In 2023, the Illinois Farm Bureau (IFB) continued to identify and navigate environmental issues that impact agriculture and specifically, our members. This work covers numerous topics, but typically falls into clear action areas: education and resource development, legislation and policy development, advocacy, and leadership. The IFB Environmental Policy team utilizes existing resources and expertise as leverage points to magnify the impact of the work completed, as well as highlight the voluntary efforts that Illinois agriculture takes to support environmental stewardship. IFB has a strong reputation in this area and countless positive stores to share, showcasing IFB’s members commitment to environmental stewardship.

This report highlights several priorities and issues that occurred over the course of the year, but it really only tells part of the story. Thank you to our members for their ongoing engagement in this work and for their support in IFB’s efforts to promote Illinois agriculture’s contributions to environmental action.

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One of IFB’s top areas of environmental action is centered around nutrient loss reduction, specifically the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRS) and other federal policy efforts. Through guidance from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), specifically the Hypoxia Task Force, states across the Mississippi River Basin are charged with developing state-driven efforts to reduce nutrient losses (i.e., nitrogen and phosphorus) to the Mississippi River and Gulf of Mexico. Illinois’ NLRS is coordinated by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA), Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA), University of Illinois Extension (U of I), and a multi-stakeholder Policy Working Group.

Throughout 2023, IFB continued to engage in countless NLRS and other efforts. Highlights from this year included:

• Continued to lead in NLRS Policy Working Group, working with other groups to advise IEPA and IDOA on areas such as implementation practices, strategies for promoting best management practices (BMPs) and the strategy, targeting funding, and many others.

• Engaged in several other NLRS committees and subcommittees, including the Agriculture Water Quality Partnership Forum, Communications Subgroup, and others.

• At the federal level, represented IFB at meetings with USEPA political and staff leadership, including the Agricultural Advisor for Region Five and the USEPA Administrator.

• Worked with researchers to highlight several areas that need additional analysis, including long-term nutrient cycles and streambank erosion, for example.
In addition to monitoring nutrient stewardship policy development and serving in leadership roles, IFB continues to voluntarily engage in several areas of NLRS implementation. IFB directly contributes time, resources, and expertise to develop programs and resources that help our members to engage in nutrient stewardship issues.

**IFB’s NLRS implementation efforts tend to fall into four categories:**

1. **Education and outreach to farmers, landowners, and the public.**
2. **Supporting research of BMPs to reduce nutrient losses from agricultural fields.**
3. **Supporting farmer implementation of BMPs across the state.**
4. **Demonstrating progress on IFB’s contributions toward NLRS goals.**

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**2023 NLRS Activity Metrics**

**Financials**

Over $3,200,000 committed to IFB NLRS initiatives

**External Outreach Campaign**

[www.ilfarmersconserve.com](http://www.ilfarmersconserve.com)

Promoted 2022 documentary and several environmental outreach topics

Over 3,000,000 impressions, with over 31,000 clicking on links to learn more
### IFB Media

#### FarmWeek & FarmWeekNow.com
Over 95 articles and digital publications focusing on the NLRS and other similar topics

#### Radio & Podcasts
Over 70 radio interviews and podcast uploads

#### External Media
15 NLRS-related press releases and media advisories to IFB membership and press statewide

1 press conference and media toolkit developed for Illinois Ag Retail Survey launch

#### Outreach Events
Over 30 Field Days and other presentations, with over 1,200 attendees

#### Other Media
Additional campaigns on IFB social media and other media, producing over 350,000 impressions

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Learn more about our NLRS efforts over the years here: [on.ilfb.org/NLRS](http://on.ilfb.org/NLRS)
For several years, IFB has made it an organizational priority to lead on environmental issues, continually committing significant resources to support the efforts. In addition to advocacy, policy development, and leadership efforts, IFB works diligently to support farmer and County Farm Bureau (CFB)-led projects that contribute to our priority areas. The cornerstone of our voluntary efforts is the Environmental Stewardship Grant Programs, including the **Nutrient Stewardship Grant Program** and the **Pollinator Conservation Grant Program**. These programs support member engagement in a wide array of environmental topics, as well as give us many opportunities for connection and collaboration with external partners.

**Nutrient Stewardship Grant Program:**

Developed in 2015 with the goal of engaging all levels of IFB in the NLRS, the Nutrient Stewardship Grant Program has committed **$1,150,000** to over **138 projects** spanning **74 counties**.

2023 Updates:
- Committed **$150,000** to 17 projects across 22 counties
- Over 1,000 hours and **$75,000** in match from CFBs and their partners
- Projects included:
  1. Field days and outreach events
  2. Implementing cover crops programs
  3. Discussions about soil health and nutrient testing and more

**Pollinator Conservation Grant Program:**

Developed in 2021 based on feedback from CFBs and others, the Pollinator Conservation Grant Program has committed **$80,000** to over **22 projects** spanning **24 counties**.

2023 Updates:
- Committed **$25,000** to 13 projects also across 22 counties
- Over 750 hours and **$10,000** in match provided by CFBs and their partners
- Projects included
  1. Pollinator seed distribution
  2. Pollinator habitat installs
  3. Outreach events and more

Looking to the future, we are excited to continue seeing high levels of engagement from CFBs and our members. The projects funded by these programs often serve as opportunities to support IFB organizational priorities, as well as other goals across the organization. These projects present the Environmental Policy team with invaluable leverage points leading to expanded networks, and increased collaboration with other organizations that support our overarching goals.
2023 Environmental Stewardship Grant Programs: Participating CFBs

Pollinator Conservation Grant
Nutrient Stewardship Grant
Pollinator Conservation Grant & Nutrient Stewardship Grant
IFB offers many resources and programs to support our members, in addition to the Environmental Stewardship Grant Programs. Two examples include the Edge of Field Practice Partnership and the Farm Gate program.

**Edge of Field Practice Partnership**

The Edge of Field Practice Partnerships (*Woodchip Bioreactor Partnership* and *Saturated Buffer Partnership*) were developed with the goal of implementing, monitoring, and providing outreach opportunities focused on these practices. Highlights for 2023 include:

- In June, representatives of both partnerships participated in a field day in Sangamon County. The field day included a tour to a woodchip bioreactor site and witnessing a saturated buffer being installed.
- In May, partners of the *Woodchip Bioreactor Partnership* (IFB, Illinois Land Improvement Contractors Association, Inc. (ILICA), the University of Illinois (U of I), and Illinois Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) participated in a planning meeting in Henry County, which also brought together farmers with existing bioreactors to review data and talk about future research needs.
- In June, the *Saturated Buffer Partnership* (IFB, ILICA, Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) and Illinois NRCS) installed their second saturated buffer to coincide with the Sangamon County field day. Looking forward, the group is developing plans for their third install sometime in 2024.

**Farm Gate**

IFB works to support livestock producers in several ways, including on environmental issues. Farm Gate was developed to help answer livestock producers’ questions about regulations and understand how environmental rules may impact their operations. IFB continues to monitor changes to inspection procedures and other rules, focusing on rules with potential impacts to small and medium-sized operations.

Learn more at www.ilfb.org/FarmGate
The NLRS calls for continued collaboration across point source and non-point source groups in order to meet interim and long-term goals. As such, IFB continues to build cooperative efforts with point source groups, like wastewater treatment plants and source water groups. In 2023 for example, IFB joined discussions with groups like the American Water Works Association Illinois Section to share information about agriculture’s efforts to support source water.

IFB’s point source partnership efforts in 2023 also continued to incorporate work with the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD). This included several key activities:

• Co-hosting a field day at MWRD’s Fulton County property. The June field day included participants from the U of I, MWRD and IFB leadership, as well as the National Association of Clean Water Agencies, who all joined to discuss point source/non-point source collaborations and trends in nutrient stewardship research and policy development.

• Co-hosting a partnership meeting. The August partnership meeting gave IFB, as well as Cook and Fulton CFB, the opportunity to visit a site where beneficial biosolid applications allowed a community to reclaim property for use as a green space. This served as a springboard for additional conversations around opportunities for continued collaboration.

The collaborations with MWRD and other point source groups have proven increasingly valuable over the years. These groups are often great resources as we continue to monitor topics related to biosolid applications, nutrient reduction-related regulations, and other water quality issues.
IFB has increasingly engaged USEPA and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)-NRCS through several grant projects for watershed improvement. This has primarily included engagement in USEPA 319 grants and USDA-NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) proposals. CFBs across the state help identify interest and magnify support by collaborating on these projects. IFB then strengthens that local support by providing in-kind and financial resources.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Watershed</th>
<th>USEPA 319</th>
<th>USDA-NRCS RCPP</th>
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| Mississippi North Central | - Provided in-kind and financial support for sub-watershed prioritization.  
- Involved Mercer, Knox, Warren-Henderson, Hancock, and Henry CFBs.                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Embarras River      | - Provided in-kind and financial support for an updated watershed plan as well as two subwatershed plans.  
- Involved Richland, Lawrence, Crawford, Champaign, Coles, Edgar, Douglas, Jasper, Cumberland, and Clark CFBs                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Kankakee River      |                                                                                                                                                                                                             | - Provided in-kind and financial support for multi-state watershed project.  
- Involved Ford-Iroquois, Kankakee, and Will CFBs.                                                                                                                                                       |
| Lake Decatur        |                                                                                                                                                                                                             | - Provided in-kind and financial support to provide outreach on BMPs to meet watershed goals.  
- Involved Ford, McLean, Champaign, DeWitt, Macon, Piatt and Shelby CFBs.                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Lake Springfield    | - Provided in-kind and financial support to provide outreach on best management practices BMPs to meet watershed goals.  
- Involved Sangamon CFB.                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Rend Lake           | - Provided in-kind and financial support to provide outreach on BMPs to meet watershed goals.  
- Involved Jefferson and Franklin CFBs.                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
IFB as well as several Illinois agricultural groups worked to support year one of the *Illinois Ag Retail Survey*. The survey was funded and supported by several of Illinois’ agricultural groups. The survey is a critical step in collecting comprehensive data on nitrogen and phosphorus fertilizer use and application methods.

The first year of data collection included several highlights including:

- Data was collected from 917 fields, when only 500 responses were needed. High participation rates show that farmers and retailers were aware and engaged in the effort.

- Year one data can be considered robust and representative of the state.

- Much of the initial data is in-line with estimates from state and federal agencies, as well as other states.

- Several partners of the survey joined a press conference and panel discussion at the Farm Progress Show. This gave partners an opportunity to share preliminary findings and plans for future surveys.

Looking ahead, survey supporters are looking forward to continued data collection and identifying trends of BMP usage over time. The data will also provide opportunities to develop new efforts to address key areas identified by the survey. For IFB, this survey is a key way to showcase agriculture’s progress and highlight the significance of voluntary practice adoption.
Supporting researchers is a key focus of IFB’s environmental efforts. We use methods like coordinating outreach events, connecting farmers with researchers to develop on-farm research trials, offering farmer focus groups for researchers, providing financial gifts and other activities to support and guide agricultural research on several environmental topics.

In 2023, some of the research projects we supported include:

- A National Science Foundation project led by several U of I researchers. This project includes analysis of soil-plant nitrogen and phosphorus cycling, as well as evaluation of nutrient management tools.

- Dr. Amir Sadeghpour’s (SIUC) research on cover crops, manure management, and soil health. This included direct research support, as well as coordinating outreach and opportunities for additional on-farm research.

- Several areas of Dr. Andrew Margenot’s (U of I) research, including a water quality monitoring project with Bureau CFB, on-farm struvite trials in specialty crop production, and other areas of soil health and water quality.

- Multiple areas of Dr. Kaiyu Guan’s (U of I) soil carbon and aerial imagery and monitoring research. This includes continued support of the Agroecosystem Sustainability Center (ASC) at U of I.

- Dr. Trent Ford’s (U of I) drought condition and other climate science-related work, including outreach for citizen science monitoring programs.

- Dr. Karla Gage’s (SIUC) weeds of economic concern research, which identifies occurrences of these weeds in transportation corridors, field margins, and other habitat areas.

- Dr. David Zaya’s (U of I) evaluations of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) grasslands and their effectiveness in attracting different pollinators and other insect and plant species.
Over the course of many years, IFB, as well as the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) and other state Farm Bureau, has actively engaged on Waters of the United States (WOTUS) - monitoring litigation and regulatory changes, as well as consistently advocating for Illinois agriculture. Key developments in 2023 included:

### 2022 Recap
- February, proposed rule & comment period, with IFB action request
- Supreme Court begins hearing arguments in *Sackett v. EPA*
- Late December, final WOTUS rule released (December 2023 WOTUS)

### February 2023
- House Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment hold hearing on impacts of December 2023 WOTUS, including testimony from Missouri Farm Bureau
- Hearings lead to introduction of Congressional Review Act resolution to void rule

### March 2023
- U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas enjoined rule from going into effect in Texas and Idaho – the first of several key court actions
- Judge in case found merit in AFBF and other plaintiffs attempting to prove that December 2023 WOTUS rule is unlawful
IFB is continuing to closely monitor updates to WOTUS. At present, the 2023 WOTUS Rule is in effect in Illinois and we are evaluating the implications of the rule. For states included in the *Kentucky v. EPA* lawsuit and other court challenges, they are currently subject to the pre-2015 WOTUS framework and further state-by-state interpretations. This is certain to create confusion for those conducting interstate business. IFB will continue monitoring the rollout in neighboring states and voicing our concerns with USEPA and the Army Corps of Engineers.

**April 2023**
- As result of additional court actions, 25 additional states (27 total) granted injunctions to block enforcement of WOTUS

**May 2023**
- Supreme Court rules 9-0 in favor of Sackett family in *Sackett v. EPA*, which included eliminating significant nexus test, defining "waters" as relatively permanent, clarifying agency's jurisdiction over wetlands
- December 2023 WOTUS left nonfunctional

**August 2023**
- New WOTUS rule published under "good cause" clause. Possibility for court challenges
- Rule considered "final" for Illinois and other states not included in *Kentucky v. EPA* or other challenges
IFB diligently works on behalf of our members to monitor and engage in issues that could have severe effects on agriculture. Over the course of 2023, one such area of focus has been monitoring pesticide regulations. In addition to working with IDOA on state-level concerns, we continued to engage with USEPA, AFBF, and other agriculture groups to monitor regulatory compliance, policy, and program implementation.

Endangered Species Act (ESA) Compliance

Several lawsuits over the last few decades laid the groundwork for USEPA undergoing a complete review of their ESA compliance, including pesticide registrations and how USEPA evaluates the impact of these products on endangered species. USEPA has settled many of these lawsuits, resulting in several actions, including releasing an “ESA Workplan Update”. This workplan identifies implementation measures, mainly mitigation, aimed at quickly bringing USEPA into compliance with the ESA. Many of USEPA’s actions proposed to address ESA compliance have raised significant concerns within agriculture.
2023 Regulatory Proposals

In addition to the ESA Workplan Update, USEPA and U.S. Fish and Wildlife (USFWS) proposed several rule changes that connect with agriculture, and often build off of previous proposals. IFB has provided comments on each of these proposals and will continue to do so. These proposals and brief highlights include:

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<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Proposal Title</th>
<th>Overview</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USEPA</td>
<td>Vulnerable Species Pilot</td>
<td>- August 2023&lt;br&gt;- Identified pilot program for prioritizing mitigation for highest risk listed species&lt;br&gt;- Includes mitigation methods for future strategies/proposals</td>
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<tr>
<td>USFWS</td>
<td>Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants Rulemakings</td>
<td>- August 2023&lt;br&gt;- Three proposed rule makings: 1. changes to designations of critical habitat (i.e., no consideration of areas of economic concern) 2. regulations for interagency consultations 3. application of “blanket rule” (i.e., all species listed as threatened can be regulated as endangered)</td>
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<tr>
<td>USEPA</td>
<td>Draft Herbicide Strategy</td>
<td>- October 2023&lt;br&gt;- Identified critical habitat maps&lt;br&gt;- Includes erosion and drift mitigation proposals for several herbicide products&lt;br&gt;- Names potential exemptions</td>
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IFB expects continued action in this area as USEPA works to comply with ESA. IFB will continue to monitor these issues closely and advocate on behalf of our members.
In 2023, IFB continued to engage in many aspects of climate change policy, working to analyze emerging issues and advocate for our members. This work included:

- Monitoring corporate sustainability, Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) and other climate-smart agriculture proposals.
- Tracking policy developments related to greenhouse gas emissions reporting, namely scope three emissions proposals, as well as carbon intensity scoring.
- Submitting comments on EPA’s “Multi-Pollutant Emissions Standards for model year 2027 and later vehicles” proposal.
- Representing IFB members in meetings and other engagements with legislative, regulatory, and industry contacts.
IFB’s Environmental Advisory Team is a cohort of farmer members who engage in environmental issues, advise staff on direction, and share knowledge with fellow members on a number of issues. In 2023, the team continued to engage in numerous evolving carbon and ecosystem service markets, as well as other climate issues. Over the course of the year, the team covered several topics, including:

- Tracked developments to carbon intensity scoring, ESG scoring, and other developing issues.
- Developed and attended a two-day sustainable agriculture exchange with companies such as McDonalds, United Airlines, and others to learn about their various corporate sustainability and regenerative agriculture initiatives.
- Participated in National Science Foundation (NSF) research on Illinois nutrient use.
- Initiated a campaign to share information with IFB membership.
- Reviewed research proposals and development of various on-farm research studies.