



COOK COUNTY GO-OPERATOR

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

Mark Your Calendar



April

- 11 - 12 Beginning Beekeeping Course **PG 12**
- 20 - 24 Member Appreciation Week **PG 1, 12**
- 21 Herbs and Healing: Ancestral Plant Medicine **PG 12**
- 21 From Patio to Plate: Edible Gardening in Small Spaces **PG 12**
- 22 Earth Day Party **PG 12**
- 23 BINGO **PG 12**
- 24 Ask a Farmer & Coffee with Bob **PG 12**
- 27 Soap Making 101 **PG 12**

May

- 30 Container Gardening for Small & Inner City Spaces **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 ?

Which Young Leader just represented CCFB and Illinois Farm Bureau on the National Leaders to Washington DC trip?

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)

March Winner: Mary Ann Hermes

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

Answer: Dr. Temple Grandin

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 April with the Word of the Month and you will be entered to win that month's prize.

We look forward to your call. Good luck!

March Winner: Alexia Koliatsis

March word was Lucky found on PG 8.



Respond Food Pantry Joins Farm Bureau for Food Checkout Day

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 Respond Now Food Pantry in Chicago Heights for Food Checkout Day. Farm Bureau and COUNTRY Financial supporters include Jim Andresen, COUNTRY Financial; Amanda McManus, COUNTRY Financial; Sharon Stemke, COUNTRY Financial; Laura Elkins, COUNTRY Financial; and Lisa Zielinski, COUNTRY Financial as well as Farm Bureau leaders Mike Rauch, Ruth Zeldenrust, Mark Yunker, Janet McCabe, and Rebecca Biernacki. **For more info on Food Checkout Day, go to Page 4.**

Master Gardener Help Desk Re-Opens

The Cook County Farm Bureau® and the University of Illinois Extension continue to partner on a project that benefits local Farm Bureau members and the general public. Master Gardeners are available to answer questions from members and the general public related to gardening and horticulture.

Master Gardeners are available through the Cook County Farm Bureau by emailing mastergardener@cookcfb.org or calling the Cook County Farm Bureau at 708-354-3276.

General topic areas that can be addressed include soil test recommendations, plant disease issues and treatments, horticulture related questions, pest identification and treatment, and more. Commercial related questions will be forwarded to the University of Illinois Extension professional staff.

In 2025, the Master Gardeners help desk took 192 phone calls and emails from members and the general public to respond to "growing" related questions. 126 of those inquiries were to support efforts by the Cook County Farm Bureau to assist in soil testing recommendations, treatments, and guidance.



Membership Appreciation Week

APRIL 20 - APRIL 24

CHECK OUT PAGE 12 FOR DETAILS

SCAN HERE

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



www.cookcfb.org

BenefitHub: Illinois Farm Bureau's New Member Benefit Platform

Illinois Farm Bureau members now have a simpler, smarter way to access and maximize their member benefits. **BenefitHub** is the new, easy-to-use platform where you can explore all your favorite discounts—and discover new ones—across dozens of everyday categories including travel, tickets, auto, electronics, and more. Many of the top brands in the U.S. are featured, giving members meaningful savings on the things they buy most. Follow these four quick steps to get the best value and maximize savings:

1. Start in the **BenefitHub** portal to compare deals across retailers.
2. Buy a discounted gift card when one is available.
3. Complete your purchase through the merchant link in BenefitHub, using your gift card.
4. Enjoy both the retailer discount and cash back.

Getting Started:

If you previously had an Abenity account, you can sign in to BenefitHub using your existing email and password. New to the platform? Create an account and start saving today. **Visit:** <https://ilfb.benefithub.com>

Need Help?

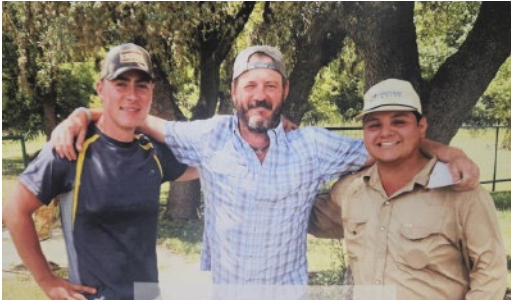
For account questions, contact BenefitHub Customer Care at 1-813-675-2210 or customer care@benefithub.com

BenefitHub members save an average of \$2,500—so why wait? Start exploring your savings at <https://ilfb.benefithub.com>.

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...




Former scholarship recipient and Young Leader, Daniel Lyons (left), for stopping by the office to thank the organization for helping him set his future course in agriculture and for his kind words.

- The many volunteers and partners who made this year's Food Checkout Day a tremendous success.
- Young Leaders Committee members who planned, hosted, and delivered an outstanding Hygiene Drive as part of this year's Food Checkout Day. This year's Hygiene Drive donations tripled 2024 totals.
- The 12 young agriculturalists who applied for a scholarship from the Cook County Farm Bureau Foundation.
- The CCFB Foundation scholarship review committee for spending considerable time and care reviewing, scoring, and determining the 2026 scholarship recipients and for those award winners for meeting with the board and expressing appreciation.
- The 2026 Community Garden Grant review committee for their extra time and effort reviewing and evaluating and ultimately selecting 6 of 20 deserving grant applications received this year.
- The many members who have voluntarily renewed your memberships again this year.
- Individual Cook County Farm Bureau Young Leaders Blake Lanphier, Jessica Biernacki, Jonathan Poole, Kayla Biegel, Elijah Floerke, Justin Kopping, Matthew Smits, Addison McGlaughlin, and Aria Lockhart for attending and contributing to the Board of Directors leadership pipeline dinner.
- All our members for their understanding and kind words shared regarding the postal delivery delay issues of publication in recent months. We are very grateful for your understanding and all the kind words you have shared during this time. One positive side-effect was getting to chat with so many members! Thank you for your patience. (We received a returned membership dues notice from the year 2012 this month from the post office.)
- Members Mary Gavenda, Cam Frigo, Richard Schroeder, Janet Lence, Dan Bultema Jr., Phil McIntosh, Diane Merrion, and others for your expressions of appreciation.

HOW FARM BUREAU SERVED YOU IN MARCH

- ▶ **Hosted a sourdough class educating members on how flour, fermentation, and farming come together.**
- ▶ **Awarded six Urban Community Gardens with a \$350 grant for use in the garden with plantings and supplies.**
- ▶ **Provided added value for members who purchase soil test kits by lowering or keeping pricing the same in 2026.**
- ▶ **Presented a Preparing Wills and Trusts workshop for members interested in preparing a will or trust.**



Co-Operator

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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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<p>Officers & Directors Janet McCabe, President Gerry Kopping, Vice President Ruth Zeldenrust, Secretary-Treasurer</p>	<p>Farm Bureau Manager Bob Rohrer</p> <p>Office Staff</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td>Jill Drover</td> <td>Linda Tobias</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Kelli Villarreal</td> <td>Tim Rost</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Debbie Voltz</td> <td>Julie Hespeneide</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Katrina Milton</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>		Jill Drover	Linda Tobias	Kelli Villarreal	Tim Rost	Debbie Voltz	Julie Hespeneide	Katrina Milton	
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Downwind

by **BOB ROHRER, CCFB MANAGER**



“Smut”

I first learned about smut from my dad, the Farmer. Yes, I used the title “Smut” to grab your attention! No, not that kind of smut! Where are your minds, members?

The Farmer grew various crops during my childhood. One of the primary crops grown was field corn. On occasion, I would see an ear of corn that looked like it had been taken over by strange alien marshmallows with the purple hue.

Dad called this repulsive growth “corn smut”. He explained that it was an undesirable fungus. I found it really quite undesirable to look at. Disgusting.

I was afraid to touch it in case it decided to invade my fingers and hand. Just the name “corn smut” conjured up a gag reflex.

That was years ago and I have not thought about corn smut much since. Until recently. I ran across an article with a picture of corn smut in it. Intrigued, I read further.

I learned that corn smut goes by several different names: huitlacoche, Mexican truffles, and corn mushrooms



Corn Smut Photo – University of Minnesota Extension

among them. A delicacy? Sells for up to \$50 a pound? I felt the gag reflex returning.

People eat smut. On purpose.

Huitlacoche is in demand for its unique, intense, earthy flavor.

Researching further about huitlacoche, I saw a YouTube video made by Rick Bayless, American chef, who said huitlacoche is “one of the most amazing flavors on the face of the earth”. It almost made me want to try it. Almost.

My dad, the Farmer, and other Illinois corn farmers have been seeking to eliminate corn smut for decades. University Extension research and publications are widely available on

the fungal disease, common corn smut. Fungal infections are usually considered undesirable, destroying crops, weakening/deforming plant parts, or killing the host plant entirely. Fungal pathogens can create massive economic losses to farmers.

A bushel of field corn weighing 56 pounds can be sold for \$4.50 or so at the grain market today. The Farmer might’ve changed his tune about harvesting a little fungus smut if 50 bucks a pound was in the offering.

Farmers are consistently seeking crops and products in demand by consumers that are economically sustainable. Instead of research preventing corn smut, the future may be in determining how to better create a better fungus for cultivation!

Certainly, fields of amber waving corn smut won’t be as nice to look at as a sunflower field.

Cook County Farm Bureau continues to develop quality programs for members. That’s our Member Advantage! Programs for our members with green thumbs. Programs for our members with young families. Programs for our members that like to Go Go Go. Programs for our creative members. Programs for members that want to have fun.

And we have fun getting to know members!

Keep the program ideas coming and we will continue to deliver for your advantage!

I wish members could see the fun we are having trying to figure out TikTok. I am at least 40 years too old

for this and yet here I am, faced with today’s society and the best ways to communicate in the market feeling like a mystery. Fortunately, Cook County Farm Bureau has some very talented staff members that are patiently explaining it to me. Check us out online so that you can be better prepared to make fun of my attempts!

I’m like so many of our members, preferring to read my newspapers and magazines in hard copy print. I want to touch the pages.

One of the challenges (and biggest frustrations) your CCFB office has faced in 2026 has been the inconsistency of postal delivery of our publications. We know that members enjoy and value our publications and are frustrated when they arrive after the intended delivery date. We know that you do not want to miss programs, drawing deadlines, activities, and events.

We continue to communicate to the U.S. Postal Service for the best way to streamline delivery. However, delivery inconsistencies have demonstrated the importance of our electronic newsletter deliveries that arrive on a timely basis in a more consistent fashion.

I want to encourage every member to share with us your email address so that we can deliver our electronic newsletter versions to you on your schedule, not the post office’s. We will not remove you from the hardcopy version unless you ask us to.

If you have not already, please share your preferred email address with fbcooperator@gmail.com for happy reading!

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.

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

Farm Bureau Soil Test Kit discounted member pricing:

- Soil Test Kit:** 1 sample: \$30
2 sample kit: \$40 | 3 sample kit: \$60
- Soil plus Lead Test Kit:** \$58
1 sample Lead Only Test Kit: \$47

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>.*

** 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.

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.

Recipe of the Month

Jackie P, Riverside

Cynthia's COTTAGE CHEESE* PANCAKES

**If cottage cheese is watery, drain it before using.*



INGREDIENTS

Mix together:

- 3/4 c all-purpose flour
- 1 T sugar
- 3/4 t baking powder
- 1/4 t baking soda

Stir together and mix in:

- 3/4 c 1-2% small curd cottage cheese*
- 2/3 c milk
- 2 lg egg whites or 1 lg egg, beaten
- 1/2 t vanilla extract

DIRECTIONS

Mix and then stir the ingredients together. Coat either a cast iron or non-stick skillet with 2 t oil and heat over medium heat. Drop the cottage cheese batter by scant 1/4 cupsful into the skillet, two or three at a time. When the bottoms are set and tops have small bubbles (about 1 minute), turn and cook until just firm in the center, 1 to 3 minutes. Add more oil to skillet as needed.

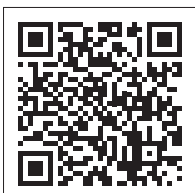
Serve with fresh fruit, fruit syrup, maple syrup, or a dusting of confectioner’s sugar. These pancakes are very light, like little pillows. And they contain protein!

Makes 8-10 pancakes.

ShopLocal This Spring

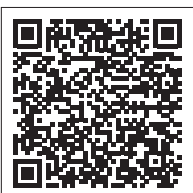
Prep & planting is happening! Visit Cook County Farm Bureau® member greenhouses, garden centers, and farms for all your outdoor needs this spring! Their vegetable and flower plantings, trees, shrubs, lawn, landscape materials, grills, and garden décor await you!

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, Teegan Compost, Grainger, John Deere, Harvard Products, and more. Check our website for details and restrictions at:

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



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.



Note: This is the final recipe from our 2025 Collection. To receive our upcoming 2026 Recipe Collection booklet available later this month, please email your contact info to ccfb@cookcfb.org, call the CCFB at 708-354-3276 or visit a participating member farmstand or Ag business in May.

Cook CFB Celebrates 26th Annual Food Checkout Day

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

Nearly \$7,000 was donated to local Cook County pantries in celebration of Food Checkout Day this year and the healthy and nutritious food grown and raised by local farmers. The donations directly benefited the one in seven individuals in Cook County who are hungry.

In addition to traditional food donations, Cook County Farm Bureau's Young Leader Committee hosted their annual hygiene product drive. Members and leaders donated personal care items including toothpaste, toothbrushes, soap, deodorant, and lotion.

Partner food pantries, Respond Now of Chicago Heights and Northfield Township Food Pantry of Glenview

received non-perishable food items and personal hygiene products as part of Food Checkout Day 2026.

"Cook County and Illinois farmers are deeply committed to producing safe, wholesome food for our neighbors and beyond," said Janet McCabe, President of Cook County Farm Bureau. "Through Food Checkout Day, we recognize the importance of access to nutritious food and reaffirm our support for families navigating rising food prices."

For 20 years, Cook County Farm Bureau partnered with Ronald McDonald House Charities® of Chicagoland and Northwest Indiana. Through the generosity of partners for nearly two decades, Farm Bureau donated over \$150,000 and nearly 100,000 pounds of food.

In 2012, and again in 2021, Farm Bureau's food pantry efforts were named a Summit Award winner by the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE). The Summit Award recognizes the positive impact that non-profit associations have on their community.

Thank you to the following individuals who financially supported this program:

Jim Andresen, COUNTRY Financial	Sharon Stemke, COUNTRY Financial
Bernacki Family	Janet Lence
Laura Elkins, COUNTRY Financial	Bob and Jayne Rohrer
Bona Heinsohn	Erin Sonntag
Margaret Jura, COUNTRY Financial	Robin Scheldberg
Karen Kavalas	Doug Yunker
Blake Lanphier	Larry & Sharon Barr
Janet McCabe	Debra Voltz

Volunteers

Jim Andresen, COUNTRY Financial Orland Park Agency	Amanda McManus, COUNTRY Financial Orland Park Agency
Rebecca Biernacki	Karen Peditto
Bryan Blau	Mike Rauch
Sharon Blau	Sharon Stemke, COUNTRY Financial Orland Park Agency
Laura Elkins, COUNTRY Financial Orland Park Agency	Mark Yunker
Bona Heinsohn	Ruth Zeldenrust
Blake Lanphier	Lisa Zielinski, COUNTRY Financial Orland Park Agency
Janet McCabe	

Thank you to all the members, supporters, and COUNTRY Financial representatives who donated non-perishable food and hygiene items.

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

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



CCFB and COUNTRY Financial Support Area Food Pantry

COUNTRY Financial® representatives and Cook County Farm Bureau® leaders donated fresh and non-perishable food items to Northfield Township Food Pantry as part of this year's Food Checkout Day. Pictured are Northfield Township Food Pantry volunteers and Cook County Farm Bureau leaders and volunteers. Food Checkout Day recognizes the healthy and nutritious food grown and raised by Cook County and Illinois farmers.



COUNTRY Financial leader and longtime supporter of Food Checkout Day Sharon Stemke shops for food donations for the Respond Now Food Pantry in Chicago Heights as part of this year's Food Checkout Day. Respond Now Food Pantry is one the partner food pantries for this year's Food Checkout Day. The year 2026 marks the 26th anniversary of Food Checkout Day.



Bryan Blau, Cook County Farm Bureau PR Team Member, signals "all is good" after completing his shopping tasks for the Food Checkout Day benefit for Northfield Township Food Pantry.



Orion Samuelson speaks to members of CCFB at the 84th Annual Meeting.

Cook CFB Mourns Passing of Samuelson

Cook County Farm Bureau leaders and members were saddened to learn of the passing of agricultural broadcasting legend, Orion Samuelson, on Monday, March 16, 2026 at the age of 91. Farmers across the country recognized Samuelson as a consummate advocate for them and their profession. Nonfarmers from the Chicagoland area learned and gained appreciation of farming and agriculture through Samuelson's decades of farm reports and shows on WGN radio and television.

Samuelson, who retired in 2020, spent 60 years broadcasting. He partnered many years with farm broadcaster Max Armstrong both on the radio and television to report on farm markets and agricultural news. He grew up on a family dairy farm in Wisconsin.

Samuelson was a widely recognized figure amongst the Cook County Farm Bureau circles not only for his radio and television fame but serving as the keynote speaker at the 50th anniversary annual meeting, at the 75th anniversary annual meeting, and the 84th anniversary annual meeting of the Cook County Farm Bureau membership. He also served as emcee at the retirement party of former Cook County Farm Bureau manager, Alden Kilian.

Samuelson would have been 92 on March 31. His ability to clearly communicate about agriculture and farming, his advocacy for the industry, his friendship with farmers and his powerful baritone voice will be remembered.

Young Leaders Team Explores Leadership Pipeline Opportunities



The 12 members of the Cook County Farm Bureau Board of Directors listened to comments from the young leaders team and asked questions during a March 11 roundtable discussion.

As a part of the Cook County Farm Bureau Board of Directors Future Forward initiative, the board held a dinner and roundtable discussion with members of the Young Leaders Team on March 11.

The board continues to seek involvement and participation from the Young Leaders Team members aged 18-35. A recent discussion was hosted to lend support for their growth and leadership development.

Concepts that came from the roundtable included:

- Board member/young leader mentorship and a farm tour of board members' operations.
- An organizational open house for younger members to explore opportunities for Farm Bureau involvement



The Cook County Farm Bureau Young Leaders Team presented Bona Heinsohn a box of her "favorites" in appreciation of her work in support for the team. Left to right Elijah Floerke, Jessica Biernacki, Justin Kopping, Addison McGlaughlin, Blake Lanphier, Bona Heinsohn, Jonny Poole, Kayla Biegel, Aria Lockhart, and Matthew Smits.

- Young Leader spotlights in Farm Bureau publications/social media
- Continued outreach to connect by board members to young leaders.

The Young Leaders Team also presented a gift basket that evening to Bona Heinsohn, Cook County Farm Bureau staff member who has helped to support and grow the group. Heinsohn has been named manager of the Kane County Farm Bureau.

Celebrating National Credit Union Youth Month at IAA Credit Union

Empowering Youth: The Importance of Financial Literacy for Families



Jennifer Killian

April is National Credit Union Youth Month! At IAA Credit Union, we believe in helping our families raise money-smart kids. Financial education starts early, and the lessons children

learn today will shape their financial habits for a lifetime. Yet many parents find it challenging to introduce these concepts at home.

How many of you have talked to your children about finances? If you haven't yet, you're not alone. A surprising 41% of parents admit they've never discussed money with their kids. According to a Greenlight survey, this communication gap contributes to the fact that 3 out of 4 teens lack confidence in their financial knowledge.

What is Financial Literacy?

Financial literacy is understanding and using financial skills and concepts effectively. It encompasses critical skills such as:

- Opening a bank account
- Using debit and credit cards responsibly
- Basic budgeting
- Managing and paying off debt

Why Financial Literacy Matters

Financial literacy equips individuals with the tools to make informed decisions and achieve financial wellness. Here are some key benefits:

- Fosters a better understanding of real-world financial decisions
- Helps manage money effectively and establish healthy spending

and budgeting habits

- Reduces vulnerability to financial fraud
- Supports life goals like saving for education, using debt responsibly, and planning for retirement

Despite its importance, **only seven U.S. states currently mandate at least one semester of financial education in schools.** That's why financial institutions like IAA Credit Union step in to bridge the gap through initiatives like National Credit Union Youth Month.

Practical Tips for Teaching Kids About Money

- **Lead by example:** Share your budget and financial decisions in age-appropriate ways.
- **Encourage open conversations:** Talk about money regularly and celebrate milestones.
- **Reinforce good habits:** Help kids practice saving and spending wisely.
- **Embrace mistakes:** Allow children to learn from small financial missteps now to avoid larger mistakes later.

How IAA Credit Union Supports Financial Literacy

Since 1951, IAA Credit Union has served the Illinois Farm Bureau Family of Companies and their employees. Beyond traditional banking services, we're committed to financial education, offering youth-focused programs tailored to every stage of development.

Kids Club (Ages 0-12)

The Kids Club is designed as an introductory savings account, helping children learn the basics of saving for short- and long-term goals. Benefits include:

- Savings Account to jump start their savings
- Access to the Greenlight app, a trusted family money management tool.

Dollars & Sense Club (Ages 13-17)

The Dollars & Sense Club builds on the foundation of the Kids Club, offering

- Savings rollovers from Kids Club accounts.
- First checking accounts with no minimum balance or monthly fees.
- Remote deposit capabilities and online banking.
- Access to over 35,000 ATMs with your debit card.
- Youth CDs with as little as \$500 to start.
- Continued access to the Greenlight app, fostering independence with parental supervision.

Elite Club (Ages 18-23)

The Elite Club prepares young adults to manage their finances independently while still offering support:

- Savings and checking account rollovers from Dollars & Sense Club.
- Access to remote deposits, online banking, and no-fee checking.
- Exclusive perks such as getting the lowest possible rate on first Auto loan.
- Build your credit by linking your current savings account to a Secured VISA credit card.
- GreenPath resources for free financial education, including budgeting assistance, credit reviews, and debt management plans.

What is Greenlight?

Greenlight is the loved and trusted financial education app and debit card for kids and teens that allows parents to instantly send their kids money, set up chores and allowances, create savings goals, and more.

For the entire month of April, enjoy a complimentary Greenlight subscription and a custom debit card at no extra cost. When you become an IAA Credit Union member and sign up for Greenlight through us, you'll receive a free* Greenlight subscription and, for a limited time, a free custom debit card^ (a \$79.99 value). Let your child bring their card to life by personalizing it with a favorite photo, pet, or design making learning smart money habits fun and memorable. Additionally, parents can add up to five kids, each with their own card, ensuring every child's experience is both engaging and special.

Once registration is complete, debit cards will be shipped for each child and will be ready for use upon activation.

Ready to Join?

IAA Credit Union's Youth Program sets your child on the path to financial success from ages 0-23. Let's empower the next generation with the knowledge and skills they need to thrive financially!



Become a member today! Together, we can build a future of financially confident and capable young adults.



*IAA Credit Union members are eligible for the Greenlight SELECT plan at no cost when they connect their IAA Credit Union account as the Greenlight funding source for the entirety of the promotion. Subject to minimum balance requirements and identity verification. Upgrades will result in additional fees. Upon termination of promotion, customers will be responsible for associated monthly fees. See terms for details. Offer ends 05/09/2027. Offer subject to change or renewal. ^New Greenlight customers are eligible for a \$10 bonus to their Parents Wallet within 7 days after completion of successful registration. Members must sign up at greenlight.com/iaa to redeem offer. Successful registration must occur between 04/01/2026 and 04/30/2026. See terms for details. Offer subject to change. The Greenlight prepaid card is issued by Community Federal Savings Bank, member FDIC, pursuant to license by Mastercard International. Greenlight is a financial technology company, not a bank. The Greenlight app facilitates banking services through Community Federal Savings Bank (CFSB), Member FDIC.

Planting Seeds “Celebrating Earth Day”



**Katrina
J.E. Milton**

When I think of Earth Day, I think of celebrating sunny days, warm weather, leafy trees, green grass, squirrels, and whales. I typically don't think of all that is needed to

make the Earth better: rainy days to make trees leafy and grass green, soil science to not only know how to grow better, but also make what we grow better, and combatting the negative impacts of litter and pollution.

When planning Membership Appreciation Week, our office staff discussed ways for the Farm Bureau to give back to members and get more involved in our community. My first thought was an event to celebrate Earth Day on April 22. I thought of celebrating Earth Day with an Earth Day Party, similar to a birthday party, with handouts, activities, and agricultural education. The Cook County Farm Bureau Earth Day Party will be held from 4-5 p.m. Wednesday,

April 22 at the Farm Bureau in Countryside. For more information, view the calendar of upcoming events on the last page of the *Co-Operator*.

After all, it only makes sense for the Farm Bureau to celebrate Earth Day. Farmers are the unsung heroes of the holiday! They are caretakers of the land and animals, helping to feed the world's growing population, and working to leave the earth a better place for not only the next generation, but all generations to come.

When our Agriculture in the Classroom Program teaches elementary-aged students about sustainability, we describe sustainability as taking good care of planet Earth, including plants, animals, soil, water, the atmosphere, and all of its natural resources. Sustainable agriculture is often described as a three-legged milking stool, with the legs representing environmental, social, and economic responsibility. When all three legs have equal length, the stool is nearly impossible to tip over. Agriculture is involved with all three legs of

sustainability, from the farm to the supply chain to our plates. Even after food is eaten, agriculture is involved. Learn more about vermicomposting in this month's Agriculture Adventure for Families.

Farmers work towards sustainability by using a number of agricultural practices, including crop rotation, grazing rotation, planting cover crops, using no-till or reduced till when planting, introducing integrated pest management to have beneficial insects eat and control pests that damage crops rather than pesticides, and using livestock manure as fertilizer. Farmers also utilize technology to achieve sustainability by creating bioplastics made from corn and soy, using corn to make ethanol for gasoline, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) to grow healthier crops and raise healthier livestock.

Instead of just sitting back, complaining, and wanting to make a positive impact, we can all change the world this Earth Day. We can use reusable bags when grocery shopping, plant

native seeds to help pollinators, pick up litter, recycle, and limit water, electricity, and gasoline use. Those may be only small steps, but they can make a big difference over time. Together, we can be the change we want to see in the world, and make this Earth Day – and all days on Earth – a true celebration of making the world and the Earth a better place.



Image from Illinois Agriculture in the Classroom's Sustainability Ag Mag



Out of this World Agriculture: Astrobotany

On March 5, 12 teachers attended Cook County Farm Bureau's Agriculture in the Classroom PDCH Workshop that covered the popular topic of astrobotany. The workshop featured guest speaker Dr. Richard John Barker, astrobotanist, researcher, and Founder of the UW Astro-Botany Engineering Society, followed by resources and lesson plans educators could use to connect the topic to their classroom curriculum.

Astrobotany is the study of cultivating plants in space environments, focusing on how vegetation grows, adapts, and thrives under extreme conditions, such as microgravity, altered lighting and UV, and extraterrestrial soil, such as the surface of the Moon or Mars.

Unlike Earth's soil, which is comprised of air, water, minerals, and organic matter, the topmost layer on the Moon, Mars, and other planets and moons is known as regolith. Regolith is typically a bedrock formed by weathering, impacts, and volcanic activity. It is generally sharp, abrasive, and fine-grained and lacks the organic nutrients and minerals to support life.

There have been multiple astrobotany firsts in space, including the first seeds (corn, rye, and cotton) in space attached to the United States' V-2 rockets in 1946; lettuce, cabbage and bean seeds germinating on the Soviet's Kosmos 110 in orbit in 1966; thale cress completing a plant lifecycle in space on the Soviet's Salyut 7 in 1982; the first crop (red romaine lettuce) grown in space and eaten by astronauts on the International Space Station's Expedition 44 in 2015; the first flower (a zinnia) blooming in space on the International Space Station Expedition 45 in 2016; and the first plant (cotton) sprouting on the Moon as part of China's Chang'e 4 probe in 2019.

NASA's growth chamber, the Vegetable Production System (VEGGIE), uses a clay-based soil and LED lights to grow food for astronauts on the International Space Station.

Dr. Barker said it was a pleasure to share his



Credit: NASA Open Science Data Archive Community Forum

This photo, provided by Dr. Barker, shows astronauts during the APEX-12 mission, featuring his AstroBotany Calibration (ABC) stickers. Advanced Plant EXperiment-12 (APEX-12) is a NASA project that is studying how space radiation and microgravity affect thale cress DNA.

astrobotany experience and insights gained from the scientists that are growing plants on the International Space Station.

"If we're going to have hundreds or even thousands of people working on the Moon or Mars, we'll have to grow food locally for them, so we need to ensure the next generation of space farmers are equipped with all the skills, tools, and materials needed to thrive in low Earth orbit and beyond," he said.

Additional resources that Dr. Barker recommends to learn about astrobotany include watching a video of a Random Positioning Machine (RPM) on YouTube that is a microgravity simulator spinning in his lab; exploring CoSE Cloud, to see how RMPs and CubeSats can transform a standard lab into a space biology hub; and AstroBotany Calibration (ABC) markers featured on NASA's APEX-12 mission, which are essential for high-accuracy sample photography and data analysis and can be purchased online at <http://www.stickermule.com/dr2025>.

For more information, resources, or questions about astrobotany, email aitc@cookcfb.org.

The CCFB Foundation Congratulates 2026 Spring Mini Grant Recipients

The grant of up to \$350 is awarded to 6-12th grade teachers in Cook County that submit a lesson related to agriculture and agricultural science. All projects must include in-classroom learning, hands-on activities, and a strong agriculture and/or food science connection.

Below are this year's recipients and a summary of their project:

- **The INcredible INcubator STEM Project, submitted by Arlene Garcia of J.C. Locke Elementary School in Chicago:** Seventh grade students will take on the role of chemical engineer interns as they try to build a portable baby incubator (PBI). Students will engage in the engineering process virtually as they try to meet specific criteria for this PBI. Through the incredible Incubator STEM project, students will become agricultural engineers where they will engage, learn, and oversee specific environmental conditions necessary for embryonic survival and development in a real time setting. Students will also engage in a hands-on engineering cycle and a farm animal life cycle.
- **The Great Soil vs. Hydroponic Showdown, submitted by Krystina Borowski of Haugan Elementary School in Chicago:** Seventh grade students will investigate the efficiency of food production by comparing how micro-greens grow in traditional soil versus a hydroponic (nutrient-rich water) environment. They will track growth rates, water usage, and "crop yield" over a 14-day cycle.
- **Seeds of Science, submitted by Alycia Scott of Gary Comer College Prep in Chicago:** Seeds of Science is a hands-on agricultural science unit where 6-8th grade students explore soil science, plant biology, food production systems, and sustainable farming practices. Students will: Conduct soil composition and nutrient testing. Study plant life cycles and factors affecting growth. Build and maintain a small classroom grow station (container garden or mini-aquaponics system). Track plant growth using scientific measurement tools. Investigate food systems and discuss food equity in urban communities. Present a final project explaining their agricultural system and its impact. The project integrates science, environmental studies, and real-world problem solving, allowing students to connect agriculture to health, sustainability, and economic systems.

Illinois Reads Highlights Three Agriculture Books

Illinois Agriculture in the Classroom works closely with the Illinois Reading Council and the Illinois Reads program. Each year, the Illinois Reads program selects six books in six strands for readers from ages birth to adult by Illinois authors. Each year, one of the books must have an agricultural connection.

This year, there will be three agricultural books: "Seasons on the Farm" by Chelsea Tornetto, originally

from Red Bud; "Dirt's Journey" by Sally M. Walker of DeKalb; and "Tractor Wars: John Deere, Henry Ford, International Harvester and the Birth of Modern Agriculture" by Neil Dahlstrom of East Moline.

On Saturday, April 25, the Illinois Reading Council is planning to hold the Illinois Reads and Young Authors Book Festival from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Tinley Park High School in Tinley Park. Families, students, and all book lovers are invited to attend this fun and free event. Many authors will be present, and you can bring your books and have them signed at the event.

For more information about Illinois Reads, visit www.illinoisreads.org.

AGRICULTURE ADVENTURES FOR FAMILIES



What's VERMICOMPOSTING?

Vermicomposting is a type of composting using worms, usually Red Wigglers, to break down food scraps and paper into fertilizer. The word "vermicomposting" comes from the Latin "vermis," meaning worm. Vermicomposting has become increasingly popular because of how easy it is to do. All that's needed are the worms, a container with aeration holes drilled on top, soil, paper, or cardboard as a bedding, and food waste, such as fruit and vegetable scraps. The worms prefer moist, dark surroundings. Check on them every few days, feed them, use a water bottle to mist the container's contents, and scoop out their castings to use as a nutrient-rich fertilizer!

Interested in earthworms and vermicomposting?

Learn more by reading Illinois Ag in the Classroom's Composting Farm Bite: tinyurl.com/CompostingFarmBite or attend Cook County Farm Bureau's Earth Day Party, held 4 to 5 p.m. Wednesday, April 22. The event is free for members to attend; non-member cost is \$10 per family. 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. 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!

DID YOU KNOW These Fun Earthworm Facts?

Earthworms improve soil health by **burrowing**, which helps air and water reach plant roots

Earthworm poop, known as castings, can be used as nutrient-rich **fertilizer**

There are about **7,000** species of earthworms in all shades and colors, including pink, green, blue, and purple

Earthworms have **5 hearts**

Earthworms only move forward head first

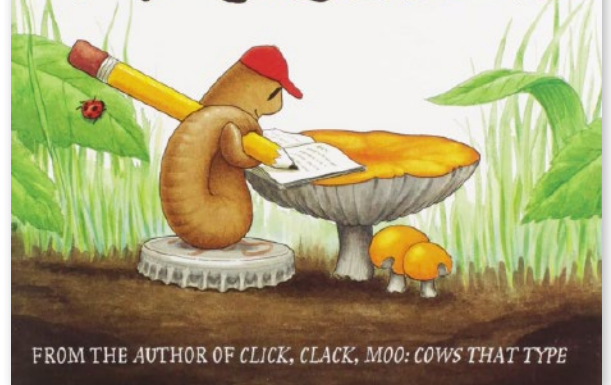
Earthworms are covered in small hairs, called **setae**

Earthworms consume **25% of their body weight** in food each day

READING Corner

By Doreen Cronin • Pictures by Harry Bliss

DIARY OF A WORM



FROM THE AUTHOR OF *CLICK, CLACK, MOO: COWS THAT TYPE*

Book summary and cover photo from Amazon.com

"Diary of a Worm:

The Hilarious Adventures of a Young Worm Navigating Life, School, and Friendship"

Written by Doreen Cronin, Illustrated by Harry Bliss

This book sheds a whole new light on a creature that spends most of its time underground: the earthworm. Written in diary form, this truly hilarious picture book tracks the ins and outs of a worm's life from the perspective of the worm family's young son.

April Word Search

March Winner: Cliff Moellenkamp

Burrow	H	D	F	L	P	S	T	O	O	R	W	Z	U	Y	D
Compost	J	E	F	L	F	X	B	U	T	S	A	F	N	B	S
Dark	V	S	A	U	O	Y	F	G	X	B	T	T	U	T	N
Earthworm	P	N	Y	D	O	L	K	T	J	U	E	R	N	S	I
Fertilizer	T	Z	E	K	D	V	H	F	S	Q	R	E	N	I	A
Food	E	A	R	T	H	W	O	R	M	O	I	J	O	O	L
Head	B	A	I	R	G	H	X	N	W	R	P	C	Z	M	H
Hearts	D	D	D	M	I	U	Z	S	T	S	J	M	P	G	Y
Moist	W	E	L	W	L	U	B	U	T	A	O	R	O	Y	E
Nutrients	D	A	I	M	A	K	N	S	M	R	F	I	Y	C	S
Plant	A	T	D	L	U	H	P	F	H	A	F	L	B	X	
Roots	R	E	Z	I	L	I	T	R	E	F	W	E	W	F	K
Setae	W	S	S	P	E	C	I	E	S	F	Z	H	H	O	R
Soil	E	M	W	L	V	L	B	Z	N	K	K	O	X	W	N
Species	G	F	C	H	W	I	M	W	J	E	M	P	F	B	T
Water															

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!**

CCFB Foundation Scholarship Winners Announced

The Board of Directors of the Cook County Farm Bureau Foundation have selected nine individuals as recipients of the 2026 Scholarship Program. Addison McGlaughlin of Belvidere was awarded the Howard Paarlberg Excellence in Agriculture Scholarship and Leah Sheeha of Palatine was awarded the Stuenkel Family Legacy Scholarship. Receiving general farm and food scholarships were Lindsey Bycraft, Lilliana Bernabei, Isabella Yarc, Alex Murr, Martin Dwyer, Jennifer Miller, and Cameron Conroy. A total of \$18,500 of scholarship funds were distributed.

Howard Paarlberg Excellence in Agriculture Scholarship

This scholarship is designed to honor Mr. Howard Paarlberg, the first President of the Foundation and President of the Farm Bureau for 16 years. The recipient of this scholarship carries the prestige of being the top-rated applicant and receives a greater financial reward.



Addison McGlaughlin – Howard Paarlberg Excellence in Agriculture recipient

McGlaughlin currently attends Joliet Junior College and intends to transfer to UW-Madison in the fall with her intended majors being Dairy and Food Animal Management and Animal and Veterinary Bio Sciences. She's been involved in 4-H, FFA, and the CCFB Young Leader's Group.

Stuenkel Family Legacy Scholarship

This scholarship was created to honor the many contributions made by the Stuenkel Family to the Cook County Farm Bureau, the Foundation, and the organization's agriculture education and literacy programming. It has been designed for those who are pursuing higher education with a focus on an agriculture related career in the areas of technology, education, leadership development, and/or mental health.



Leah Sheehan – Stuenkel Family Legacy Scholarship recipient

Sheehan attends the University of Minnesota and is majoring in Industrial/Systems Engineering. Her involvement in 4-H contributed to her passion for agriculture and with her degree, she hopes to create smarter systems that will use resources more efficiently to help farmers and the food industry meet both consumer and regulatory demands.



Lindsey Bycraft – General Agriculture Scholarship

Bycraft currently attends Glenbrook South High School and is highly involved in her 4H club. She hasn't made a final decision on which college she'll be attending in the fall yet, but she hopes to become an agricultural innovator and communicator.



Lilliana Bernabei – General Agriculture Scholarship

Bernabei attends Iowa State University and is pursuing a degree in Agricultural Business and has obtained a real estate certificate.

She hopes to support the growth of the ag community and help farmers and landowners navigate the complexities of real estate.



Isabella Yarc – General Agriculture Scholarship

Yarc attends Joliet Junior College and is working on an associate's degree in applied science (Ag Business). She has grown up in the ag industry and hopes to pursue a career

that will help shape practical, effective policies that are grounded in the real experiences of producers, with a focus on small and family owned farms.



Alex Murr – General Agriculture Scholarship

Murr attends the University of Missouri and is currently in the College of Veterinary Medicine. He is committed to providing outstanding veterinary care

to farm animals and is particularly interested in being a livestock veterinarian with an interest in horses and cattle.



Martin Dwyer – General Agriculture Scholarship

Dwyer plans to attend either the University of Missouri or Iowa State University in the fall. His passion for agriculture started as a young kid working

with his mom in the garden. He hopes to work with crops on a larger scale after college in the field of agri-business.



Jennifer Miller – General Agriculture Scholarship

Miller attends Southern Illinois University's School of Dental Medicine and is working on her doctorate in Dental Medicine. She has been greatly involved in the ag world by attending

Young Leaders meetings, statewide conventions, and other related ag events. Her agriculture career goal is to provide dental services in a rural/underserved area in Cook County.



Cameron Conroy – General Agriculture Scholarship

Conroy will attend Xavier University in Cincinnati, OH in the fall. Cameron hopes to work in agriculture policy to establish and protect more sustainable farming practices for farmers and farm workers.



Soybean: Small Bean With a Big Resume

If I were a crop, I might be a soybean. I'm short, low drama and work best behind the scenes. My mood can shift from tolerant and forgiving (planting season) to an annoying attention to detail (harvest). But chocolate holds it all together. (Soy is the key; I'll explain).

All of that is really by comparison to corn, the primary crop alternative in Illinois. We live in the Corn Belt. Corn gains name fame for its visual dominance in acres. We find fascination in corn mazes, and the most common consumer-facing farm policy conversations – like ethanol – involve corn.

Unbeknownst to most citizens, Illinois grows more than 20 million tons of soybeans annually and claims the reigning title of No. 1 soybean state in the nation. The achievement reached the heart of Springfield, where legislators voted the soybean as the Illinois state bean in 2025.

Soybeans make a great team with corn as a rotational crop companion and literally bring the muscle with their protein punch. Our FFA chapter packed 4,000 non-perishable meals for local food pantries using soy protein, a budget-friendly, high-protein staple. Soy protein is a common ingredient in meat, both plant-based alternatives and the real thing. Soybean meal, the byproduct after removing the seed's oil, is the nation's top high-protein feed that brings chicken, pork, eggs and dairy to the table.

The average American consumes nearly half a cup of soybeans in some form every day, which could include cooking oil, margarine, soy milk and protein shakes. Soy lecithin keeps chocolate and cocoa butter from separating. Hooray for soy holding together my bite-sized sweet fix after lunch, which likely was a salad that wouldn't exist without dressing, a soy-dominant lifeline for the fresh greens.

Our farm fuels its tractors and trucks with soy-based biodiesel. Soy oil is a named ingredient in plastics for John Deere and the foam in the seats of Ford vehicles. This month, I will see the bean more than my family as I plant some 300 million of those pea-sized seeds across our farm.

Thankfully, soybeans tolerate a wider range of "good-enough" conditions during planting season. Corn prefers perfection. The tides turn come harvest, when the bean gets moody: moisture content rapidly shifts from too wet to too dry, and the mature, standing crop's harvestability is notoriously sensitive to weather.

Beyond that, soybeans check the boxes for Illinois: rotational cropping systems, soil types, climate and access to exports in a state literally shaped by rivers. As the top U.S. agricultural export crop, soybeans bring billions of dollars to America's economy.

Those are some cool beans.

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.

For Soybean Fun Facts, go to <https://cookcfb.org/stay-updated-ccfb-news/article/2026/04/soy-bean-fun-facts>.



Jessica Biernacki

Young Leader Spotlight: Jessica Biernacki

Background

Jessica grew up in Tinley Park, helping with the family horticulture business. She graduated from the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana with Masters Degree in Agricultural Leadership Education and is now a high school agriculture teacher in the south suburbs. She now teaches students about animal

science and community food production and advises the local FFA Chapter. She is a 2025 graduate of the Illinois Agricultural Leadership Program, a two-year executive leadership program.

How did your involvement in Farm Bureau and Young Leaders begin? I began volunteering in 2008 with my dad, helping with everything I possibly could. Then Tim

Stuenkel encouraged me to join Young Leaders, and it's been the best experience.

What is your favorite tractor? 1948 Allis Chalmers C

Favorite farm or food memory For me, it would be planting the family garden with my parents each year and then canning and freezing it at the end of the season.

What are your hobbies or interests?

In my free time, I enjoy gardening and crafting.

What would you say to someone considering joining the Young Leader Committee?

Joining Young Leaders is a great way to dialogue with other young individuals about the future of agriculture.

CCFB Board Wishes Bona the Best



Bona Heinsohn (center) thanks members of the Board of Directors and action teams for 18 great years of work partnering with them as the organization wished Bona the very best as she transitions to manager of the Kane County Farm Bureau. Janet McCabe, President (left) and Kim Morton, Governmental Affairs Team and PAC Treasurer (right).



Cook County Farm Bureau Board and Team members wished staff member Bona Heinsohn, Director of Governmental Affairs and Public Relations, the best as she transitioned in March to manager of the Kane County Farm Bureau.

County Board Approves Resolution Celebrating National Agriculture Day

To learn more, scan the QR code or visit: <https://cookcfb.org/stay-updated-ccfb-news/article/2026/04/cook-county-celebrates-national-agriculture-day-with-resolution-approval>.



Farm Bureau Volunteers and Leaders Advocacy for Agricultural Priorities

Cook County Farm Bureau volunteers, leaders, and staff joined Cook County legislators at this year's Statewide Legislative Reception as part of the Farm Bureau's Governmental Affairs Leadership Conference. Pictured left to right are Rebecca Biernacki, British Griffis, Kim Morton, Bona Heinsohn, State Representative Threesa Mah, State Representative Michael Kelly, and Janet McCabe.



State Rep. Mary Gill Visits With FB Leaders During Reception

State Representative Mary Gill, pictured left, visits with Cook County Farm Bureau President Janet McCabe during this year's Statewide Legislative Reception in Springfield, Illinois. Representative Gill represents the 35th House District and is "adopted" by the Stephenson County Farm Bureau through Farm Bureau's Adopt-a-Legislator® program.



State Representative Anthony DeLuca, pictured right, visits with members (L to R) Rebecca Biernacki, Kim Morton, and Janet McCabe during the Statewide Legislative Reception. DeLuca represents southern portions of Cook County and northern portions of Will County.



A Look at Legislation...

The Governmental Affairs & Commodities (GAC) Team and Cook County Farm Bureau continues to monitor and engage on key issues impacting Illinois agriculture at both the state and federal levels. Below is an update on budget developments and important federal action.

State Update: Governor's FY27 Proposed Budget

Governor J.B. Pritzker delivered his State of the State and introduced his FY27 budget proposal, totaling \$131.8 billion, with \$56.03 billion in General Revenue Funds, which is the portion most directly controlled by the General Assembly.

The proposal reflects:

- \$56 billion in estimated revenues (1.5% increase from FY26)
- A projected \$24 million surplus
- A \$878 million (1.7%) increase in General Funds spending
- \$10.7 billion in required pension payments
- Continued childcare and early childhood investments
- Revenue proposals include:
 - A new Social Media Digital Platform Fee projected to generate \$200 million annually for education
 - Casino gaming tax adjustments (+\$120M projected)
 - A phased Net Operating Loss deduction cap (+\$269M projected)

Major highlights include:

- \$9.2 billion for K-12 education (+\$305M evidence-based funding)
- \$721.6 million for MAP grants (serving ~150,000 students)
- \$8.9 billion for Healthcare & Family Services (Medicaid)

Agriculture & Energy Notes:

- Maintains staffing for Illinois Department of Agriculture regulatory functions, including meat and poultry inspection.
- Executive Order 2026-01 initiates review of new nuclear energy development following repeal of Illinois' nuclear moratorium under the Clean and Reliable Grid Affordability Act. Agencies will evaluate siting, safety standards, and regulatory updates. Participation by communities is expected to remain voluntary.

The General Assembly now begins several months of budget negotiations before the May 31 deadline. IFB will continue monitoring changes as legislative priorities evolve.

Federal Update: 2026 Farm Bill ("Farm Bill 2.0")

The House Agriculture Committee moved the legislation out of committee. Illinois Farm Bureau supports the legislation.

Key provisions include:

- A legislative fix to Proposition 12
- Strengthened disaster programs (including specialty crops)
- Improvements to dairy risk management tools
- Increased funding for trade promotion programs (MAP & FMD)
- Updated loan limits and expanded support for beginning and veteran farmers
- Expanded rural broadband access
- Stronger reporting on foreign-owned farmland

Floerke Represents CCFB on DC Lobbying Trip

Elijah Floerke, Cook County Farm Bureau Young Leader and past Howard Paarlberg Excellence in Agriculture scholarship recipient, represented the organization by participating in the Illinois Farm Bureau Leaders to Washington DC lobbying trip in March. He joined the other leaders of the group in advocating for passage of a farm bill, solutions to escalating input costs for farmers, agricultural trade and shipping.

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

MICHAEL BECKETT – AGENT

Country Financial has had a long-standing history of working alongside the Cook County Farm Bureau to provide resources and support to our client base. I believe the best way to help my clients is by truly understanding their lives, their work, and what matters most to them. Whether I'm helping a farming family, a couple looking at retirement, or a young family just getting started. I always want to help my clients by taking the time to understand their unique situations and the risks they face – especially those in the farming community. Agriculture is full of uncertainty, and having the right protection in place can make a big difference for a family and their livelihood. I work closely with my clients to make sure they have coverage that fits their needs today while also helping them think about the future, including protecting their families, farms, and legacies for the next generation. My goal is to be someone my clients can rely on – not just when they need a policy, but whenever they need guidance or have questions along the way.



I love being able to give back to my community however I can, both personally and professionally. I am very involved with the Manhattan Patriots, our local football and cheerleading program. My son has played flag and tackle football for years, and my two daughters are both cheerleaders there. I am entering into my second year as a volunteer coach, and it has been so fulfilling to be on the field giving back to our local youth, instilling in them the balance or responsibility, discipline and foundational skills, while also exemplifying the love of the game! It also has given me a unique and positive opportunity to connect with more families right in our community.

I also support Breakthrough T1D. My son, Carson, was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes at age 3, and now at age 10, we are still learning so much and benefitting from the advocacy and fundraising that Breakthrough T1D does for families. My agency is happy to support their annual Breakthrough T1D walk as a "Brighter Future Sponsor", where I represent Beckett Insurance – Country Financial proudly. As a business owner and a father. I'm immensely grateful for the opportunity to

connect and contribute to the communities that I care about.

17605 S Oak Park Ave Ste C, Tinley Park, IL 60477

Office Phone: 815-230-6522
Cell Phone: 815-230-6522
michael.beckett@countryfinancial.com

with COUNTRY Financial since August 2025

WORD OF THE Month



GROWING COMMUNITY

Meet the 2026 Urban Garden Grant Recipients

The 2026 Cook County Farm Bureau Community Garden Grant Committee (four experienced volunteers), reviewed applications from twenty community gardens and selected six outstanding recipients. Please meet this year's recipients:

- **Respond Now Community Garden**, located in Chicago Heights, has a primary purpose to supplement Respond Now's food pantry with freshly grown and harvested produce and increasing pantry clients' access to nutritious food. The garden also serves as a gathering place for volunteers and community members, where discussions about food security, gardening, and services are provided by Respond Now. Grant funds will be used for vegetable seeds, plantings and starters, compost, mulch, and garden supplies.
- **69th & Stewart Garden**, located in Chicago's Englewood neighborhood, is a community-based garden created to cultivate a safe, welcoming outdoor space to serve local families, youth,

and residents who have limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables. The garden also serves as a space to educate, provide youth engagement, and wellness centered programming while beautifying the underutilized lot. Grant funds will be used for vegetable seeds, seedlings, soil, compost, straw mulch, and garden supplies.

- **Jen Jensen Youth Educational Gardens** at Eckhart Park, located in Chicago's Noble Square Eckhart Park neighborhood, is a volunteer-led, hands-on food production garden. The space is designed as an outdoor classroom connecting kids to nature, culture, and community, while growing and harvesting nutritious food, ecology, global food origin, and shared stewardship of public space. Grant funds will be used for vegetable seeds, starter plants soil, garden tools, and supplies.
- **The Rising Garden**, located in Forest Park, is a community garden, where garden volunteers from Freedom RISE look to serve local residents, youth, and seniors living in communities impacted by food insecurity and limited access to fresh produce. This learning garden distributes fresh fruit, vegetables, and herbs, while providing hands-on learning in the areas of gardening, nutrition, leadership, and environmental stewardship. Grant funds will be used for soil, root vegetable and herb seeds, mulch, vegetable seedling plants, and garden supplies.
- **Phoenix Farms, NFP**, located in Chicago's Woodlawn neighborhood is a community driven urban ag initiative, cultivating pollinator habitats, developing food forest systems and providing equitable access to fresh,

local produce. The garden is open and accessible to area residents receiving fresh produce as well as First Presbyterian Church food pantry. Education is central to the garden's mission, home to learning on all age levels. Grant funds will be used for fruit bushes, fruit trees, pollinator seeds, garden tools, and supplies.

- **Schaumburg Food Pantry Garden**, located on a church lot in Schaumburg, is a volunteer-ran food production garden, serving Schaumburg and Hanover Township Food Pantries averaging 3000 lbs of food production in the last two years. The garden is also home to educational programs to local residents and is a designated local Monarch Waystation pollinator garden also home to a large compost system. Funds will be used for fruit trees, potato seeds, seedlings, plant starters, onion sets, fertilizer, and supplies.

While we cannot provide financial grants to the remaining 14 gardens who applied, our hope is that you may provide assistance to a deserving garden near you. Please consider supporting River Roots Garden, Chicago; Oak Lawn Community HS Garden, Oak Lawn; All Things Through Christ Comm Garden of Hope, Chicago; Three Brothers Garden, Chicago; Thomas Middle School Soil-Mates Garden, Arlington Heights; Tri-Village Garden Club Pantry Garden, Bartlett; Lemont Township Community Garden, Lemont; Green Thumb in a Box, Chicago; Roots Community Garden, Palatine; Evergreen Park Urban Barn, Evergreen Park; Chicago FarmWorks, Chicago; Community Roots Garden NFP, Chicago; and Little Buds Garden, Des Plaines. Congratulations to all the gardens and we wish you a bountiful growing season.

Cook County Farm Bureau members can save up to 20% on hotel stays!



Call our office at 708-354-3276 for discount codes or download BenefitHub (your member benefit platform) Details available at www.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

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

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.

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**.

4 Uniroyal Tiger Paw tires 255x55x20" Rim. Only used for 1,200 miles. \$375 for all. Call Donald **847-358-0972**

Flygt Model #2610.172 commercial grade heavy duty dewatering/ditch pump. 1.3 hp, 115V, 3400 RPM. 2" discharge pump with starter and 150' of 2" discharge hose in good working condition. Asking \$475. Call or text **708-516-5695**, Pictures available online.

R-22 Freon for sale. 2 - 30lb tanks. \$750 each. Call Richard **708-363-2208**. Pictures available online.

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 game systems: Atari, Nintendo, Magnavox, Odyssey, ColecoVision, Intellivision, etc. Also boomboxes wanted. Call Jim **708-361-8230**

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

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.

<p>This month "V"</p>	<p>VANILLA BEAN</p> 
<p>Vanilla beans are long and skinny seed pods, measuring 12 to 17 centimeters in length, and bear a dark brown hue.</p>	<p>The pod's skin is soft, spongy, and flexible, with long, defined ridges.</p>
<p>When split open, the pod releases tiny black specks inside a sticky and gelatinous filling.</p>	<p>Scrape the black specks from the sides of the pod to be used.</p>
	<p>VANILLA BEANS HAVE A SWEET AND PLEASANT AROMA WITH FLORAL AND WOODY NOTES.</p>
<p>Vanilla beans are used across many cultures to flavor and sweeten desserts, beverages, and many other foods.</p>	<p>Vanilla beans are available year-round.</p> 
<p>ONE VANILLA BEAN POD IS EQUAL TO 1 TEASPOON OF EXTRACT.</p> 	<p>The beans add a more robust and complex vanilla flavor without the aftertaste of alcohol and chemicals often associated with extracts.</p>

Source: https://specialtyproduce.com/produce/Vanilla_Bean_787.php



RURAL NURSE PRACTITIONER

Scholarship PROGRAM



ILLINOIS FARM BUREAU
Farm. Family. Food.™

RIMSAP.com
Helping to meet the needs of primary care in rural Illinois.

DEADLINE IS MAY 1

RIMSAP Scholarship Program Available

This is a scholarship through Illinois Farm Bureau and is for those who are looking to be a nurse. The Rural Nurse Practitioner Scholarship Program offers various \$4,000 scholarship to support students accepted into a Nurse Practitioner program.

- 15 scholarships are available at \$4,000
 - Applications are due on May 1st
 - To apply, visit www.rimsap.com.
- Please consider sharing this with anyone you might know who fits the criteria!

Area Ag Roundup

SWCD Spring 2026 Tree Sale

The Will-South Cook Soil and Water Conservation District is now taking orders for the Spring 2026 Tree 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.

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.

Are you — or someone you know — making waves in food and agriculture?

Farm Foundation is now accepting nominations for the 2026 Young Agri-Food Leaders Program, a fully funded, yearlong leadership experience designed for emerging leaders across the U.S. food and agriculture system. They're looking for professionals ages 25-40 who are shaping the future of the agri-food value chain, whether in farming, agribusiness, food production, research, supply chains, technology, sustainability, or beyond.

Participants in the program will:

- Join a national cohort of rising agri-food leaders

- Participate in monthly virtual leadership sessions
- Attend the Farm Foundation Round Table (June 15-18, St. Louis) alongside ~250 C-suite leaders in food and agriculture
- Attend the Farm Foundation Next Gen Summit (September 2026, Libertyville, IL)
- Be paired with a senior agri-food mentor for career guidance
- Build a lasting professional network across the food system

Nominations may come from supervisors, colleagues, mentors - or you can nominate yourself.

Nominations close April 14, 2026

Learn more and submit a nomination: <https://www.farmfoundation.org/young-agri-food-leaders>

Illinois Extension Offers Legal Series to Empower Farmers to Strengthen Safeguard Operations

Legal Training for Illinois Small Farms Webinar Schedule

April 14, 2026 – Land Leasing Basics

June 9, 2026 – 5 Steps to Protect Your Farm, Legally Speaking

There is no cost to register for the series, but registration is required for all events at go.illinois.edu/FarmLegalSeries.

Each session begins at 6 p.m. and lasts 45 minutes, followed by 15 minutes for questions.

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**

Beginning Beekeeping Course at the CCFB: *RESCHEDULED*

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 Soltész, President of Cook DuPage Beekeepers Association.

LOCATION: Cook County Farm Bureau
NEW DATES: Saturday & Sunday, April 11 & 12, 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 CDDBA. \$150.00 for non-members (ask how to join)

Herbs and Healing: Ancestral Plant Medicine

Plants have been used as medicine for thousands of years by cultures around the world. Many of these plants have been studied scientifically for their actions, and 20-40% of modern medications are derived from plants. This workshop offers a window into ancestral relationships with healing plants. Participants will learn about specific herbs and traditional uses, while reflecting on healing as a cultural, spiritual, and community-based process. Presented by Community Health Extension Educator Dr. Leilah Siegel. **This event is free!**

LOCATION: Cook County Farm Bureau
DATE: Tuesday April 21, 2026
TIME: 10:30 – 11:30 a.m.
REGISTRATION: Registration for select sessions by calling the CCFB at 708-354-3276; email ccfb@cookcfb.org with session and contact name.

From Patio to Plate: Edible Gardening in Small Spaces

Discover how to grow fresh, flavorful food—even when space is limited. This workshop introduces smart space saving strategies such as vertical gardening, succession planting, and square foot gardening. You'll also learn the basics of growing vegetables and herbs, along with practical tips for productive container and raised bed gardening. Presenter: Nancy Kreith, Horticulture Educator, University of Illinois Extension. **This is a free event!**

LOCATION: Cook County Farm Bureau
DATE: Tuesday April 21, 2026
TIME: 12:30 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.
REGISTRATION: Registration for select sessions by calling the CCFB at 708-354-3276; email ccfb@cookcfb.org with session and contact name.

Member Horticulture & Wellbeing Event at the CCFB

Event will feature:

- Two free Horticulture for well-being centered classes – registration required
- Drop-in Master Gardener Help Desk onsite to assist with your gardening questions
- Soil Testing Program information and kits for sale; Health from the Hive info
- Information on health-based member benefits and discounts offered by the Farm Bureau, with assistance on signing up – drop in
- Drop in to learn about the Member Benefit Platform info and set up assistance on your phone or device

Earth Day Party: A Family Connections Event

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!

LOCATION: Cook County Farm Bureau
DATE: Wednesday, April 22, 2026
TIME: 4 - 5 p.m. – 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.

BINGO!!!

Join us for some fun while supporting agriculture and community. We will play 15 BINGO games and will have prizes and refreshments. Open to members, families, and friends.

LOCATION: Cook County Farm Bureau
DATE: Thursday, April 23, 2026
TIME: 1:00 p.m.
FEE: \$10.00 for CCFB members, \$15.00 for Non-Members
REGISTRATION: Call 708-354-3276 to register. Walk-ins welcome.

Ask a Farmer & Coffee with Bob

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. They are truly looking forward to talking with all the members who are able to attend. Join us for refreshments and giveaways!

LOCATION: Cook County Farm Bureau
DATE: Friday, April 24, 2026
TIME: 8:00 – 10:00 a.m.
REGISTRATION: Walk-ins welcome.

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
DATE: Monday, April 27, 2026
TIME: 6:00 – 7:30 p.m.
FEE: Members - \$15.00 for one soap or \$25.00 for two soaps, Non-Members - \$20 for one or \$30 for 2
REGISTRATION: Call the Farm Bureau at 708-354-3276 or go online to the Member Center at www.cookcfb.org.

Grow Where You Are:

Container Gardening for Small & Inner-City Spaces

2-hour beginner-friendly gardening workshop focused on food production in containers and raised beds that are off the ground, making it accessible to seniors and individuals with disabilities or limited mobility. Participants will bring their own containers to encourage sustainability and reuse. Soil, planting materials, and educational resources will be provided on-site. Instruction will emphasize practical success for apartment dwellers, condo residents, and households with small or shared outdoor spaces.

FACILITATOR: Green Thumb In A Box, Paulette
LOCATION: Church parking lot, Chicago (inner-city neighborhood) Greater Bethesda Missionary Baptist Church, Pastor David Watkins III
DATE: Saturday, May 30, 2026
TIME: 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
FEE: \$35.00
REGISTRATION: Registration and payment is required in advance by credit card or ACH by calling 708-354-3276 or CCFB members online via Member Account at: <https://www.myifb.org/Account/LogIn?ReturnUrl=%2f>

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!

TUESDAY – Member Horticulture & Wellbeing

WEDNESDAY – Earth Day Party

THURSDAY – BINGO

FRIDAY – Ask a Farmer and Coffee with Bob

Must be a member paid in good standing to enter. Scan the QR Code 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:

Name: _____ Phone: _____
 Email: _____ Member #: _____