



# COOK COUNTY CO-OPERATOR

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

## Mark Your Calendar

### May

- 4 Membership Monday **PG 12**
- 30 Container Gardening for Small & Inner City Spaces **PG 12**

### June

- 23 Annual Pollinator Event at Lincoln Park Zoo
- 27 Niles Township Pollinator Garden Grand Opening

### July

- 15 DIY Summer Barn Quilt Workshop **PG 12**
- 15 Photo Contest Deadline **PG 10**

For participation details on these programs and activities, check out the related information in this publication, go to [www.cookcfb.org](http://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](http://www.cookcfb.org).

## Question of the Month

**What is the name of the new Cook County Farm Bureau staff member who focuses on Governmental Affairs and Engagement for the organization?**

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

**April Winner: Henry Dill**

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

**Answer: Elijah Floerke**

## Word of the Month

Because we enjoy talking with our members, we are changing things up a little bit. Somewhere in each edition of the *Co-Operator* 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 May 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!

**April Winner: Vic Maurello**

March word was Spring found on PG 10.

## Young Leaders Gain Lobbying Skills

See more Young Leaders photos on Page 2



The Cook County Farm Bureau Young Leaders and several Members of the State Young Leaders Committee sat down with Senator Bill Cunningham, Senate district 18 in Chicago and SW Suburbs to discuss key agriculture issues and share their agriculture journey. Pictured R to L: Senator Cunningham, Aria Lockhart, Blake Lanphier, Carmen Trotta, Jennifer Miller, Michael Bernhart and Doug Yunker.

Members of the Cook County Farm Bureau Young Leaders Team took time out of their busy business schedules to travel to Springfield to visit the state capital on March 25. During the day, they visited with legislators on key agricultural issues and learned more about the capital and the Illinois legislative process.

Young leaders participating included Blake Lanphier, Aria Lockhart, Jennifer Miller, Carmen Trotta, and Doug Yunker. Helping to support the group was Cook County Farm Bureau manager Bob Rohrer.

## Soil Testing Kits Available This Spring

ADDITIONAL SAVINGS FOR MEMBERS!

Cook County Farm Bureau offers both members and non-members an opportunity to test their garden or lawn soil by purchasing a soil testing kit. Soil, in its natural state, is rarely fertile enough for the best growth of plants. Usually, it is necessary to supplement the earth's store of plant nutrients before we can obtain the most vigorous lawn, the most abundant and brilliant flowers, the most aesthetically satisfying trees/shrubs, and the greatest yield of tasty and nutritious vegetables or crops.

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.**

## 2026 Recipe Collection IS HERE

This year's booklet is full of great recipes calling for the season's best of local produce.

Be sure to visit a Farm Bureau member Ag location and pick up the freshest, finest local produce area farmers have to offer to make these great recipes.



2026 Recipe Collection



## Who Says There Is No Agriculture Located in Cook County?



CHECK OUT THE DATA & INFO AT:

<https://cookcfb.org/discover-local/resources/ag-resources/profile/growing-cook-county-where-agriculture-meets-innovation-and-impact>

# Unlock the Basics of Parliamentary Procedure!

Want to run more efficient, organized, and productive meetings? Join members of the Cook County Farm Bureau Young Leaders Team for an engaging introduction to parliamentary procedure!



**Tuesday, May 26**  
**6:30 PM – 8:00 PM**

Cook County Farm Bureau Building 6438 Joliet Rd., Countryside, IL 60525

**Pre-registration required by Friday, May 22**

Call the Cook County Farm Bureau to reserve your spot or email [ccfb@cookcfb.org](mailto:ccfb@cookcfb.org)

**Instructors:**  
Danelle Burrs  
Madison Hawkins  
Training Division – IFB

**Don't miss this opportunity to build skills that will elevate your meetings and leadership effectiveness.**

## Young Leaders

Continued from Page 1



**L to R: Doug Yunker, Carmen Trotta, Jennifer Miller, Aria Lockhart, and Blake Lanphier met with Representative Tom Weber serving House District 64.**



**L to R: Representative La Ha, House District 82, sat down with Jennifer Miller, Doug Yunker, Aria Lockhart, Blake Lanphier and Carmen Trotta to discuss Farm Bureau positions on issues and to float an educational partnership concept in her district to teach about seed saving and vegetable planting.**

## 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...

- Our 179 active CCFB volunteers provide skills, knowledge, wisdom, enthusiasm, and leadership to the organization. The Cook County Farm Bureau donated \$1750 to the CCFB Foundation for enhancing Agricultural Literacy in Cook County during the April 20-24 National Volunteer Appreciation Week in recognition of our valuable volunteers' efforts.
- Foundation scholarship recipients Addison McGlaughlin, Leah Sheehan, Lilliana Bernabei, Lindsey Bycraft, Cameron Conroy, Alex Murr, Isabella Yarc, Martin Dwyer, and Jennifer Miller for participating in meetings with Board of Directors to discuss agricultural career aspirations.
- Elijah Floerke, Young Leader, for attending the April Board of Directors meeting to review his Illinois Farm Bureau Leaders to Washington, D.C. experience and takeaways.
- Young leaders Aria Lockhart, Carmen Trotta, Doug Yunker, Blake Lanphier, and Jennifer Miller for traveling to Springfield to participate in a lobby day in the state capital.
- The hundreds of members who participated in the Cook County Farm Bureau Member Appreciation Week held April 20 -24. We appreciate the opportunity to serve you.
- University of Illinois Extension staff: Dr. Leilah Siegel, Community Health Educator and Nancy Kreith, Horticulture Educator, for presenting excellent horticulture programming and Margaret Burns-Westmeyer, South Sub Master Gardener Coordinator, and Master Gardener Help Desk volunteers, Sandy, Christine, Lou, Valerie, Mary, and Ed for serving members and the community at the Farm Bureau on April 21.
- The many volunteers and Chicago High School for Ag Sciences students for serving as presenters, group leaders, and educational assistants at our April 7 Ag Day where we hosted several hundred elementary students. Thank you to The Children's Farm in Palos Park for hosting the successful events!
- Board members Gerry Kopping and Mark Yunker for taking time out of their busy schedules to recertify as certified directors with the Illinois Farm Bureau.
- Members Leah Walton, Shirley Lausted, and Janet Lence for sending us such nice notes.
- Candidate for Cook County Commissioner Kiana Belcher for sending a nice note of appreciation in response to the PAC support.
- Therese Landschoot for helping with our Earth Day Party on April 22.

### Welcome All Members!

You receive the Co-Operator because you are a Cook County Farm Bureau member. If you are a farm operator, owner, or urban producer, you benefit from a local, state and national organization committed to agriculture and your way of life.

If you work in the field of agriculture, your membership is helping to support the various areas of agriculture and agribusiness that start at the farm and end at the table.

If you do not have direct ties to farming, your membership helps promote local farms and farming, encourages wise use of our limited natural resources and helps preserve farmland and our agricultural heritage.

All members have access to 302 membership benefits, information and helpful tools that enhance your membership value and experience.

**Thank you for your membership!**

## Co-Operator

Published Monthly

### Cook County Farm Bureau

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# Downwind

by **BOB ROHRER, CCFB MANAGER**



## “Compare and Contrast”

### The Underachiever:

Growing up on the farm, you would have thought that I would've taken advantage of all the amazing gifts available to me. I had gifts in buckets. Great parents and family. Strong farm experiences. A supportive community. School and church. Quality organizations with open arms including 4-H and FFA seeking to build leaders.

Nope - I was more concerned about myself and my sports/entertainment than putting any passion into better farming and leadership development. I preferred to hang out with my friends over putting overtime into the farm.

As a kid working on the farm, I was mostly a simple farm laborer. I went to college with a mission to escape the farm. Ingrate

Someone should have hit me in the head. Hard. With a ball peen hammer. All those moments and chances to better myself, the family farm and agriculture in general. Wasted. Slacker.

I contrast my youthful past with the young people I come in contact today through Cook County Farm Bureau.

### The Overachievers:

Today's generation, like every generation before it, gets a bad rap. It's not a fair rap based on the young people I've become acquainted with in recent years through my Farm Bureau work (except the "addicted to technology" part).

Many of these young people I meet have a dream. A dream to farm. A dream to help farmers.

That farm dream requires commitment, perseverance, opportunity and a bit of luck.

That dream is difficult. They must ignore the naysayers. Scratch and claw. Persevere.

- I meet Urban Highschoolers seeking farm careers. We see it at FFA events and within our Farm Shadows activities as they share their farm goals.
- Our CCFB Foundation scholarship recipients have upped their game... getting connected and making a difference. They are joining Farm Bureau and seeking to get involved. My heart fills with pride...Daniel stopping in to tell me his near-future ranching plans following college this spring. Elijah reporting on his DC experience to the board. Scholarship winners sitting down with the board for conversation to help chart a course for the next generation of Young Leaders.
- The Young Leaders Team is growing with its members doing more and more. I had a wonderful state capitol experience this spring with Blake, Aria, Carmen, Doug and Jennifer in Springfield. What fun to "run" around the Capitol meeting with legislators and listening to these Young Leaders tell their stories.

I consider all the Young Leaders work and team efforts over the last couple years on the Food Checkout Day hygiene drive with its significance to the people of area communities served by food pantries. The key - young members like Jennifer, Jonny, Carmen, Rebecca, Doug and Blake have expanded their leadership and influence.

I see a hunger for leadership, learning and growth...British, Kayla, Thomas, Angelica, Jessica, Justin, Mathew and so many others.

These young people have sought a difficult path in order to try to fulfill their full agricultural dream. And they are reaching success.

Many "point" to the importance of their Cook County Farm Bureau connections and some even thank me personally.

Compare and contrast.

What was I thinking when I had so many gifts in front of me when I was their age? What would these young people of today give to have the opportunities I had in my youth? It makes me want to help them all the more to make up for the past.

The future of Cook County Farm Bureau is here and it is now. My ask of members...Support this youth renaissance within the Cook County Farm Bureau. Encourage these and other young people to follow their hearts along the path of agriculture.

Help them fulfill their Farm Dreams!

\* \* \*

I'm wondering if Cook County Farm Bureau is "evil". Bear with me as I run the flow chart leading to my suspicion...

1. CCFB seeks to serve members with great programs and workshops.
2. CCFB offered a workshop on the sourdough craze.
3. I mentioned the workshop to my wife.
4. My wife, with excitement, attended the workshop on sourdough.
5. My wife came home with a sourdough starter jar and has been "feeding" it ever since (whatever that means).
6. My wife has used the sourdough to make pretzels, cheese crackers, pancakes, chocolate chip cookies, breadsticks and loaves of bread. Learning. Creating. The cinnamon rolls were divine.
7. I have recklessly and joyfully consumed lion's share of the above. It's a gift or an addiction.
8. I have gained 5 pounds centered around my core. Make it 10.
9. I conclude "that is evil". And, it all started with the Cook County Farm Bureau.

### Dear Cook County IFB Board Members,

We want to extend our heartfelt thank you to each of you for the incredible support you've shown our son, Elijah. The scholarship assistance meant more to us than words can express, but what truly stands out is everything you've given him beyond financial support.

From the very beginning, the Cook County Farm Bureau believed in Elijah. Your encouragement, guidance, and willingness to invest in him as a young person growing in agriculture helped fuel his confidence and deepen his passion for this industry. Being surrounded by people who genuinely care about the future of agriculture-and the youth who will lead it-has made a lasting impact on him.

Elijah has grown tremendously through his involvement with this amazing group, and we are so grateful for the opportunities, connections, and sense of belonging you've provided. It has reinforced his love for agriculture and helped shape the person he is becoming.

As a family, we truly value the Cook County Farm Bureau and hope to continue our involvement for years to come. Thank you for believing in Elijah and for all that you do to support young people and agriculture in our community.

With sincere appreciation,

*Jeff & Janelle*



### Elijah Floerke,

Cook County Farm Bureau Young Leader and Scholarship Recipient, met with the Board of Directors in April to present his takeaways and respond to questions regarding the March Illinois Farm Bureau Leaders to Washington DC trip with other state leaders.

## Recipe of the Month

### Lemony ORZO WITH GRILLED SHRIMP & ASPARAGUS

Jodi Shield, Farm Flavor *Makes 6 Servings*

#### INGREDIENTS

- 6 T olive oil, divided
- 4 T fresh lemon juice of 1 lg lemon, divided
- Zest of 1 lemon
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/2 t salt
- 1/4 t black pepper
- 2 c water
- 1/4 t turmeric
- 1 1/2 c whole wheat orzo, uncooked
- 6 T Parmesan cheese, grated
- 1 lb fresh asparagus, ends trimmed
- 2 c low-sodium chicken broth
- 1 lb raw jumbo shrimp (15-18 count), peeled, deveined and tails removed

#### DIRECTIONS

In a small bowl, combine ¼ cup oil, 2 tablespoons lemon juice, lemon zest, garlic, salt, and pepper. Whisk until the dressing emulsifies a bit. Set aside. Place the shrimp in a medium bowl. Pour the remaining 2 tablespoons oil and 2 tablespoons lemon juice over the shrimp and toss to coat. Set aside to marinate. Lay the asparagus stalks in a 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Pour boiling water over the asparagus (just enough to cover). Cover the dish with plastic wrap and let sit for about 10 minutes. Drain the water and cut the asparagus stalks into 2-inch pieces. In a large pot, combine the chicken broth and water and bring to a boil. Add the turmeric and orzo and cook until tender, about 10 minutes. Drain the orzo but do not rinse. Transfer orzo to a large bowl. Add the asparagus and lemon dressing and toss to combine. Preheat grill to high. Remove shrimp from marinade and place on grill. Grill until pink and opaque, about 2 to 3 minutes per side. Divide the orzo mixture evenly between 6 serving bowls. Top each serving with grilled shrimp and Parmesan. Serve warm.

*Tips: Save time by preparing the lemon dressing and marinating the shrimp in advance. Grill shrimp on pre-soaked bamboo skewers for a festive presentation.*



To receive a copy of the **2026 Recipe Collection** booklet, please email your contact info to [ccfb@cookcfb.org](mailto:ccfb@cookcfb.org), call the CCFB at 708-354-3276, or visit a participating member farmstand or Ag business this spring, summer, or fall.

## Family Farm, and Food Bytes

### Chicago Pickle Festival May 9, Chicago

(IFB Partners Magazine)

Chicago's Wrigleyville neighborhood welcomes pickle lovers in early May for a day of food and fun at the Chicago pickle Festival. Taking place from noon to 6 PM, this street festival features live bands and DJs, giveaways, pickle photo ops, pickle beer, pickle cocktails, and plenty of special pickle – themed food items. Sample everything from fried pickles and dill pickle potato chips to pickle-stuffed quesadillas, pickle pizza, pickle doughnuts and much more. All guests must be 21 or over. [chicagopicklefest.weebly.com](http://chicagopicklefest.weebly.com)

### USDA: Most Landlords Are Non-Farmers

(FarmWeekNow)

More than 2 million landowners rented out 348 million acres of farmland nationwide in 2024, according to the tenure, ownership and transition agricultural land (TOTAL) survey released March 12 by USDA.

And, of those acres rented out, 79% are owned by non-farming landlords and more than half (52%) have never farmed. The average age of these landlords is 69.2 years while only 12% of all principal landlords are under 55 years old.

The TOTAL survey also found about 5% of the nearly 900 million U.S. farmland acres (about 43 million) are slated for ownership transfer in the next five years, not including land expected to be put in wills or trusts.

### Illinois Land Values Simmer, for Now

(Rhiannon Branch, FarmWeek)

The 2026 Land Values and Lease Trends Report saw a shift in narrative from recent years, with 61% of survey respondents expecting a decline in farmland prices this year, signaling a potential plateau in the market.

However, the report, conducted annually by the Illinois Society of Professional Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers (ISPFMRA), indicates the downturn could be short lived with most respondents expecting farmland prices to increase in the next five years. And prices are still substantially higher than historical averages.

Free digital copies of the full report are available online at [ispfmra.org](http://ispfmra.org).

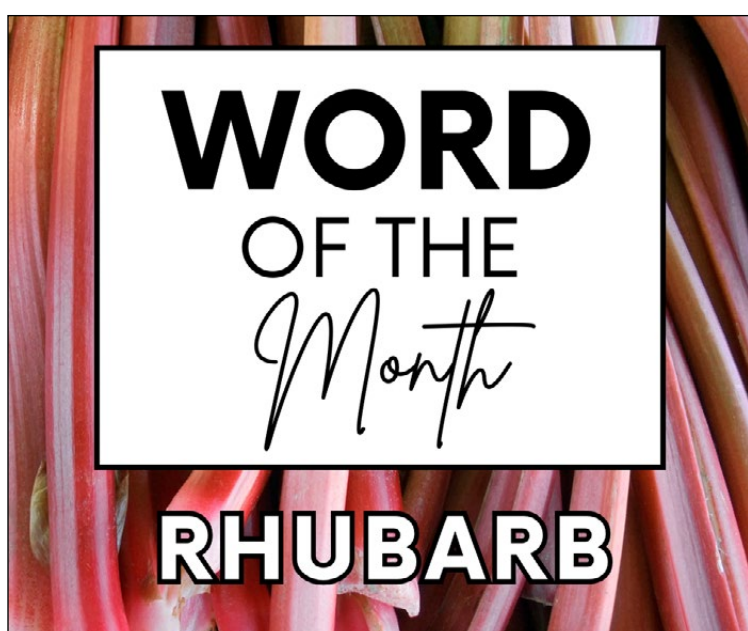
### Food, Ag Generate One-Fifth of Economic Output in USA

(American Farm Bureau Federation)

The 2026 Feeding the Economy report estimates \$10.4 trillion in economic output is tied to food and agriculture, accounting for roughly one-fifth of all U.S. economic activity. Illinois' food and ag output is set at \$486 billion, according to the report representing 24% of the total state economic output.

For details: <https://feedingtheeconomy.com>

**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.



# HOW FARM BUREAU SERVED YOU IN APRIL

- ▶ Hosted a Horticulture for Wellness event where participants learned about herbs and gealing plants as well as edible gardening in small spaces, while offering on-site Extension Master Gardener Help Desk.
- ▶ Held a soapmaking workshop where participants crafted their own natural soap and learned about the history of soap and soapmaking.
- ▶ Hosted students at an Ag Day event at The Children's Farm in Palos Park. Students, teachers, and chaperones learned about agriculture by visiting eight learning stations with bees, plants, livestock, and even worms.
- ▶ Celebrated our CCFB members during Member Appreciation Week! We truly value and appreciate your support. Thank you!
- ▶ Awarded \$2,100 in grant awards to six community gardens in Cook County, highlighting grant use at CCFB member Ag locations.
- ▶ Made the 2026 Recipe Collection available to members.



## GRANT UPDATE: New Collaboration with Global Gardens



Bob Rohrer meets with Jessica Davis, Development and Programs Manager for the Global Garden Refugee Training Farm, to discuss the upcoming pollinator project.

CCFB Manager Bob Rohrer and Mary Ann Martinez, Director of Governmental Affairs and Engagement, recently met with Global Gardens to collaborate on a project funded by the Illinois Farm Bureau Pollinator Conservation Grant. This partnership introduces custom signage that educates the community on how pollinators are the essential link between local agriculture and environmental conservation.

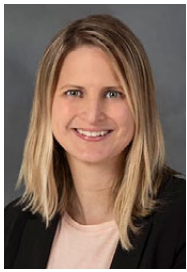
Global Gardens leases the land from the Chicago Park District and has been collaborating with them on garden plans, including coordination around site use and plant selection. This project also supports CPD's "Project Monarch" to raise awareness of and protect monarch butterfly habitat.

A community event is planned for later this summer or fall.



Jessica Davis (center) leads a tour of the farm, introducing Bob and Mary Ann to the market farmers and highlighting the site for the new grant-funded signage.

# Putting Members First: IAACU's Partnership for Small Business Growth



Jennifer Killian

National Small Business Week, hosted by the U.S. Small Business Administration, takes place May 3–9, 2026, and celebrates the impact of small businesses

nationwide. In recognition of National Small Business Month, IAA Credit Union (IAACU) is proud to highlight its ongoing commitment to supporting entrepreneurs. IAACU provides personalized financial services, including easy-to-use business checking accounts and a range of loan options to help your business grow, remain sustainable, and achieve long-term success. This commitment aligns with the Illinois Farm Bureau's shared legacy of trust, service, and

community support. Together, IAACU and the Illinois Farm Bureau maintain a strong partnership focused on putting members and local businesses first.

## Comprehensive Business Solutions

IAACU offers several services designed to support small businesses with varying needs:

- **Business Lending:** Understanding the specific challenges of small businesses, IAACU provides a selection of loan products, including:
  - **Owner and Non-Owner-Occupied Real Estate Loans:** These loans help businesses purchase or refinance commercial property.
  - **Equipment Loans:** Businesses can secure funding to buy or refinance essential equipment and vehicles.

- **Operating and Asset-Backed Lines of Credit:** With these flexible lines of credit, companies can manage daily expenses or use assets to fuel growth.
- **IFB VISA Credit Card:** Features the classic IFB design; a portion of each purchase supports the IAA Foundation's Ag in the Classroom. In 2025, the card contributed \$9,500 to Illinois Agriculture in the Classroom.
- **Business Checking Account:** IAACU's Simple Business Checking Account features no monthly fees and offers the first 100 transactions free each month. Account holders can manage their finances seamlessly online or via mobile devices, and benefit from free bill pay services.

IAACU continues to serve as a dependable financial institution by providing customized services and competitive products. With innovative banking solutions, IAACU is committed to supporting businesses and contributing to the strength of the communities it serves.



Visit [www.iaacu.org/business](http://www.iaacu.org/business) to learn more about how we can help your business grow.

## DISCOVER LOCAL

Join Cook County Farm Bureau® in supporting our local agricultural member businesses. Our online member listing is a great resource – easily accessible and updated with the most accurate information.

Discover local at <https://cookcfb.org/discover-local/discover-local>

For a paper Discover Local listing, contact the CCFB at 708-354-3276 or email: [ccfb@cookcfb.org](mailto:ccfb@cookcfb.org).

## SHOP LOCAL

Calling all Ag producers & consumers: Our Shop Local directory provides simple yet powerful search tools to connect growers, buyers, sellers, and consumers. Join and register your business today. Whether you are a farmer looking to reach new customers or a consumer looking for fresh produce, local dairy, or a brewery in your area, our Shop Local directory is a MUST-HAVE resource!

Visit us at <https://cookcfb.org/discover-local/shop-local>

**Not a part of the directory?** Register your local food or farm business today at <https://foodmarketmaker.com/registration>.

## Ag Innovation Challenge Opens: \$100K for Top Entrepreneur



The American Farm Bureau Federation, in partnership with Farm Credit, is accepting online applications from entrepreneurs for the **2027 Farm Bureau Ag Innovation Challenge** through June 5. Now in its 13th year, this national business competition showcases U.S. startup companies developing innovative solutions to challenges faced by America's farmers, ranchers and rural communities.

The overall winner of the competition will receive \$100,000 in startup funds, the runner-up will be awarded \$25,000 and two additional business owners who advance to the final four round will receive \$10,000. "Encouraging innovation is essential to keeping American agriculture strong," said AFBF President Zippy Duvall. "If you're building a business that can help farmers and rural communities thrive, don't wait, apply today."

Farm Bureau is offering a total of \$145,000 in startup funds throughout the course of the competition. After the application period closes on June 5, 10 semi-finalist teams will be selected and announced on Sept. 2. Next, the 10 semi-finalist teams will pitch virtually to compete for a spot in the final four round of the contest.

The final four teams will be awarded \$10,000 each and participate in a live pitch competition in front of Farm Bureau members, investors and industry representatives at the AFBF Convention in January 2027 in Charlotte, North Carolina, to win:

- Farm Bureau Ag Innovation Challenge Winner, \$90,000 (total of \$100,000)
- Farm Bureau Ag Innovation Challenge Runner-up, \$15,000 (total of \$25,000)

Farm Bureau is proud to recognize these innovative businesses, in partnership with sponsors **Farm Credit, Bayer, John Deere, Farm Bureau Bank, Farm Bureau Financial Services, ClearPath and T-Mobile.**

Recent winners of the Ag Innovation Challenge include FarmMind (2026), a company that unifies farm workflows from GIS to compliance and agronomic insights, and Gripp (2025), a company that provides an operator-focused tool for asset tracking and team communication. Other examples of successful Ag Innovation Challenge participants, as well as detailed eligibility guidelines and the competition timeline, can be found at [fb.org/challenge](http://fb.org/challenge).

Entrepreneurs must be members of a county or parish Farm Bureau within their state of residence to qualify as top 10 semi-finalists. Applicants who are not Farm Bureau members can visit <https://www.fb.org/about/get-involved> to learn about becoming a member.

Applications must be received by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time on June 5.

**The application deadline is June 5, 2026.**

Additional details and application information can be found at: <https://www.fb.org/initiative/ag-innovation-challenge>



## ARE YOU CURRENTLY ENROLLED IN VETERINARY SCHOOL?

Apply for the iVET loan program today!

- Loan for food animal vet students
- No interest on loan while you're in school
- Up to \$40,000 loan distributed over three years



[www.ilfb.org/iVET](http://www.ilfb.org/iVET)

## iVET Low-Interest Loan Program

The Illinois Farm Bureau® Illinois Veterinary Education Training (iVET) Program traditionally supports second-year veterinary students who are passionate about serving livestock producers in Illinois. iVET provides low-interest loans (up to \$40,000) and a fourth-year stipend to help offset the cost of veterinary school while investing in the future of food animal practice in our state.

- Since 2005, more than \$610,000 has been awarded to students
- Applications are due on May 15th
- To apply visit [www.ilfb.org/iVET](http://www.ilfb.org/iVET) for more information.

Please consider sharing this with anyone you might know who fits the criteria and keep this in mind if Veterinary Medicine is in your future!

# Planting Seeds “Lyrics and Literacy”



**Katrina J.E. Milton**

I have always loved Dolly Parton (and I always will).

Growing up, my mom joked that she was Dolly Parton with her blonde curly hair and my dad was Kenny Rogers with his beard. I

grew up listening to Dolly’s music, including her songs with Porter Wagoner and her Christmas CDs. Last year, I was able to visit Dollywood with my cousin and his family. I recently bought Dolly Parton’s new line of frozen dinners (beef pot roast was the best), her brand of perfume and lipstick, her baking mixes (I loved her cornbread), and I just found out about her line of \$200 jeans called Dolly’s Joleans.

Although I like her music and her cornbread mix, what I like the most about Dolly is her good-heartedness and giving nature.

In February, the East Tennessee Children’s Hospital was renamed the Dolly Parton Children’s Hospital, and it is a free-standing, independent, not-for-profit pediatric health care system certified by the state of

Tennessee as a Comprehensive Regional Pediatric Center.

She has also helped Tennessee wildfire victims in 2016 and Tennessee flood victims in 2021, donated \$1 million to the Mountain Ways Foundation for Hurricane Helene relief in 2024, donated to the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture, and funds numerous scholarships.

However, one of Dolly’s most renowned charitable acts is the creation of Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library, which she founded in 1995. Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library provides free books to children from birth until age 5. Her program has distributed more than 200 million books to children around the world. According to her foundation’s website, the childhood literacy program “gifts over 3.4 million books per month to children across the U.S., Canada, UK, Australia and the Republic of Ireland.”

Literacy is still an issue in today’s modern world. According to the National Literacy Institute, as of 2024-2025, approximately 79% of U.S. adults are considered literate, while 21% – about 43 million people – possess low English literacy skills. 54% of adults read below a 6th-grade

level, and the country ranks 36th in literacy globally. According to Illinois Report Card, 43% of Chicago Public School students in third through eighth grade read at grade level in 2025.

Literacy levels are relevant not only in school, but throughout life. Reading and comprehension skills are needed to understand instructions, read legal documents, for recipes, and nearly every job. Being a good reader helps with critical thinking, analyzing, summarizing, and inferring information.

Reading is important when it comes to learning about agriculture as well. Illinois Agriculture in the Classroom (IAITC) has compiled a list of ag-accurate book recommendations on their website: <https://www.agintheclassroom.org/teacher-resources/book-recommendations/> IAITC created a companion brochure with iRead’s summer reading theme, “Plant a Seed, Read.” The brochure spotlights 11 ag-accurate books and pairs a hands-on activity and lesson plan with each book and can be found on IAITC’s website, [www.agintheclassroom.org](http://www.agintheclassroom.org).

As the school year is winding down and summer reading is starting, remember to stay literate! Read a book, a magazine, or a newspaper. Read a book together with a child, share a book with an older relative, recommend a book to a friend. And don’t worry if you’re not a reader – start small, read something short, and keep at it. After all, in the words of Dolly Parton, “You never do a whole lot unless you’re brave enough to try.”

If you’re looking to support a local nonprofit that supports agricultural literacy, please think of donating to the Cook County Farm Bureau Foundation. The Foundation supports charitable, literary, leadership training, and educational work in agriculture in the Cook County area. The Foundation’s key programs include “farm, food & agriculture” related scholarships for members/dependents pursuing higher education, internships, sponsorships of various agricultural literacy programming activities in the County for youth, and adult agricultural leadership and education scholarships. For more information or to make a tax-deductible donation, call 708-354-3276.



## 200 Students Attend Ag Day 2026

Approximately 200 third grade students attended the Cook County Farm Bureau’s Ag Day, held April 7 at The Children’s Farm at The Center in Palos Park.

The event featured eight agricultural stations, where students learned about bees and pollination, horticulture, earthworms and composting, and livestock, including sheep, cows, chickens, pigs, and horses.

Students from the Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences led groups of students from station to station as guides.



**Cook County Farm Bureau Ag Literacy Team Chair and horticulturalist Greg Stack teaches students about the many uses of plants during Ag Day.**



**Director of Agricultural Literacy for the Cook County Farm Bureau Katrina Milton presents about bees and pollination during Ag Day and shows a hive frame to third grade students.**



**University of Illinois Extension Educator Nancy Kreith teaches about earthworms and composting to a student during Ag Day as Master Gardener volunteers speak to other students.**

### Educators: Register Today for Summer Ag Institute 2026 and Earn 8 PDCH/CPDUs Each Day!

This year’s SAI theme is “Agricultural Innovation & Technology.” Cost is \$50 each day or \$75 for both days for Cook County Farm Bureau members. Cost includes lunch and snacks both days and charter bus travel on the first day.

To register, visit [bit.ly/saiplease](http://bit.ly/saiplease). For more information, email [aic@cookcfb.org](mailto:aic@cookcfb.org) or call 708-354-3276.

#### June 11: Exploring Ag Technology

Round-trip Charter Bus Trip to:

- Green Era Campus
- Gary Comer College Prep
- Griffin Museum of Science and Industry

Learn more about ag by visiting and touring high-tech sites, including an urban farm and a newly-renovated museum exhibit.

#### July 14: Education and Ag Innovation

Hear from Expert Guest Speakers from:

- Illinois Agriculture in the Classroom
- STIHL Technology Demonstration
- University of Illinois College of ACES

Take home lesson plans, activities, and resources to integrate agricultural technology into your STEM curriculum.

## WE HAVE AN ADVANTAGE

“Whenever I have a question, I can call up my county Farm Bureau and they’ll help us, free of charge, with nothing but the purest of intentions.”

**SHARON PFERSCHY**  
KANE COUNTY FARMER  
MEMBER SINCE 1994



IMPACTFUL ADVOCACY  
TRUSTED INFORMATION  
MEANINGFUL DEVELOPMENT

[www.ilfb.org/advantage](http://www.ilfb.org/advantage)

# AGRICULTURE ADVENTURES FOR FAMILIES



## WHAT IS A *Farmers Market?*

A farmers market is a food market in which farmers sell products from their farms directly to consumers. Farmers markets often include vendors with specialty crops, but also vendors who sell meat, dairy, and bakery items. Some markets also have arts and crafts vendors, as well as different forms of entertainment.



### What are Specialty Crops?

Specialty crops are fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops, including flowers, herbs, and plant seedlings.

For more information about specialty crops, visit the Illinois Specialty Growers Association's website, [www.specialtygrowers.org](http://www.specialtygrowers.org).



## FUN FACTS

### About Farmers Markets

- There are more than 300 farmers markets in Illinois and more than 8,000 across the United States.
- Illinois ranks third in the U.S. in the number of farmers markets in the states.
- Saturday is the most popular day of the week for farmers markets.
- In Illinois, we import 97% of the food we eat.
- In addition to corn and soybeans, Illinois is the top producer of pumpkins and horseradish.

## FARMERS MARKET Scavenger HUNT

Look for these items the next time you go to a farmers market!

- |                                               |                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> SOMETHING WITH SEEDS | <input type="checkbox"/> FRESH HERBS        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SOMETHING RED        | <input type="checkbox"/> BERRIES            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> EGGS                 | <input type="checkbox"/> SOMETHING HOMEMADE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> HONEY                | <input type="checkbox"/> MEAT               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SOMETHING YELLOW     | <input type="checkbox"/> SOMETHING PURPLE   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> PICKLES              | <input type="checkbox"/> BREAD              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A FARMER             | <input type="checkbox"/> TOMATOES           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CARROTS              | <input type="checkbox"/> JELLY              |

Looking for a farmers market near you?

Visit [www.ilfma.org/find-a-market](http://www.ilfma.org/find-a-market) or scan this QR code!



## May Word Search

April Winner: Nancy Bechtold

Consumer	C	G	Y	E	R	Y	F	K	O	Q	V	O	J	N	E
Crops	A	D	N	S	R	O	F	R	W	X	E	X	U	S	B
Dairy	V	P	E	I	L	F	D	H	U	E	G	I	A	T	W
Farmers	Y	K	A	I	Y	A	E	N	T	I	E	R	R	C	A
Food	M	D	Z	A	Q	R	D	R	E	U	T	K	I	U	Z
Fruits	E	A	B	N	B	M	S	P	V	V	A	S	P	D	C
Herbs	I	N	R	S	T	E	T	E	A	E	B	I	V	O	M
Market	S	D	Y	K	N	R	A	W	T	A	L	I	N	R	T
Meats	R	I	E	V	E	S	E	R	F	U	E	S	M	P	V
Plants	S	P	O	R	C	T	M	Y	P	D	U	R	L	N	L
Products	S	P	E	C	I	A	L	T	Y	M	O	L	K	V	O
Seedlings	Z	S	G	N	I	L	D	E	E	S	E	O	B	Z	Y
Sell	A	P	L	A	N	T	S	R	U	S	W	A	F	M	Z
Specialty	T	C	V	Z	J	B	S	C	C	P	Y	K	E	W	Q
Vegetable	C	K	G	M	J	C	H	J	O	A	R	B	R	J	I
Vendor															

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!**



## Women in Farming: New to the Narrative, Not the Work

Grandma never questioned butchering two chickens for lunch before church. She cleaned, cut, breaded and partially fried the ultra-fresh poultry, which finished baking in the oven while the family of six attended worship.

Holy chicken.

It's almost Mother's Day. I love Sunday dinner out. And the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations for the first time ever named 2026 the International Year of the Woman Farmer. In reality, female farmers aren't a new phenomenon. The industry is just finally talking about it out loud.

On both sides, my family tree is rooted in farming, and I'm blessed that both my grandmas – a fresh 88 and almost 89 – still can coherently share about their careers on the farm. Today, my mom farms, I farm, and more exciting yet, the fourth generation (the oldest now 20 studying agriculture in college) has grown to know two generations of grandmas and their quiet impact on agriculture as partners with the men in their family businesses.

The narrative used to frame a women's farm labor as "just helping." Yet, their husbands will attest these ladies would disk fields, sort and load hogs, locate field tiles, unload racks of hay, fetch parts, market crops, manage the farm financials, sign into debt, pay the taxes and elevate ear corn into the wire crib. They managed massive gardens that fed the family on summer evenings and year-round through preservation.

Meanwhile, they raised farm kids inspired to enter the same business. With children in tow for farm duties, my mom and grandmas packed lunches for the entire family, feeding hearts and minds with life lessons as much as bellies with nutrition during a hard day's work.

I don't see us returning to the era of buying 100 straight-run chicks, butchering half for meat and raising half for selling eggs. But our farm's ownership by gender is a 50/50 split – Mom, Dad, my 40-something brother and I – all working full-time, pulling the occasional 90-hour weeks and collectively operating, managing, decision-making, succession planning, turning wrenches and respecting the talents each brings to the table, both in the conference room and at family dinners.

The team mindset and collaborative approach support farm continuity, community, harmony and the motive to live values, not just list them. Communally, we create a culture that has the next generation – both males and females – welcome and wanting to belong. That kind of narrative endures.

**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.



## April Showers Bring May Flowers... and *Fruits and Vegetables!*

Illinois is known for nutrient rich soil which makes planting backyard gardens a breeze. May and June are the best times to get fruits and vegetables in the ground to ensure fresh produce is ready throughout the summer. Illinois has prime conditions to grow many diverse crops, but here are a few main ones to start planning for in May and June.

### 1. TOMATOES:

the most popular garden vegetable in the U.S.! Tomatoes should be started as seeds in a greenhouse beforehand so that transplants are ready to go in the ground between May 10 and June 15. Tomatoes are usually ready to begin harvest within 60-80 days of transplanting. These plants thrive in warm summer days but be careful if the temperature reaches above 90F. High temperatures cause tomatoes to ripen and soften quicker, causing reduced quality. To avoid this, pick tomatoes every 1-2 days when color is beginning to form and allow them to ripen indoors more if needed to preserve freshness and quality. If weather conditions allow and proper care goes into them, tomato plants can produce fruit for up to 100 days after maturity.



### 2. PUMPKINS:

a fall staple! Pumpkins may seem tough, but they are actually very sensitive vegetables. Pumpkin seeds will not germinate in cold soil and are easily damaged in frost, so seeds should not be planted until all danger of freezing and frost has passed. The best time to plant pumpkins are May 10-June 10 which leaves plenty of time to have beautiful and delicious pumpkins by fall. Pumpkins will be ready to harvest when the rind is hard, and they are a deep solid orange color. This typically falls around late September to early October if the vines remain healthy. Just remember to harvest them before heavy frosts to preserve quality. When picking them from the vine, leave at least 1-2 inches of stem or they will decay quickly leading to mushy insides and a sad looking jack-o-lantern!



### 3. SWEET CORN:

the best companion to every summer meal! Sweet corn can be grown easily in any garden.



Successive plantings ensure fresh sweet corn from early summer until frost returns. The best time to plant sweet corn seeds is when the soil is already warm, usually between May 1-June 15. To make the most of growing sweet corn, it's recommended to plant different varieties at different times since each plant can only be harvested once. When following this planting method, fresh sweet corn should be ready to go as early as July, throughout August.

### 4. PEPPERS:

the must-have garden addition for adding spice and flavor to the summer! Peppers are like tomatoes in that they are best started from seeds in a greenhouse and then transplanted in gardens between May 10 and June 15. Peppers are ready within 60-90 days after transplanting. Green bell peppers should be picked when they are fully grown, firm, and green. Other varieties can be harvested at any size. Yellow, orange, or red peppers can be left on the plant to fully ripen and develop a deep flavor or harvested when they are green and immature. Hot peppers are harvested at the bright red, ripe stage. Peppers are so versatile, easy to grow, and elevate fresh summer dishes. Depending on what varieties are planted, peppers can be harvested through September or first frost.



### 5. WATERMELON:

the sweet, delicious taste of summer! Watermelon seeds should be planted in the ground between May 10 and June 15 and are often ready to pick in mid-July, but the sweetest flavor comes if they are harvested a bit later in mid-August through early September. To best decide when watermelons are ready to pick wait until they are light green in color and the curly tendrils near the stem turn dry and brown, the color begins to dull, and the bottom of the melon that is lying in the soil turns a dull yellowish color. The sweetest watermelons grow through a long-hot summer, and once they are picked, they stop ripening, so be patient!



# Farm Bureau Leading the Charge on Estate Tax Reform

Protecting the future of family farms remains one of the most pressing issues facing Illinois agriculture. That's why passage of the Family Farm Preservation Act, Senate Bill 2970 (Sen. D. Turner) and House Bill 4736 (Rep. Chung), is the top legislative priority for Farm Bureau during the 2026 spring legislative session.

For the past two years, Farm Bureau has worked tirelessly to build broad, bipartisan support for this legislation. With continued advocacy and member engagement, our goal is clear: get the Family Farm Preservation Act to the governor's desk this year.

## What the Family Farm Preservation Act Does

The bill makes critical updates to Illinois' estate tax laws for farm families who claim the IRS agricultural Special Use Valuation Rule for Illinois estate tax purposes. Importantly, estates are not required to make the federal special use election.

### The bill would:

- Raise the current \$4 million estate tax threshold to \$6 million.
- Convert the threshold into a true exemption, meaning only assets

above \$6 million would be taxed, rather than taxing the entire estate once the threshold is exceeded.

- Index the exemption to inflation, ensuring it keeps pace with rising land values and modern farm operations.
- Allow portability, enabling unused exemption amounts to transfer to a surviving spouse, effectively protecting up to \$12 million plus inflation for farm families.
- Modernize the agricultural special-use valuation to better reflect today's farm estates and multigenerational family structures.

These reforms are essential to preserving family farms and preventing the forced sale or fragmentation of farmland simply to meet estate tax obligations.

Estate tax reform is politically complex because it directly impacts state revenue. Many members of the General Assembly do not represent agricultural districts and may not fully understand how estate taxes uniquely affect farm families.

Despite these challenges, Farm

Bureau has secured bipartisan, bicameral support from Democratic and Republican leadership, as well as legislators representing Cook County, suburban communities, and downstate districts. This broad coalition underscores the fairness and necessity of this reform.

Tax issues are typically addressed during end-of-session budget negotiations. Currently, Senate Bill 2970 is in the Senate Assignments Committee, and House Bill 4736 remains in the House Rules Committee. Because these are revenue-related bills, they are unlikely to move through the traditional legislative process and will instead be considered as part of broader budget discussions.

Farm Bureau is working aggressively to ensure estate tax reform remains part of final budget negotiations, but grassroots engagement is essential.

We are asking you to contact your legislator to stress the importance of the Family Farm Preservation Act and to ask them to raise this issue with their caucus leadership and budget negotiators to ensure it is included in final budget discussions.



Farm Bureau is committed to tackling the most significant issues impacting farmers. Together, we can protect

family farms, preserve generational legacies, and secure the future of Illinois agriculture.

## Legislative Happenings:

### Coalition Letter Sign-On:

We recently signed onto a coalition letter led by the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) urging House leadership to maintain a federal fix for California's Proposition 12. This collective effort aims to protect the interstate marketplace and ensure consistent production standards for farmers nationwide.

### Farm Bill:

The House is currently targeting the week of April 27 for a full floor vote on the 2026 Farm Bill, though the legislative schedule remains subject to change.

### H-2A Guestworker Program

American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall warns that ongoing ag labor shortages are a critical threat to U.S. food production. Farmers continue to report unfilled positions, reduced output, and crop losses, reinforcing calls for Congress to modernize the H-2A guestworker program and broader farm labor policy.

### Nationwide Survey:

#### Fertilizer Costs Strain Farmers

A recent American Farm Bureau Federation survey (April 14) found that 70% of farmers say fertilizer is too expensive to meet their needs. Rising global input costs are forcing some to reduce applications or acreage, raising concerns about lower yields and long-term food supply impacts.

### HB 1596 – Notice of State Restricted Pesticide Application Act

The Illinois Farm Bureau engaged key Cook County legislators and coordinated with downstate Farm Bureaus to oppose HB 1596 in the Energy and Environment Committee. The targeted outreach helped prevent the bill from advancing, though it remains eligible for consideration through the end of May.

### HB 3596 – Wetlands Bill

Targeted outreach continues urging legislators to oppose HB 3596. The proposal would create a state wetlands regulatory program exceeding the federal Clean Water Act, raising concerns about overly broad implementation and impacts on property owners and drainage districts.

### Governor's Letter on E15

Governor Pritzker sent a letter to Congress on April 2, 2026, supporting year-round availability of E15 fuel (15% ethanol blend). The proposal has received broad coverage in Illinois political media and on official social channels.



Mary Ann Martinez

## Martinez Joins Staff as Director of Governmental Affairs and Engagement

Mary Ann Martinez has been hired to join the Cook County Farm Bureau as Director of Governmental Affairs and Engagement. Mary Ann brings more than a decade of stakeholder engagement, government, and legislative relations experience, primarily through multi-state work, with additional exposure at the local and federal level.

Mary Ann said, "I am honored to join the Cook County Farm Bureau Team and eager to bring my background in governmental affairs, engagement, leadership development and policy advocacy to members and the Farm Bureau's mission."

Throughout her career, Mary Ann has built relationships with elected officials, managed multi-state advocacy campaigns,

and organized high-profile policy events and stakeholder convenings.

She has held government relations roles with national nonprofit organizations and public policy think tanks, where she developed expertise in coordinating advocacy initiatives, engaging directly with lawmakers, and building coalitions with professional associations and community and industry partners across the Midwest. Mary Ann has also served as a registered lobbyist in multiple states, giving her firsthand experience navigating the legislative process on behalf of the organizations and members she represents.

Mary Ann holds a Master of Public Administration from Arkansas State University and a Post-Baccalaureate Certificate from the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Saint Xavier University. She also serves as an Adjunct Professor at Aurora University, where she teaches public policy analysis and government relations to the next generation of public administrators.

Bob Rohrer, CCFB Manager, said "We are thrilled to bring Mary Ann's skills and broad experience to the Cook County Farm Bureau to support the efforts of the organization in the areas of Governmental Affairs, Political Action Committee, Public Relations and Leadership Development/Engagement".

**Mary Ann can be reached by calling the Cook County Farm Bureau at 708-354-3276 or through email at [mmartinez@cookcfb.org](mailto:mmartinez@cookcfb.org)**

# COUNTRY Financial MONTHLY SPOTLIGHT

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



**Chicago South Agency**  
Alonzo Nevarez, District Leader

## MARISOL PUENTES INSURANCE AGENT

I support the Cook County Farm Bureau by explaining the benefits of membership and offering memberships to my clients. As a dedicated insurance advisor, I'm proud to serve my community by protecting their homes and futures while fostering financial education. For the past three years, I've been a coach with Girls on the Run, empowering young girls to build confidence through running. I also lead local seminars in coffee shops and community spaces, teaching families about homeowners' insurance, proper coverage, and financial planning. In addition, I'm a proud sponsor of local back-to-school events, ensuring students and families are equipped for success. Whether it's local events, local businesses, or school initiatives, my mission is to help every client feel confident in their financial future. What drives me daily is knowing that by supporting one family or one student at a time, I'm building a stronger, more confident community.

6438 Joliet Rd, Ste 102, Countryside, IL  
Office Phone: 708-898-9072  
Cell Phone: 708-219-5505  
Marisol.Puentes@countryfinancial.com  
with COUNTRY Financial since January 2024



**Orland Park Agency**  
Sharon Stemke, District Leader

## TIFFANI GERGELY INSURANCE AGENT

The Farm Bureau has been a meaningful part of my life for generations. My family has worked with COUNTRY Financial for nearly 50 years, beginning with my great uncle, a farmer and COUNTRY representative in Carlyle, Illinois, and continuing with my father, who has been with the company for 35 years. Supporting the Farm Bureau allows me to honor my family's legacy while helping support the agricultural families and communities we serve—because at the heart of it, we are all one family.

I help my clients by really getting to know them and what matters most in their lives. From there, I can offer guidance and coverage that fits their needs, so they feel comfortable, informed, and supported every step of the way.

I stay involved in my community by giving back to the people and programs that helped shape who I am today. One organization I am especially passionate about is the Lincoln Way East High School cheer team. They hold a special place in my heart, not only because they are the 2026 State Champions, but because I was once a member of that same program and a three-time state champion myself. The cheer team was like a second family to me and played a major role in shaping who I am today. Through cheerleading, I learned the importance of accountability, respect, and teamwork—values that have stayed with me well beyond high school. Those lessons carried into my time cheering at the University of Arizona and continue to influence both my personal and professional life.

Supporting this program allows me to give back locally allows me to invest in the next generation and strengthen the community I care so deeply about.

17605 S Oak Park Ave Ste C, Tinley Park, IL  
Office Phone: 630-257-6100  
Tiffani.gergely@countryfinancial.com  
with COUNTRY Financial since November 2025



**Chicago Northwest**  
Matt Huonder, District Leader

## BRETT RIEKENA FINANCIAL ADVISOR

Our office enjoys sharing with clients all the community events that the Farm Bureau participates in throughout the year. Describing ways that the Farm Bureau helps to educate our communities on where our food comes from and the importance of agriculture in our everyday lives.

I help my clients through education. Clients are looking for some guidance through all the noise they are exposed to on their phones, TV, and radio. People in the community that gravitate towards our office are looking for a "co-pilot" to help them through all the changes that have happened in the insurance and financial world over the last few years.

I am passionate about helping people to find a balance between their current lifestyle desires and their future lifestyle requirements. Finding that balance brings peace of mind to their financial lives. If your financial life is in order, you can direct your energy to all the other important things in life. We help clients using unique visuals to see their financial life in a way they never have before, creating that freedom to spend more time on things that mean the most to them in their community.

110 N Brockway St, Ste 230, Palatine, IL  
Office Phone: 847-383-4321  
Brett.riekema@countryfinancial.com  
With COUNTRY Financial since May 2011

## CCFB Photo Contest

Get your camera and capture moments by showcasing your best photos depicting the theme of Agriculture in the Spring/Summer. Send in your photos – selfies, pictures of others, landscape, etc.

The deadline for seasonal photos is **July 15**. The winning photos will be posted in the August *Co-Operator*.

### Example Categories:

Planting Vegetables, Planting Flowers, Farmers' Markets, Horseback Riding, and More!

### Prizes:

Each season will have three winners.

- 1st place:** \$100 cash
- 2nd place:** \$40 Farm Fresh Funds\*
- 3rd place:** \$25 Farm Fresh Funds\*

All participating photos will be featured on our website and social media.

The contest is open to all members in good standing.

Go to <https://bit.ly/4etwEqw> to submit entries.

\*Farm Bureau Farm Fresh Funds are funds that can be redeemed at local farmstands, greenhouses, and garden centers just as you would use cash.



Mayflower Cruises & Tours offers an exclusive discount to Cook County Farm Bureau members.

### Start Your Travel Planning with Mayflower!

To begin your "Life Enriching Experience" with North American Group travel, River Cruising & Small Ship Adventures, European Holidays, Railway Adventures, and so much more.

Contact **Tina Patel** at Mayflower and state you're a Cook County Farm Bureau member to receive added savings:

Discount Code: Cook County Farm Bureau member

Call **Tina Patel** at 630-435-8259 or email [tinap@mayflowercruisesandtours.com](mailto:tinap@mayflowercruisesandtours.com)

Digital brochures at: <https://www.mayflowercruisesandtours.com/>

Mayflower Cruises & Tours, LLC, is a division of the Scenic Group, located in Lisle, IL.

## CLASSIFIED ADS

All ads that we receive for the Co-Operator are also listed on our website at [cookcfb.org/stay-updated/classified-ads](http://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](mailto: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.

1 RIDE electric scooter new. Asking \$650, 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.

Classic limited edition 2002 Jaguar XKR100 super charged with every available option. Pristine condition. 17,000 original miles. Will send pictures by phone, if interested. **Contact Jim 773-581-4400.**

Erte Courvoisier Cognac Collection. Will send pictures by phone, if interested. **Call Jim 773-581-4400.**

Dockers jacket black, size XL. Great condition. \$9. Picture available online. **Call Bob 708-424-9572.**

Professional osteoarthritic knee braces prescribed by orthopedic doctor. Used twice. List price \$150 each, selling for \$75 each. Pictures available online. **Call Bob 708-424-9752.**

### FOR RENT

Apartment for rent in Blue Island, IL 60406. 2 bedroom, 1/100 square feet. Separate utilities. **Call Allan 708-785-2568.**

### 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.



This month  
"W"

**WHITE PEPPERCORN**

**Both white and black pepper come from the Piper nigrum plant.**

Using white pepper correctly brings depth and balance that black pepper can't.



White pepper is made from fully ripe berries with the outer layer removed before they are dried.

White pepper is rich in antioxidants and several important micronutrients, including manganese, fiber, and iron.

It is often chosen for its ability to disappear visually into light-colored dishes like cream sauces, mashed potatoes, or fish soups.

**IT IS A LITTLE BIT HOT AND A LOT EARTHY.**



It's also often frequently used in Chinese and Vietnamese cuisines.



White pepper is rich in antioxidants that can help alleviate inflammation, and contains a small amount of riboflavin, phosphorus, and zinc.

Source: <https://reluctantgourmet.com/white-pepper/>

Grow Fresh Anywhere

Container Gardening Workshop



Green Thumb  
in a Box

Paulette Edwards

The Gardening Realtor™

"You can grow almost anything in almost anything."

**Grow Where You Are:  
Container Gardening for  
Small & Inner-City Spaces**

More info on Page 12

Green Thumb in a Box  
Container Gardening Workshop

TODAY'S FOCUS:

- ✓ Small Space Gardening
- ✓ Easy Vegetable Growing
- ✓ Hands-On Learning

Instructor:

Paulette Edwards

## NOTICE TO MEMBERS

Please be advised that, effective immediately, we have **discontinued our notary service** benefit that we offer through the office.

This decision was made after careful consideration of several factors, including very minimal member usage, the increasing costs associated with maintaining and supporting the service, and potential liability concerns related to errors.

We appreciate member understanding as we focus on allocating Farm Bureau resources to better serve the broader needs of our members.

**Thank you for your continued support.**

*Bob Rohrer,*

MANAGER

Cook County Farm Bureau

## 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](http://www.cookcfb.org)

### Membership Monday 2026

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

**DATE:** Monday, May 4, 2026

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

**LOCATION:** Zoom; link will be emailed the Friday prior

**REGISTRATION:** Registration is required by emailing [ccfb@cookcfb.org](mailto:ccfb@cookcfb.org) or call the Farm Bureau at 708-354-3276.

### Grow Where You Are: Container Gardening for Small & Inner-City Spaces

Two-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:**

Paulette with Green Thumb in a Box

**LOCATION:** Church parking lot, Chicago Greater Bethesda Missionary Baptist Church

**DATE:** Saturday, May 30, 2026

**TIME:** 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

**FEE:** \$35.00; discount rate for CCFB members

**REGISTRATION & PAYMENT:** 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>

### DIY Summer Barn Quilt Painting Workshop

Learn about the history of barn quilts and paint your own SUMMER design during this three-hour make-and-take workshop. A barn quilt is a piece of wood, painted in simple geometric patterns to resemble a quilting block that is hung on the exterior of a building. During this beginner-level class, you will paint a 12x12 barn quilt design on wood to hang indoors.

**DATE:** Wednesday, July 15, 2026

**TIME:** 5:30-8:30 p.m.

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

**FEE:** \$20 for CCFB members, \$25 for non-members (includes materials: board, stencil, paint, etc.)

**REGISTRATION REQUIRED:** Call the Farm Bureau at 708-354-3276 or at the Member Center. For additional information, email Kelli at [membershipkelli@cookcfb.org](mailto:membershipkelli@cookcfb.org).

## 2026 Master Member Club 2.0



Cook County Farm Bureau is pleased to announce the expansion of the Master Member Club open to all members, affiliates, and partners of the Cook County Farm Bureau. Check out the Master Member Club 2.0 to see how you can join and get a coveted jacket.



#### What it is

A recognition club for active Farm Bureau members and leaders who support membership growth through recruitment and retention of Ag and non-Ag members.

#### Eligibility

- Active Cook County Farm Bureau members in good standing
- Exclusions: CCFB, IFB, and other CFB staff

#### How to Join

Earn 10 points by recruiting new members

- Voting Members (MM or PM – farming/Ag): 5 points each (2 required)
- Associate Members (A – non-Ag): 3 points each (4 required)

#### How to Stay in the Club

- Earn 5 points annually
- Recruiting period: September 1 – August 31, 2026
- Program deadline: August 31, 2026

#### Questions:

Contact us at 708-354-3276 or [ccfb@cookcfb.org](mailto:ccfb@cookcfb.org)

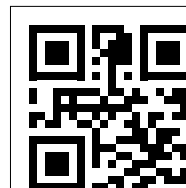
#### Awards & Recognition

First-Time Inductees

- CCFB logo apparel – a coveted jacket
- Gate sign or \$50 item
- \$100 gift card (Amazon, Bass Pro, Target, Kohl's, Jewel-Osco, TJ Maxx, restaurants, etc.)

#### Easy Ways to Sign Up Members & Pay Dues

- Phone: 708-354-3276 (credit card or ACH), M-F 8-4:30 pm
- Online: [www.myifb.org](http://www.myifb.org) or QR code below (list yourself in "Recommended By" field)
- In Person: Cook County Farm Bureau, 6438 Joliet Rd, Ste 101, Countryside, IL 60525



BUY TICKETS

### CCFB SPECIAL MEMBER PRICING

TICKETS VALID ANY OPERATING DAY MAY-OCTOBER

INCLUDES BOTH AMUSEMENT AND WATER PARK

ANYDAY TICKETS \$37.99 EACH W/CODE

USE PROMO CODE CDP2026

[SANTASVILLAGEDUNDEE.COM](http://SANTASVILLAGEDUNDEE.COM)



### Master Gardener Help Desk Going Full Bore

With spring in all its glory and members and nonmembers picking up soil test kits, the Master Gardener help desk that opened in April is operating at full capacity.

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](mailto: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.