she will do a terrific job for our friends west of Cook County. Bona was hired back in 2008 to help us become better in the area of public policy/government and help solve related member problems. As with any good employee, we continually added more to her plate throughout the years! We will miss her skills, work ethic, and leadership and thank her for all she’s done to serve member needs.



Blake Lanphier Joins Master Member Club

Board member Blake Lanphier proudly displays a gate sign he received as a new member of the Master Member Club (MMC) of the Board of Directors. The MMC is for members that successfully recruit other members to be a part of the Cook County Farm Bureau organization.

Recipe of the Month

Joyce Holste, Midlothian

Baked ZUCCHINI



INGREDIENTS

- 4 fresh zucchinis
- 2 c bread crumbs
- 3/4 c parmesan cheese
- 1/3 c fresh basil
- 1 1/2 t red pepper flakes
- 1 t pepper
- 1 t salt
- 1 T garlic powder
- 2 eggs

DIRECTIONS

Wash zucchini, with rind on, and slice lengthwise into thin strips. Make breadcrumb mixture: mix breadcrumbs, parmesan cheese, basil, red pepper flakes, pepper, salt, and garlic powder. In another bowl or plate mix and beat two eggs separately from above. Dip zucchini in egg mixture and then roll in breadcrumb mixture. Put on baking sheet, lined with parchment paper. Bake 450° for 15-20 minutes and flip halfway through baking. Serve with dip if desired.

Optional serving dip: 1/3 c mayo, 1 T lemon juice, 1/2 t salt, 1 t pepper

2025 Recipe Collection Still 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.



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.

SEND YOUR RECIPE TODAY! Deadline for consideration is 3.25.26

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

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

Glenview Wagner Farm Hosts World Renowned Author



Dr. Temple Grandin spoke to around 150 agriculturalists, FFA students, 4-H club members, Cook County Farm Bureau members, and community leaders as a part of a special experience, book signing, and presentation hosted by Wagner Farm and the Glenview Park District in Glenview on February 12. Dr. Grandin is a world-renowned author, educator, and advocate in humane livestock handling practices, autism, and other areas of life. A movie was made about her life titled "Temple Grandin".



Members of the Chicago High School for Agriculture Science livestock track and staff gather around Dr. Temple Grandin prior to her presentation on Animal Behavior and Autism during a visit to Wagner Farm in Glenview.



Cook County Farm Bureau manager, Bob Rohrer, picks up a book signed by Dr. Temple Grandin.

Long Time Staffer Promoted



Bona Heinsohn

Kane County Farm Bureau announced Bona J. Heinsohn, CAE, has been hired as the manager of Kane County Farm Bureau effective March 15, 2026.

Bona currently serves as the Director of Governmental Affairs and Public Relations at the Cook County Farm Bureau, a position she has held since 2011. In this role, she has led advocacy efforts and represented Farm Bureau members on legislative and public policy issues at the local and state levels. She has been with the Cook County Farm Bureau since 2008.

Prior to joining Cook County Farm Bureau, Bona worked for the Illinois Senate Republican Caucus as a Legislative Analyst and

Communications and Public Affairs Specialist. She also served as a Campaign Manager for two state senate elections.

Bona holds a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture from Illinois State University and a Master of Arts in Political Studies from the University of Illinois. She has earned the Certified Association Executive (CAE) credential from the American Society of Association Executives and holds a Certificate in Nonprofit Management from the University of Chicago. Bona is also a graduate of the Illinois Agricultural Leadership Program.

Bona and her husband Jeff, along with their two children, are grain farmers outside of Kirkland, Illinois. She enjoys horseback riding and performing with the Stateline Hot Shots Rodeo Drill Team.

She will replace current manager Steve Arnold when he retires this spring.

Farmers Care for Our Environment

Soil not only nurtures the crops as they grow, but it has a vital role to play in climate change as well. Our soil has the capacity to store two to three times more carbon than they currently do. As populations grew over the last 100 plus years, forests and prairies were converted to farmland, and that land was tilled to grow crops. Every time the soil is tilled or turned over, carbon that is in the soil is released back into the air. Farmers can have a positive impact on climate change by doing lots of things, but two main ones are related to protecting the soil. This can be done by 1) reducing the amount of carbon lost to the atmosphere by tilling the

ground less and 2) adding even more plants to take additional CO2 out of the air.

Historically, every farmer would plow their entire fields after harvest and leave the ground a blank slate. Today, many farmers practice no-till which means entire plant residue is left on top of the soil. This adds organic plant matter back into the soil which keeps carbon trapped in the soil instead of being released into the air.

Another opportunity to protect the soil is by planting cover crops. Cover crops are like grasses and are planted in the fall and instead of being harvested, are left in the ground when crops are

planted in the spring. This not only keeps carbon trapped in the soil, but it actually allows the plants to capture even more carbon from the air and use it for photosynthesis. The practice of cover crops alone not only protects the carbon currently trapped in the soil, but provides a way to clear more carbon out of the atmosphere.

In Illinois, farmers care for 75% of the land. When that much ground is being cared for in these ways, just imagine the positive impact that has on our environment, and our world.

Jeff Jarboe,
the Innovation Grows Here series,
Illinois Farm Families

ShopLocal this Spring

Prep & Planting is happening! Visit Cook County Farm Bureau® member Greenhouses, Garden Centers, and Farms for all your outdoor needs this spring! Their vegetable and flower plantings, trees, shrubs, lawn, landscape materials, grills, and garden décor await you!



For a complete listing of member businesses and producers in the Cook County area, please visit: <https://cookcfb.org/discover-local/shop-local/online-directory>.

Member businesses offering additional discounts to CCFB members include Goebbert's Farm and Garden Center in South Barrington, Ted's Greenhouse in Tinley Park, and Teegen Compost Services, Mt Prospect. Check our website for details and restrictions at:

<https://cookcfb.org/membership/member-resources/member-benefits/profile/home-business-and-agriculture>.

On the Road Webinar

VIRTUAL SESSION

MARCH 19 | 12PM

LEARN MORE ABOUT SAFETY, CDL, & TRUCKING REGULATIONS

Contact Cook County Farm Bureau to register.
Call (708) 354-3276 or Email ccfb@cookcfb.org

ILLINOIS FARM BUREAU

RULES FOR THE ROAD

The Budgeting Strategy You Should Know About



Jennifer Killian

Managing your money in 2026 is as crucial as ever, and the 50/30/20 rule remains a reliable budgeting strategy. By dividing your income into clear categories, you can meet your financial

goals with less stress. Let's explore how this rule works today, and how IAA Credit Union products can help you stay on track.

How It Works

Here's how the 50/30/20 rule applies to your finances today:

- **50 percent** of your income supports fixed expenses: rent, groceries, and bills.
- **30 percent** of your income goes toward your wants discretionary spending for enjoyment. With IAA Credit Union's mobile banking and IAACU Cards App, you can keep track of your purchases instantly and manage them efficiently.
- **20 percent** is allocated to savings and debt repayment. Open an IAA Credit Union Premier Savings account and set up automated transfers, allowing you to grow your savings easily.

Breaking It Down for Today

Here's how each category fits into a modern budget.

50 percent: Covering your needs" or necessities vital for daily life.

- **Food:** Groceries for home meals.
- **Shelter:** Rent or mortgage options, with affordable loans and Downpayment Plus® Program eligibility from IAA Credit Union.
- **Essential Expenses:** Utilities, transportation, healthcare

30 percent: These are your "wants" or extras. IAA Credit Union's Rewards credit card provides members with valuable benefits for entertainment, dining, and shopping expenditures.

- Entertainment offers include sporting events, film screenings, concerts, and additional activities.
- Dining out and meal delivery.
- Gym memberships and fitness activities.
- Personal care, such as spa treatments.
- Designer clothing and accessories.

20 percent: Prioritize savings and debt repayment. IAA Credit Union offers high-yield savings, and competitive rates for consolidating loans and credit card debt.

Save for emergencies with a Premier Savings Account.

- Set clear savings goals like a car, home, or travel. A Vacation Club helps you gradually save for your trip.
- Investments: short- and long-term with IRAs and Share Certificates.
- Retirement savings: 401(k) rollover options and IRAs.
- Debt payoff: Use IAA Credit Union's competitive loan rates to refinance or consolidate debt.

Benefits of the 50/30/20 Rule Why This Strategy Can Work— Especially with IAA Credit Union

The 50/30/20 rule brings clarity and simplicity to managing your finances in 2026, making it easier to handle everyday expenses, save for future goals, and still enjoy life's extras. By pairing this method with IAA Credit Union's digital tools, financial products, and member support such as My Credit Score for budgeting, Premier Savings or Club accounts for saving, and collaboration with GreenPath Financial Wellness for debt management you can take a straightforward approach to building financial stability while making the most of what matters to you.

Potential Drawbacks

The 50/30/20 rule may not suit everyone, especially if:

- Your finances are complex and need more detailed planning.
- You're focused on aggressively paying down debt. Consider IAA Credit Union's debt consolidation loans for faster progress.
- You want to maximize savings IAA Credit Union's high-yield Premier Saving or Shared Certificates can help you boost your savings beyond the rule's standard of 20%.

Do One Thing: If you're looking for a simple budgeting method in 2026, try the 50/30/20 rule and take advantage of IAA Credit Union's products and services to make it work even better for your life.

Not a member yet?

Join IAA Credit Union today and let us help you stay on budget and build a brighter financial future!

Scan the QR code or visit us at www.iaacu.org today!



Details Announced on Specialty Crop Assistance

The Ag Department provided details on the previously announced \$1 billion to be distributed to specialty crop and sugar growers not covered through USDA's farmer bridge program.

The Assistance for Specialty Crop Farmers (ASCF) program provides one-time bridge payments to help address market disruptions, elevated input costs, persistent inflation and market losses from foreign competitors engaging in unfair trade practices that impede exports. Specialty crop producers have until March 13 to report 2025 acres to USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA).

"If our specialty crop producers are not economically able to continue their operations, American families will see a decrease in the food they rely on, wholesome and nutritious fruits and vegetables," USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins said.

The ASCF program is authorized under the Commodity Credit Corporation Charter Act and will be administered by FSA.

Eligible specialty crops include: almonds, apples, apricots, Aronia berries, artichoke, asparagus, avocados, bananas, beans (snap or green, lima, dry edible), beets (table), blackberries, blueberries, breadfruit, broccoli (including broccoli Raab), Brussels sprouts, cabbage (including



Specialty crop producers have until March 13 to report 2025 acres to USDA's Farm Service Agency. (File photo)

Chinese), cacao, carrots, cashews, cauliflower, celeriac, celery, cherimoya, cherries, chestnuts (for nuts), chives, citrus, coconuts, coffee, collards (including kale), cranberries, cucumbers, currant, dates, dry edible beans and peas, edamame, eggplant, endive, feijoa, figs, filbert (hazelnut), garlic, gooseberries, grapes (including raisin), guava, horseradish, kiwis, kohlrabi, leeks, lettuce, litchi, Macadamia, mangoes, melon (all types), mushrooms (cultivated), mustard and other greens, nectarines, okra, olives, onions, opuntia, papaya, parsley, parsnip, passion fruit, peas (garden, English or edible pod, dry edible), peaches, pears, pecans, peppers, persimmon, pineapples, pistachio, plum (including prune),

pomegranates, potatoes, pumpkins, quince, radishes (all types), raspberries, rhubarb, rutabaga, salsify, spinach, squash (summer and winter), strawberries, Suriname cherries, sweet corn, sweet potatoes, Swiss chard, taro, tomatoes (including tomatillo), turnips, walnuts and watermelon.

Eligible farmers should ensure their 2025 acreage reporting is factual and accurate by 5 p.m. March 13. Commodity-specific payment rates will be released by the end of March. Crop insurance linkage will not be required for the ASCF program.

More information on ASCF is available online at fsa.usda.gov/fba or producers can contact the local Will/Cook FSA county office at 815-462-3106.



Proudly serving the Illinois Farm Bureau since 1951.

- Auto
- Mortgage
- Personal
- Commercial

- Credit Cards
- Checking Accounts
- Youth Accounts
- And More!

Become a member today!

SCAN ME



Looking for farm fun or a farmers market near you?

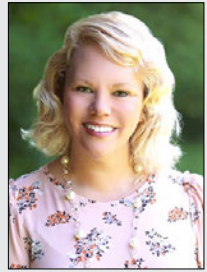
We're making it easier for you to shop local and support your community with our Shop Local online directory!

ON.ILFB.ORG/COOKSHOPLOCAL






Planting Seeds “Time Marches On”



Katrina J.E. Milton

The saying, “March comes in like a lion and out like a lamb” was something that my mom often said. It means that the weather in March is cold and snowy, fierce like a lion,

at the beginning of the month, but by the end of the month, the weather is calmer and more spring-like, gentle like a lamb.

I’ve always loved March, not only because of St. Patrick’s Day (which is also my cousin’s birthday and gives me two reasons to celebrate March 17), but also because spring is in the air. Daffodils, tulips, and crocuses are getting ready to awaken after winter, gardeners are starting their seeds indoors, and the temperature is finally above freezing.

March is a pretty busy time for Cook County’s Ag in the Classroom Program: we are preparing for Ag Day field trip events for third grade students, educator workshops, library programs, Farm Shadow Programs for high school students – and we’re visiting classrooms throughout Cook County, teaching about agriculture with free, hands-on programs.

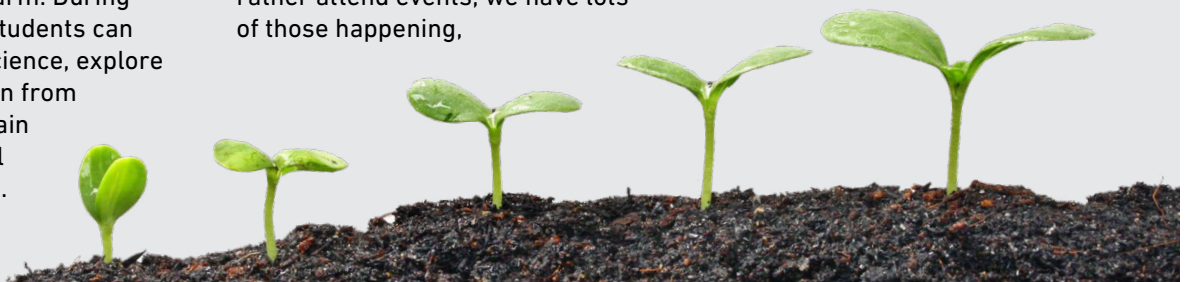
Spring is a great time for teachers to book our Ag in the Classroom Program (using the Google Form URL bit.ly/AITCplease). Students can learn about Illinois’ top crops and livestock, where their food comes from, and what farmers do year-round on the farm. During the presentations, students can also discover soil science, explore the food supply chain from farm to table, and gain insight into potential agricultural careers.

Maybe what I love most about March is the busyness of the month. It reminds me that March Madness isn’t just basketball, it’s the farm bureau calendar! I love rolling up my sleeves to teach about germination by planting seeds, spending time with FFA students during contests, visiting fourth grade classrooms to teach about nutrition and soil science, and visiting farms, greenhouses, and agribusinesses on field trips.

If you are interested in staying busy this spring, get involved with the Cook County Farm Bureau! We are always looking for volunteers for events and activities. If you would rather attend events, we have lots of those happening,

too: a Workshop on Preparing Wills and Trusts and Transferring Non-Titled Property on March 10; Knead to Know: How Agriculture Feeds Your Sourdough on March 18; and Membership Appreciation Week in April. Don’t worry, there is even more if you need more to do!

If you’re keeping busy and getting involved, don’t worry – time flies when you’re having fun! Enjoy the busyness of March, both the lion and the lamb, because summer will be here before you know it – and our Ag in the Classroom Program is already planning events and preparing for it. We can’t wait to see you!



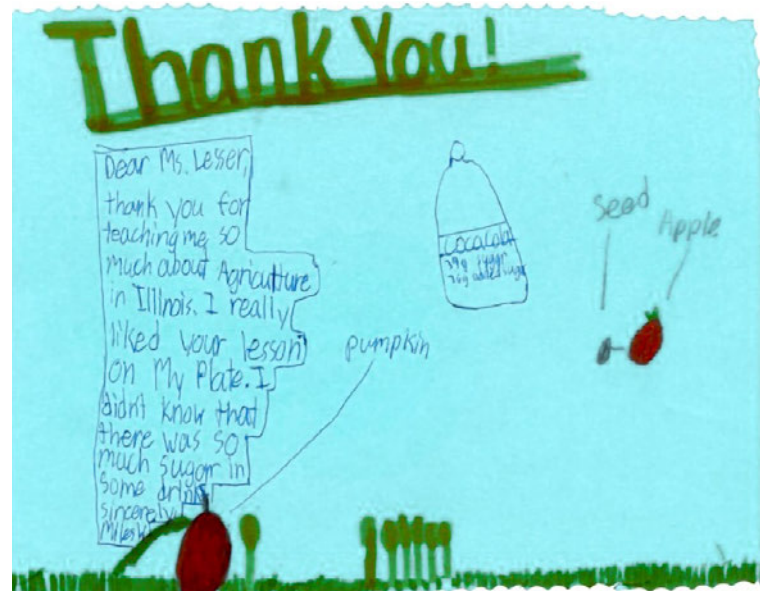
AgAdventures Yearlong Winner Announced



This year’s Ag Adventures word search yearlong winner is Thaddeus Byczek who has been a loyal CCFB member for 37 years and counting! There were 28 members who completed the Ag Adventures word search all twelve months in 2025.

Thaddeus won a prize basket with agricultural related items with ties to Illinois, the Chicagoland area, and Cook County Farm Bureau, plus a few items that celebrate his love of the Chicago Bears, the White Sox, and pizza!

Manager Bob Rohrer had a great visit and learned some history about Thaddeus. He started playing in a rock n’ roll band as a kid until he was drafted by the US government. He has traveled the country playing drums in a polka band. He currently plays for Keith Stras & Polka Confetti band and considers retiring at age 80 but still loves doing it. He loves completing crossword puzzles and the Ag Adventures puzzle found in the *Co-Operator*.



Cook County Students Show Appreciation for AITC Presenter

Students at Alcott College Prep Elementary in Chicago recently showed their appreciation to Ag in the Classroom Presenter Kathy Lesser with heartfelt, handmade thank you notes. Ag in the Classroom is proud to provide free agricultural education to Cook County schools, made possible through the generous support of donors to the Cook County Farm Bureau® Foundation.

To help us continue bringing hands-on agricultural learning experiences to local students, please consider making a donation at bit.ly/4afdHpk or by calling our office at 708-354-3276. Your support helps us grow the next generation’s understanding of agriculture!

EARTH DAY PARTY

Celebrate Earth Day with Cook County Farm Bureau’s Agriculture in the Classroom Program!

Earth Day Party: A Family Connections Event

WHEN: Wednesday, April 22 4 – 5 p.m.

WHERE: Cook County Farm Bureau, 6438 Joliet Road, Countryside, IL 60525

More Information: 708-354-3276 or aitc@cookcfb.org

As part of Member Appreciation Week, we invite you to celebrate Earth Day with Cook County Farm Bureau’s Agriculture in the Classroom Program. This family-friendly event will feature fun ag education, story time, and hands-on STEM activity stations about seed germination and growing, vermicomposting, and pollination. All attendees will leave with handouts, take-home growing projects, and giveaways. Come celebrate sustainability, soil, and seeds this Earth Day at the farm bureau! The program is free for members to attend; non-member cost is \$10 per family. Advanced registration is required by calling or emailing by April 15. Space is limited to the first 30 attendees.

For more information about Member Appreciation Week visit page 12 of the *Cooperator*.

AGRICULTURE ADVENTURES FOR FAMILIES



EDIBLE PLANT PART *Salad* RECIPE

Recipe adapted from www.foodhero.org/recipes/plant-part-salad

FOR THE SALAD:

Make a salad using examples from the list!

- 6 cups leaves
- 1 cup roots
- 2 cups flowers
- 1 cup stems
- 2 cups fruits
- 1/4 cup seeds

FOR THE DRESSING:

- 2 to 4 tablespoons fruit juice or vinegar, such as lemon juice, orange juice, or apple cider vinegar
- 2 to 4 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 clove of minced garlic or 1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/4 teaspoon oregano or basil
- 1 teaspoon mustard
- 1/4 teaspoon each salt and black pepper



DID YOU KNOW That We Eat Many Parts of Plants?

Here are a few examples:

LEAVES

Spinach
Kale
Cabbage

FLOWERS

Broccoli
Cauliflower
Artichoke

ROOTS

Carrot
Beet
Radish

FRUIT

Tomato
Cucumber
Pepper

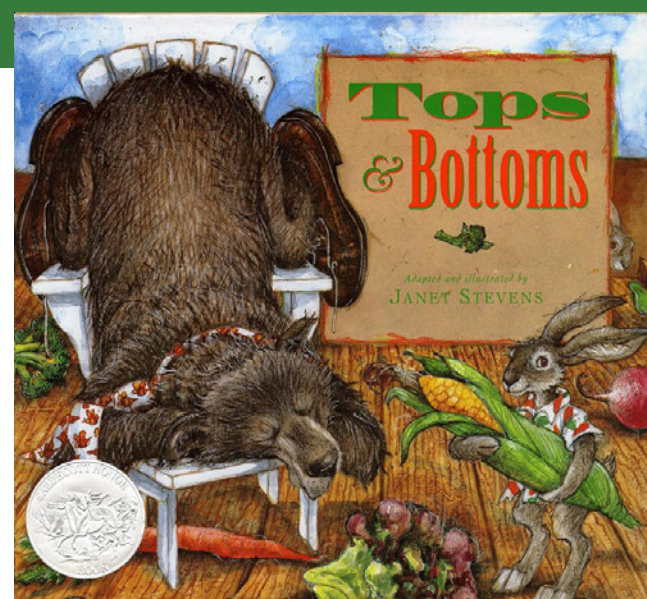
STEMS

Celery
Asparagus
Leeks

SEEDS

Sunflower Seeds
Corn
Beans

READING *Corner*



Book summary and photo from www.amazon.com

“Tops & Bottoms:

A Hilarious Fairy Tale of a Clever Rabbit, a Lazy Bear, and a Trickster’s Plan”

Written and Illustrated by Janet Stevens

In this funny Caldecott Honor-winning fairy-tale retelling by Janet Stevens, wily Hare solves his family’s problems by tricking rich and lazy Bear into giving up half his crops.

Once a upon a time, there was a lazy Bear and a clever Hare. Bear had lots of money and lots of land but all he wanted to do was sleep. Hare had nothing but hungry children, so he came up with a plan to convince Bear to split his land down the middle—tops and bottoms.

Hare can work all day and Bear can sleep.

It’s the perfect solution! Or is it?

March Word Search

January Winner:
Cam Frigo

February Winner:
Larry Tierney

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Beet | I | W | H | J | Z | R | G | U | T | M | S | E | A | T | B |
| Broccoli | A | J | V | P | K | C | O | N | P | T | N | C | V | X | E |
| Celery | L | E | A | V | E | S | A | O | R | V | R | K | I | P | E |
| Corn | F | G | O | W | B | L | I | A | T | C | O | S | F | X | T |
| Eat | K | Q | U | P | P | S | P | R | E | S | C | T | Y | I | L |
| Edible | T | I | U | R | F | B | D | L | P | B | S | E | U | L | E |
| Flowers | W | Z | U | O | I | O | E | E | R | U | V | M | W | H | L |
| Fruit | C | Z | R | M | P | R | K | A | E | E | X | S | D | U | B |
| Kale | O | C | X | W | Y | T | H | G | O | S | P | T | I | F | I |
| Leaves | I | L | O | C | C | O | R | B | Z | K | O | P | L | K | D |
| Parts | A | Q | E | Z | M | F | K | S | U | G | A | O | E | K | E |
| Pepper | E | N | M | N | U | M | D | I | K | K | W | L | I | P | G |
| Plant | Q | R | P | B | R | T | M | V | N | E | C | W | E | L | H |
| Roots | C | R | B | C | I | X | C | K | R | G | R | Q | L | O | Y |
| Seeds | U | O | V | F | R | I | B | S | R | P | E | Q | Y | W | K |
| Stems | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

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!**



It's National Ag Month Hats Off to the Many Roles of Family Farmers

Our son has 39 hats hanging in his bedroom – bill facing down and caps evenly spaced in a single row on hooks positioned within inches of the ceiling.

Wait. Make that 42. Dad just returned from two farm shows.

Farmers own and wear many hats, a culture traced back to at least his great-grandpa's era in farming. Farmers love to wear hats. Ag retailers love to give them away as walking advertisements. And nowadays, many schools allow hats during the academic day, making them both a style statement and a part of today's youth identity.

Metaphorically, farmers wear many hats throughout the day, a juggling act worth recognizing in this season that honors National Ag Day on March 24, 2026. Being a full-time farmer means embracing a wide range of part-time roles: grower, mechanic, heavy equipment operator, agronomist, meteorologist and veterinarian among them.

You could add scientist to the list: The liquid fertilizer jar tests in our shop fridge prove this one. Logistics manager is another: Necessary to direct trucks hauling grain 11 months of the year. Firefighter, too: This last dry and abnormally hot harvest required that. Add in accountant: We keep our own books. Then, our grain requires a marketer, our freezer beef a sales lead; our employees, a human resources manager; and the next generation, a mentor and teacher.

An impressive 96% of Illinois farms are owned by families, and on those farms family operators and their employees must assume many roles with enough skill to be mechanics at 8 a.m., marketers after the late-morning USDA report, agronomists before the kids get off the bus and accountants by dusk. We personally recognize the value of partnering with outside professionals who improve our performance in those fields as we conduct this orchestra of crops, people, tools and nature.

Our son owns trucker-style farm hats for nice events, school and playing golf. He reserves a grungy one for farm work and another for outdoor FFA events. He also displays one that belonged to his great-grandpa, a nod to Gramps and his former hat collection. I still can picture those farm caps, more than 100 that fully covered Gramps' farmhouse office walls to the point Granny didn't realize termites had destroyed the studs behind them.

Outside of termite exterminator, farmers wear many hats in every sense of the phrase.

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

Update/Create Your MarketMaker Profile!

Cook County Farm Bureau helps promote farmer to consumer market connections through MarketMaker on the organization's website www.cookcfb.org. Have you created a free profile for your farm or food business on MarketMaker? Get listed on our Live Local, Shop Local online directory, powered by MarketMaker, where you can market your business to customers who are searching for agricultural products across Illinois.

Traffic across MarketMaker profiles is up...and that means people are searching profiles more than ever! Now's a great time to login and get started so you don't miss out on potential customer searches and activity.

MarketMaker allows customers to easily search for farms and businesses based on the products they are looking for.

Register your FREE profile today and reach new customers.

1. Visit foodmarketmaker.com to get started.
2. Click on the orange "Sign In" button in the upper right-hand corner of the MarketMaker page.
3. You can sign up securely with your Google, Amazon, or Facebook logins. Or sign up with an email and password.
4. Add affiliations to your profile to indicate which organizations your business belongs to and the types of products you sell. This allows your business to be seen across multiple networks and search platforms within affiliate websites. For example, indicating you're an ISGA member will promote your business on the MarketMaker search engine designed specifically for the ISGA website.
5. Add the e-commerce option or link to an existing store.
6. Check out the Buy/Sell Forum for product listings and advertising.
7. Connect with customers!

For technical support, email contact@foodmarketmaker.com.

Family Farm, and Food Bytes

Penny Shortage Causes Headaches for Retailers in the Land of Lincoln

(ERIKA TULFO Capitol News Service Illinois)

At the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, visitors can shop for sweatshirts, pillows, jewelry and chocolates using coins bearing the face of perhaps the most-famous Illinoisian, Abraham Lincoln. But even here, pennies are growing scarce at the cash register. The museum gift shop, like the rest of the country, is grappling with a penny shortage after the United States Mint halted production of the coin in November, citing the rising cost of producing them.

See full article on Cookcfb.org

Farm Bureau Supporting HB 2753 On Emissions Testing

(IFB)

HB 2753 would impact counties that requiring vehicle emissions testing. The bill in the General Assembly increases the date of first emission inspection to 6 years from manufacture date (from 4). The bill would lower the burden on Farm Bureau members.

AFBF: Illinois Sees 10% Increase in H-2A Workers

(TAMMIE SLOUP FarmWeek)

Demand for ag labor through the H-2A temporary visa program in Illinois and the nation continues to rise. During fiscal year 2025, 559 more positions were certified in Illinois over fiscal 2024, bringing the total to 5,757, according to an American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) Market Intel report.

The primary requirement of any H-2A certification reaffirms that no domestic workers desire the position. Only 182 positions out of over 415,000 advertised (less than 0.04%) received a domestic applicant in fiscal year 2025.

The costs of using this program, from unpredictable wage increases to application costs and nonwage benefits, have also long been a barrier for many farmers. Recent changes to the adverse effect wage rate methodology seek to correct years of uncontrolled wage inflation and recognize the large nonwage costs of utilizing the H-2A program.

Two H-2A proposals submitted by Illinois Farm Bureau also were approved (proposed by Cook County Farm Bureau originally), including streamlining the H-2A application process by using electronic application filing and lengthening the term of stay for H-2A workers.

State's Best Tenderloin in Champaign County

(FarmWeekNow)

Illinois is home to delicious, breaded pork tenderloin sandwiches all over the state. But, for those wanting a taste of the best, at least according to the first-ever Breaded Pork Tenderloin Draft contest hosted by the Illinois Pork Producers Association (IPPA), it's found at Buford's Pub in Sadorus (Champaign County). IPPA members voted for different nominees of the competition and narrowed it down to the top five. A panel of judges then taste-tested a sandwich from each finalist to determine a winner.

Famous Southern Illinois BBQ Business Expands

(PHYLLIS COULTER FarmWeek)

Amy Mills is leading the 40th anniversary celebration of the 17th Street Barbecue restaurant in Murphysboro her father started in southern Illinois is adding to his legacy this spring by spreading more Magic Dust across the country. Magic Dust is the signature dry rub that helped Mike Mills and his team win so many world BBQ awards. Magic Dust is going from zero to 100 regional Walmart stores this spring. She co-authored two books with her dad, "Peace, Love & Barbecue" and "Praise the Lard."



About Family, Farm, and Food Bytes: This is a collection of articles gathered from Illinois Farm Bureau FarmWeek, FarmWeekNow, and other trusted media sources and is designed to keep you informed as a member and leader within the Cook County Farm Bureau® organization. We thank the FarmWeek staff for their reporting skills and talents. The articles summarized above are not intended to represent Cook County Farm Bureau policy or positions, but rather to provide members an idea of what is being reported regionally, nationally, and globally.

Manifolds, Manolos, and Manure

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

Fairwell, but not Goodbye



Bona Heinsohn

Over 18 years ago, I joined the staff of the Cook County Farm Bureau as the first Director

of Public Policy. The position was the result of a board strategic planning session. My direction upon being hired was "to make Cook County Farm Bureau a major player in Cook County government." A small task, right?

Looking back, that first year was a mix of meeting county commissioners. Board members. Volunteers. And aldermen. Coming from the hallowed halls of the Capitol meant that I was familiar with state legislators, but wholly unprepared for the travel, traffic, and parking associated with 'Friend of Agriculture' award delivery and Adopt-a-Legislator visits. I believe it was that year that one of my volunteers assumed parallel parking duty for me outside of Smoque BBQ in Chicago. It was also the last time anyone believed I could back a car.

Shortly after the door closed on that first year, the Cook County Farm Bureau Board of Directors approved the creation of the Cook CFB Political Action Committee. Leading up to the approval, volunteers and leaders

weighed the benefits and risks associated with creating a PAC that didn't necessarily favor incumbents and was designed to operate the heaviest during Primary Elections.

The PAC's first round of endorsements was for the 2010 Primary Election. Since its creation, PAC Governance Committee members, volunteers, and leaders have interviewed over 185 candidates and made over 80 endorsements. Assuming that each interview lasted only 40 minutes, which most did not, volunteers have spent over 123 hours interviewing candidates. One hundred twenty-three hours or over five days of interviews. These interviews are a tremendous credit to the volunteers who willingly give of their time. Some of these interviews will live on in infamy. Like the time I was called a hack for the Democratic machine and a Republican blowhard on the same day. Or the candidate who nearly came across the table because she didn't like the question she was asked. Or the lady who told us all about her chickens that lived in her house.

It was early in my time with Farm Bureau that I led my first Washington, D.C. fly-in. If my math is correct, we've returned to D.C. six times since that initial program. Cook CFB participants

have visited a variety of sites during the fly-ins, including the American Sugar Alliance, Tyson Foods, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, USDA Research Center, the International Fresh Produce Association, the Environmental Working Group, the International Dairy Foods Association, and the Pentagon. Each program has had a slightly different focus depending on the issues and priorities that Farm Bureau is working on at the time. Although each of these programs are educational, they're also an outstanding opportunity for volunteers and leaders to connect and learn more about one another. However, that first year was filled with beef tartare. Cognac. And losing a volunteer on the D.C. metro. I returned to Chicago confident that my tenure at the Farm Bureau was very short-lived. Fortunately, it was not.

Several years later, I didn't lose a volunteer, but several of us took several uncomfortable charter bus rides as part of the Staff Exchange program. The Staff Exchange is designed to expose county leaders and staff to Cook County agriculture. Past participants have toured greenhouses, local farms, area agribusinesses, food processors, ingredient manufacturers, and cutting-edge facilities. Although this program started as a full-day adventure, it very quickly became a half-day, multiple-

day program. The change not only enabled more people to attend the program, but it also widened our audience since we weren't asking staff to take a full day out of their office.

Like our Washington D.C. fly-ins this program is also riddled with unexpected excitement. One year, our bus driver refused to accept directions, and we got very, very lost. Another year, we followed directions but went the wrong way, i.e., north instead of south. And perhaps most infamously, there was the year that the bus picked up the group and made it less than half a mile before side-swiping a car and getting into a screaming match with the other driver, in the middle of Lake Street in downtown Chicago. Needless to say, we arrived at our destinations via Uber that year.

Speaking of Chicago, in 2012, Farm Bureau had the opportunity to partner again with the Ronald McDonald House of Chicagoland and Northwest Indiana for Food Checkout Day. With the grand opening of the house near Lurie Children's Hospital, Food Checkout Day was expanded to a multi-part program. The morning featured a sportscaster grudge match to collect the most food for the House. If my memory serves me correctly, Marc Giangreco raced to the finish ahead of Ryan Baker. The afternoon featured a classic battle between the Oak Lawn Police and Fire.

Food Checkout Day has since evolved to include donations to local food pantries and the Young Leader Hygiene Product Drive, but its message remains the same: local farmers supporting local families in need. This program and programs spurred by it have won two Power of A Summit Awards from the American Society of Association Executives as well as numerous Farm Bureau awards, but it's not the awards that have impacted me the most; it's been the opportunity to meet the families, the pantry directors, and Food Checkout Day supporters and partners that have made a lasting impact.

As I prepare to step away from Cook County Farm Bureau, I don't have enough space in this column to thank everyone, but please know that I am forever grateful for the opportunities and challenges offered to me through this role. The person who entered the doors of 6438 Joliet Road in February of 2008 is not the same as the person exiting, and that has been because of the leaders, volunteers, friends, partners, colleagues, and individuals I've met along the way. To the Board of Directors and especially to President Janet McCabe, thank you for the past 18 years. It's been an incredible journey.

To the Kane County Farm Bureau, I look forward to the path that we will carve out together.



Cook County Farmer Provides Insights at Local Foods Conference

Sauk Village farmer, Carl Smits (fourth person seated), provides insights on low-till/no-till practices in vegetable crops during the Everything Local Conference in Springfield, Illinois earlier this year. The Everything Local Conference is a premier annual event for local food systems, bringing together farmers, specialty crop growers, and market managers.

COOK COUNTY FARM BUREAU® POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE PRIMARY ELECTION ENDORSEMENTS

★★★★★

COOK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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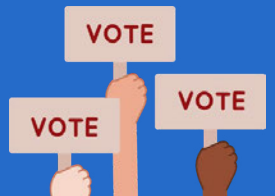
METROPOLITAN WATER RECLAMATION DISTRICT

PRECIOUS BRADY-DAVIS (DEMOCRAT)

SARAH BURY (DEMOCRAT)

EIRA CORRAL SEPULVEDA (DEMOCRAT)





A copy of our report filed with the State Board of Elections is (or will be) available on the Board's official website (www.election.il.gov) or for purchase from the State Board of Elections, Springfield, Illinois.

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 PIERO SETTA, JR – FINANCIAL ADVISOR

The Cook County Farm Bureau has been an integral part of my career at Country. The services and offerings from CCFB have always been a welcome addition to providing insurance and financial products. The staff at CCFB have ALWAYS been more than helpful to our client base and a huge voice for our farming clients. I believe in the Cook County Farm Bureau and its mission to serve all its members with programs that serve the agricultural community.



I try to help my clients by providing solutions whether it is their personal insurance, their commercial insurance needs, or their goals toward retirement. At Country, we do it different. We don't just provide coverage; we try to show the client how/why a particular coverage is beneficial for THEIR situation.

I love to coach youth sports. I coach soccer, football, and basketball teams for the Channahon Park District youth organizations. I also train athletes in speed and agility. Lastly, I am a member of Immaculate Conception Church in Morris and through the Religious Education Program, I am a Catechist for religious education. I am lucky enough to have the honor and privilege to work with our local families and their kids.

14500 John Humphrey Dr, Suite 8, Orland Park, IL 60462
Office Phone (708) 226-0431
Cell Phone (773) 691-5217
Piero.setta@countryfinancial.com
with COUNTRY Financial since 01/1995

Chicago South Agency – Alonzo Nevarez, District Leader ROB SWEISS – INSURANCE AGENT

From the beginning of my career, I have supported the Cook County Farm Bureau. The substantial discounts on national brands, local dining, and entertainment pay for the membership through savings. Membership also provides access to IAA Credit Union and the many programs and loans they offer.



I dedicate myself to delivering top-notch service to my clients. I relish the opportunity to meet new people and serve my clients and community. Engaging in open and transparent conversations allows me to assist clients in achieving their financial security objectives.

I have assisted and been involved in activities to support various humanitarian efforts such as food drives for the needy and hungry, and packaging foods for organizations such as Feed My Starving Children.

I am quite passionate about a Japanese martial art called Aikido. It means harmony and is known as the art of peace. It focuses on harmonizing with your opponent to bring peaceful resolutions to situations involving conflict. It is about self-mastery, personal development, and self-awareness. I have been a student of art for decades and I instruct on the weekends. To learn more, please visit <https://nsaikido.com> or attend a class.

15811 Annico Dr, Unit 7, Homer Glen, IL 60491
Office Phone (773) 498-7339
Cell Phone (708) 945-6969
robert.sweiss@countryfinancial.com
with COUNTRY Financial since 05/2007

This Month in Cook County Agriculture

Cook County Farm Bureau is Now on TikTok: This Week in Agriculture

Cook CFB is officially on TikTok! Each week, we're bringing you "This Week in Agriculture", a quick, engaging roundup of the latest agriculture news, trends, and insights that matter to producers and agribusinesses. From market updates to policy highlights and industry happenings, it's agriculture made easy to follow, all in under a minute.

Follow Cook.CFB on TikTok and stay informed, one week at a time.

Area Ag Roundup

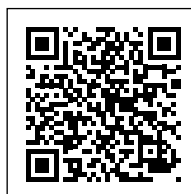
Pollinator Steward Certification presented by Project Wingspread for IL agricultural landowners, producers, and professionals this spring 2026.

Virtual on Zoom:

Registration Details:

<https://secure.qgiv.com/for/pwats/event/pwats/>. This program is

made possible through competitive grant funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Participants can expect to learn about the benefits of integrating pollinator habitat into agricultural landscapes, as well as conservation practices that support both production and stewardship goals. Questions regarding the training in IL can be directed to Imeña Valdes at ivaldes@pollinator.org.



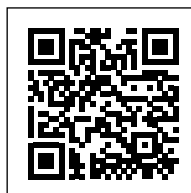
2026 Cook County Virtual School and Community Garden Training Series

You're invited to a free three-part garden series presented on Zoom.

Participants may attend any or all of the sessions.

Attendance at all three is highly recommended

for new gardens seeking on-site support from Illinois Extension in Cook County. Registration is required. Learn more and register online: go.illinois.edu/gardentraining2026



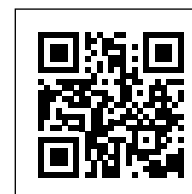
Monday, March 9, 6 to 8 p.m. – Getting Started and Volunteer Engagement

Monday, March 16, 6 to 8 p.m. – Vegetable Gardening

Monday, March 23, 6 to 8 p.m. – Ornamental Gardens and Curriculum

SWCD Spring 2026 Tree and Fish Sale

The Will-South Cook Soil and Water Conservation District is now taking orders for the Spring 2026 Tree and Fish Sale! Order forms are available on the district website (will-scookswcd.org) or can be picked up at the District office during business hours.



The District has a wide variety of plants, shrubs, trees, and groundcovers available this spring. Fish varieties for sale include Black Crappie, Channel Catfish, Largemouth Bass, Redear Sunfish, Triploid Grass Carp, Rainbow Trout, Bluegill, and minnows.

Fish orders must be received by Monday, March 16. Grass Carp orders require the permit information on the bottom of the form to be filled in completely. Tree orders are due by Friday, March 27. All orders are prepaid only.

Tree orders will be available for pick-up April 9 and 10 during regular business hours. Fish orders will be available for pick-up on Saturday, April 11 from 11 a.m. – 2 p.m. only. Pick-up is located at the Will-South Cook Soil and Water Conservation District Office, 1201 S. Gougar Road, New Lenox.

For more information or order forms, please call 815-462-3106, ext. 3 or email info@will-scookswcd.org.



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.



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: Cemetery plots at Mt Vernon Memorial Estates in Lemont, IL. Located in the Garden of the Apostles, Blk #3, Lot #56-B, graves 1 & 2. Cemetery price \$3649.00 each. Asking \$2000.00 each, which includes transfer fees. Call or text Dolores 708-935-6470.

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.

Wanted 5ft blow mold Santa, with or without light. Also, any other vintage indoor or outdoor Christmas decorations. Call 708-439-9770

IDOA Announces \$3.6 Million in Grant Funds for Local Food Infrastructure

The Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA) announced plans to distribute \$3.6 million in fiscal year 2026 at the Everything Local Conference. The funds, which were appropriated in the fiscal year 2026 state budget, will be used to support local food processing, aggregation, and distribution. Grants will be available for collaborative projects from \$1,000 to \$250,000 and for individual projects from \$1,000 to \$75,000.

"Strong agriculture depends on strong infrastructure," said IDOA Director Jerry Costello II. "The Local Food Infrastructure Grant program gives Illinois farmers the processing, aggregation, and distribution capacity they need to ensure Illinois-grown food can reach consumers."

Applications for grant funding are available on the Illinois Department of Agriculture website.

"With food prices rising across Illinois, investing in local food infrastructure is no longer optional; it's essential," said State Representative Sonya Harper (D-Chicago), Chair of the House Agriculture and Conservation Committee. "We created this program to strengthen our farmers, shorten the supply chain, and ensure Illinois families can access affordable, locally grown food. I've spent my career fighting to move our state from food deserts and fragile systems toward real, durable solutions, and this investment helps put that vision into action."

Eligible applicants include Illinois residents who store, process, package, aggregate or distribute value-added agricultural products or plan to do so. These entities must meet one of the following criteria:

- Illinois farm or cooperative with fewer than 50 employees
- Illinois slaughter and/or processing facility with fewer than 50 employees. Slaughter and/or processing facilities must be USDA or state licensed or be a custom-exempt slaughter and/or processing facility
- Illinois food business with fewer than 50 employees
- Illinois food hub with fewer than 50 employees
- Illinois nonprofit organization
- Illinois unit of government

To encourage further expansion of the local food industry, all grant funding must be used for purchasing, leasing to own, renting, building or installing infrastructure related to the processing, storage, aggregation, or distribution of value-added agricultural products.

Additional information is available at <https://agr.illinois.gov/assistance/illinoisfarmprograms/lfig.html>



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
"U"

UZUKHULU

Flavor profile is earthy, mild, and slightly sweet.

Uzukhulu matters for its functional role in West African cuisine.



It adds subtle depth without heat, making it indispensable for dishes.

Avoid using it in delicate sauces (e.g., béchamel), desserts, or raw applications.

Real Uzukhulu has small, dark brown seeds (1-2mm).

USUALLY AVAILABLE AT SPECIALTY RETAILERS ONLY.

Use confidently in hearty meat stews, bean dishes, or tomato-based rice recipes where its earthiness complements robust flavors.



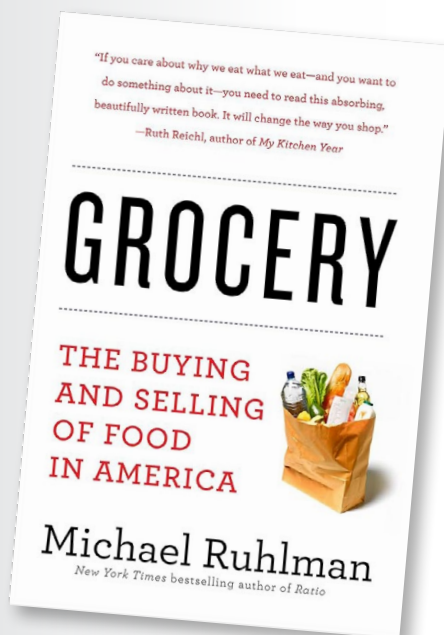
Store whole seeds in airtight containers away from light; ground versions lose 70% potency within 3 months.

Source: <https://www.seasonedpioneers.com/quatre-epices-uncovered>

CCFB Book Club Members Discuss Ruhlman's Book Grocery: The Buying and Selling of Food in America

Farm Bureau members are taking a fascinating look at the history, culture, and business of the modern supermarket during this year's Between the Rows Book Club. Through behind-the-scenes insights and personal stories, Michael Ruhlman reveals how grocery stores shape what we eat, how we live, and even how we see ourselves as consumers.

Thank you to all that participated! Kim Morton, Mike Rauch, Joyce Holste, Theresa Johnston, Joanna Whitten, Leann Pettis, and Mary Kay Nielsen.



Medieval Times

DINNER & TOURNAMENT



SAVE 25% ON TICKETS!

CCFB Members can save 25% on an "Unforgettable Knight Out"

Tickets can be purchased at www.cookcfb.org under Member Benefits and Entertainment.



Discounted Movie Tickets



As a member, you have access to money-saving benefits, and this is just one of many!

Call us to order your tickets by phone and we will mail them to you free of charge.

Phone: 708-354-3276



CCFB Ticket Prices

AMC Theatres: \$9.50
Marcus Platinum: \$8.00
Marcus Silver: \$7.00

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

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 in preparing a will and a 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 to 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)

TIME: 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.

REGISTRATION: Call the CCFB at 708-354-3276

DATE: Tuesday, March 10, 2026

FREE for members (\$10 non-members)

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

DATE: Monday, March 23, 2026

TIME: 4:00-4:30 p.m. with Q & A

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

RESCHEDULED: Beginning Beekeeping Course at the CCFB

If you never kept bees or have an apiary - 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

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>

NEW DATES: Saturday & Sunday, April 11 & 12, 2026

TIME: 9:30 am – 3:30 pm

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

Natural Soap Making 101

Soapy Roads of Lombard will provide a beginner/ introduction to natural soap-making which includes a 'make your own melt & pour soap bar' and an educational soap presentation. Each participant will be provided with equipment and ingredients to craft their own natural soap with natural botanicals (clays and plants) for color and essential oils for fragrance.



LOCATION: Cook County Farm Bureau, 6438 Joliet Rd, Countryside

FEE: \$15.00 for one soap or \$25.00 for two soaps

DATE: Monday, April 27, 2026

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

TIME: 6:00 – 7:30 p.m.

Soil Testing Kits Available This Spring *Additional savings for Members!*

Soil test includes soil pH, Potassium, Phosphorous, Calcium, Magnesium, Organic Matter, and Cat Ion Exchange Capacity.

Pricing subject to change **Non-member pricing available * Additional kit pricing available online at <https://cookcfb.org/stay-updated/-events-and-programs/programs-and-events/profile/soil-testing>.*

Complete kit includes:

- Step by step instructions on how to sample soil
- Sample bag and form
- Convenient pre-paid shipping box and label via USPS
- U of I Extension Master Gardener Info Form and pre-paid envelope

** Additional member-only savings – ask us how!*

Members will receive emailed test results and basic recommendations typically within two weeks, with more extensive test interpretation provided by the partnering volunteer Master Gardener Unit with the University of IL Extension South Suburban Horticulture Team.

Farm Bureau Soil Test Kit discounted member pricing:

Soil Test Kit: 1 sample: \$30
2 sample kit: \$40 | 3 sample kit: \$60

Soil kits are available for purchase at the Cook County Farm Bureau by calling 708-354-3276, using a credit card at no additional charge; cash or check accepted when purchasing from the office, Mon-Fri 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Soil plus Lead Test Kit: \$58
1 sample Lead Only Test Kit: \$47

Member Appreciation Week Events at Cook County Farm Bureau!!!

Tuesday, April 21:

Member Horticulture & Wellbeing Event at the Cook CFB

TIME: 10 am – 2 pm: drop-in event times in the Farm Bureau building

REGISTRATION: Registration for select sessions by calling the CCFB at 708-354-3276; email ccfb@cookcfb.org with session and member contact info

Registration needed to attend these 2 wonderful classes offered: space is limited

10:30 AM – 11:30 AM: Ethnobotany
A historical look at the relationship between the use of plants, herbs, and health

12:30 PM - 1:30 PM: Nutritious Gardening in Small Spaces
Growing a healthy harvest of produce and leafy greens in small spaces; nutritious recipes

Horticulture & Wellbeing Event will feature:

- 2 free Horticulture for well-being centered classes presented by U of I Extension Educators: **Ethnobotany & Nutritious Gardening in Small Spaces** – registration required
- Master Gardener Help Desk onsite to assist with your gardening questions-drop in
- Soil Testing Program information and kits for sale; Health from the Hive info- drop in
- Information on health-based member benefits and discounts offered by the Farm Bureau, with assistance on signing up – drop in
- Member Benefit Platform info and set up assistance on your phone or device-drop in

Wednesday, April 22:

Earth Day Party - A Family Connections Event

TIME: 4 - 5 pm – drop-in anytime

FEE: Free for members to attend; non-member cost is \$10 per family.

REGISTRATION: Advanced registration is required by calling 708-354-3276 or emailing aitc@cookcfb.org by April 15. Space is limited to the first 30 attendees.

As part of Member Appreciation Week, we invite you to celebrate Earth Day with Cook County Farm Bureau's Agriculture in the Classroom Program. This family-friendly event will feature fun ag education, story time, and hands-on STEM activity stations about seed germination and growing, vermicomposting, and pollination. All attendees will leave with handouts, take-home growing projects, and giveaways. Come celebrate sustainability, soil, and seeds this Earth Day at the farm bureau!

Thursday, April 23: BINGO!!!

TIME: 1 pm

FEE: \$10.00 for CCFB members, \$15.00 for Non-Members

REGISTRATION: Call 708-354-3276 to register, not required. Walk-ins welcome.

Join us for some fun while supporting agriculture and community.

15 Bingo Games

Prizes • Refreshments

Open to members, families, and friends.

Friday, April 24: Ask a Farmer & Coffee with Bob

TIME: 8 - 10 am

SCAN HERE

Scan below to renew your CCFB membership
Just as easy as using the "EASY" button!

www.cookcfb.org



CCFB IS AWESOME!

