How Livestock Adds Value to Illinois Communities

Learn about livestock’s impact at the local level and how members can advocate on behalf of the industry.
Our Mission
To improve county Farm Bureau® influence in local government issues and advance county Farm Bureau leaders’ awareness, capability, and involvement in local government through information and assistance in understanding and planning on local government issues.

Call to Action
We encourage you to share LINK with county Farm Bureau leadership and membership.

We encourage you to share this publication with your local officials. This information may be a LINK to their success.

Upcoming Dates & Events

January 20 - 21
Illinois Association of Drainage Districts Conference

January 21 - 22
Young Leader Conference

February 15
Governmental Affairs Leadership Conference (GALC)

February 22 – 23
Illinois Pork Expo

February 23
Illinois Rural Economic Development Conference – Virtual

February 24 – 27
Illinois Beef Expo

February 24 – 26
Illinois Meat Processors Annual Convention
Let’s Talk Livestock at the Local Level

By Tasha Bunting

Early on in the pandemic, livestock farmers faced a unique set of challenges as supply chains ruptured and meat-processing plants shuttered. As reports surged from Farm Bureau members who were unable to get appointments at their local meat lockers, my family and I faced similar disruptions on our Livingston County farm.

Fast forward almost two years and animal agriculture has made great strides in stabilizing the food supply. But it took a lot of work along the way, requiring farmers, manufacturers, consumers and legislators to work together to find solutions. These efforts must continue into the future.

In this edition of LINK, we’ll provide information about the value livestock farms bring to communities throughout our state. My hope is that you and your members feel empowered to take some of these facts and figures into conversations with your local elected officials to advocate on behalf of animal agriculture.

Livestock farms add economic value to community businesses by keeping dollars local. Each year, the livestock industry and related food processors contribute more than $31 billion to our state while supporting more than 91,000 jobs.

In addition to strengthening Illinois’ economy, livestock farmers also work hard to grow their businesses for future generations. Their efforts include using new technology and techniques to produce more food with less land and water, efforts in which farmers have invested significantly.

One of the many things we learned from the past couple of years is that there is a tremendous amount of value American shoppers place on having nutritious, healthy sources of animal protein at the grocery store.

As consumers faced emptier shelves in 2020, their frustrations were shared by farmers whose animals and crops were ready for market but unable to be processed. Yet despite transportation and packaging delays, Illinois farmers continued to provide a steady supply of food for families who were counting on it.

As a cattle farmer myself, I have a front row seat to the many ways animal agriculture benefits Illinois. It’s through this lens that I share my story with individuals who aren’t directly tied to the industry.

Whether you raise livestock on your farm or grow corn and soybeans that are used for animal feed, I encourage you to highlight the importance of animal agriculture within your community by sharing your story with others.
Farm Bureau Members Can Help Tell County’s Livestock Story

By Ryan Whitehouse

Tasha Bunting’s personal farm story about raising livestock with her family during a global pandemic offers a unique, on-farm perspective. Her experiences dealing with meat supply chain issues, which were felt by both farmers and consumers, underscore the fragility of the supply chain and the value of domestic food production in our nation.

Farmers like Tasha need to continue to tell their stories, sharing hardships they face and ways they overcome them, with people outside our industry. By connecting names, faces and families to the resiliency of agriculture, we can help educate elected officials on the importance of livestock in meaningful ways.

This edition of LINK discusses many ways livestock farms contribute to their counties, such as environmental stewardship, job markets, tax bases and community economic development. While all of this information is important to share with elected officials, there is no better advocate than the local farmer, the person the elected official represents.

So, how can Farm Bureau help members share their stories?

Start by asking your farmers to begin conversations with local elected officials. Encourage members to initiate conversations by asking “what questions do you have for me?” After that, prep each farmer to share basic information using these questions:

- Where is your farm located?
- How do you operate?
- How do you care for livestock or crops?
- How do you give back to the community?
- How do you provide food for the community and the world?

I know some farmers may find it intimidating to talk to local officials, so it’s important to remind your members that these folks are our neighbors. They want to see the counties and communities they represent thrive, and agriculture is part of that success. We should all be proud of that!

In addition to bringing livestock farmers into the conversation, you’ll also want to bring in grain farmers. These individuals have a vested interest in animal agriculture because the livestock industry consumes the bushels of corn and soybeans they produce. Support from a range of farm families only enhances the significance of livestock farms.

While this article provides a 10,000-foot overview of how to engage with local officials, I hope it inspires you and your members to take steps toward becoming the face of livestock in your county.
Livestock Farms Add Value to Illinois

The Illinois livestock industry benefits our state by supporting food security, protecting the environment, strengthening communities and driving economic growth.

**SUPPORTING FOOD SECURITY**

Illinois is home to more than 71,000 farms, 96% of which are family-owned and a third of which include livestock. For these farm families, producing high quality meat and dairy products means providing important protein sources for their families and others.

These farmers raise more than livestock on their farms; they improve their communities by providing local products Illinois residents rely on for well-balanced meals.

- Illinois’ state licensed meat establishments processed more than **31 million pounds** of meat to feed families across the state in 2020.
- Illinois farm families donated more than **250,000 pounds** of food to local food pantries in 2020.

**PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT**

Farmers care for their animals in ways that also benefit the land. Their dedication to conserving the resources entrusted to them preserves their way of life for future generations.

Farmers make significant investments to properly design livestock barns that protect the environment. Barn construction is subject to multiple layers of regulation involving state and federal agencies, as well as an **18-step approval process managed by the Illinois Department of Agriculture**.

- Pig farmers today use **75% less land** and **25% less water** than they did 60 years ago.
- Cattle farmers are producing **60% more beef** with **40% fewer carbon emissions** than 50 years ago.
- Each gallon of milk produced by dairy farmers creates **63% fewer carbon emissions** than in 1944.

**Total Livestock Related Complaints to IEPA**
(includes water pollution and odor complaints)

According to the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, these efforts have significantly reduced the number of livestock-related environmental complaints submitted to the agency over the past decade.
Livestock farms, along with meat and dairy processing, are economic engines for Illinois. The dollars generated from livestock production ripple through the state’s economy.

In 2019, the livestock industry contributed more than $31.8 BILLION in economic activity for our state, supported more than 91,000 JOBS and accounted for $4.7 BILLION in household income.

On average, one small meat processor in Illinois generates nearly $27.9 MILLION in economic activity and supports 88 JOBS for the local community each year.

For every $100 of output created by livestock in Illinois, an additional $80 of economic activity is created outside the industry.

Farmers care about strengthening and supporting communities through a variety of assistance, involvement and support.

- A recent study of property values in Illinois shows livestock farms, rural neighbors and town residents can successfully coexist with no adverse impacts to property values, thanks to modern technology and statewide siting criteria.

- Farmers serve as volunteer firefighters, school board members, elected officials, church elders and in other essential roles that support communities.
Behind the Numbers: Farm Families Make the Difference

Numbers help quantify the impact the livestock sector makes in Illinois. But family farmers are the heart of agriculture, and it’s their individual efforts making the difference.

There are hundreds of livestock farms scattered throughout the state, each doing their part to support food security, protect the environment, strengthen their communities and drive economic growth. They’re the ones deciding what to produce, ways to become more efficient in their use of resources and how to innovate for the future.

See how that’s happening over the next few pages as you meet a few of those farmers and learn about why animal agriculture is so important to them.

Supporting Food Security: Pork Producers’ Acts of Kindness Touch Families Throughout State

Illinois farmers are passionate about ensuring their neighbors have access to healthy and nutritious food.

Dale Weitekamp personally made sure of this by providing nine food pantries in and around his hometown of Raymond with 742 pounds of ground pork through the Pork Power program. The president of the Illinois Pork Producers Association (IPPA) used federal stimulus money and his IPPA leadership stipend to make the purchase.

“Touched it in my heart to turn my stimulus checks, and stipend from his leadership role within IPPA, into 700+ pounds of ground pork for various local outlets. (Photo courtesy of IPPA)

“I felt it in my heart to turn my stimulus checks into pork to provide to my local community,” he said. “On top of that, I also converted the stipend I received from serving as the IPPA President in 2020 into pork. It will go to better use as food.”

Last summer, pork producers in Mason County donated over 400 pounds of pork to the Havana Food Pantry. The gift was made possible with a monetary donation from the Mason County Pork Producers and the Pork Power program.

“We appreciate and thank the Pork Producers for their continued generosity and support of the Havana Food Pantry. Without such support from local community organizations, we would not be able to continue to serve those in need,” shares Sharon France, coordinator for the pantry, which serves more than 800 families in their community.

Since its inception in 2008, the Pork Power program has provided over 922,000 pounds of pork — enough for nearly 3 million meals — to families throughout Illinois.

This article was originally published in FarmWeek. For more stories about Illinois livestock producers and the impact they have on their local communities, visit FarmWeekNow.com.
Thoughtful barn construction and new technology keep dairy cows comfortable and productive at Hunter Haven Farms near Pearl City.

Longtime managers Scott and Jennifer Brenner and Nathan and Amanda Dinderman bought the Carroll County farm in 2019, from the Doug and Tom Block families who established it in 1976, and currently milk about 925 cows three times a day. They produce most of their own feed on about 2,000 acres as well.

The Blocks added a 100-stall addition to the existing 400 dairy free stall barn in 2000, installed and put a methane digester online in 2005 and constructed an additional 200 dairy free stall barn in 2006.

Tunnel ventilation was added to the original barn about 10 years ago and Brenner continues to expand that system.

“We found it’s a positive thing with a controlled environment,” Brenner said. “It’s much nicer for the cows. I think we see as much benefit in the winter as we do in the summer.”

Brenner’s goal is to strategically place fans to generate an average windspeed around 7-9 mph through the barns via tunnel ventilation. The system reduces the farm’s water usage as a different method to cool cows in the summer.

“We feel like we can do things to really improve cow comfort. That’s what it’s all about.”

– Scott Brenner

The plug-flow anaerobic methane digester also helps improve cow comfort in an environmentally friendly fashion.

The biodigester creates natural gas from cow manure, which fires boilers to make hot water for the farm, and destroys pathogens and breaks down fiber in the manure to create a byproduct used for bedding the cows.

The pens are cleaned every eight hours and fresh bedding is added about four to five times per week.

The digester created electricity for the grid, but the farm lost the generators in a fire and opted to use the digester for farm use after repairs were made. It also produces a liquid product used to fertilize the crop fields.

Hunter Haven Farms grows about 825 acres of corn silage and 400 acres of alfalfa, all harvested for haylage. Soybeans produced on the farm are sent to a processor to be roasted and then return to the farm to go into the cow rations.

The farm also grows a number of cover crops, with rye as its main one along with winter triticale. Those crops can be added to the feed rations in the right conditions to create almost a double crop type situation. But Brenner prefers to keep the rations consistent.

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Driving Economic Growth: Meat Processing Creates Jobs, New Opportunities

Swine and cattle farmers in the southern half of Illinois and surrounding region could have another option to market their animals as early as the fall of 2022.

Saline River Farms, LLC recently announced plans to construct a meat processing plant on Route 166, just east of Marion in Williamson County.

The 83,000-square-foot facility will process beef and pork on two lines and employ about 116 workers on two shifts, according to Brent Clark, one of the four partners involved in the project and a Williamson County cattle producer.

“This will give producers in Illinois a great option to process their (meat) products,” said Clark. “Once we announced this in September, my phone started ringing off the hook, river to river.”

Saline River Farms plans to source all animals from the surrounding region, possibly extending into Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, Tennessee and Arkansas. The plant initially will process about 5,600 hogs and 2,800 cattle weekly, but that is expected to grow.

“We’re building with the capacity to expand and even double production,” Clark said. “We want to serve our region first. I think farmers from Interstate 72 south will be in an area that can really tap into this.”

More processing capacity is sorely needed in the livestock industry, where pandemic related shutdowns of some plants exposed production issues and temporarily backed up the supply of market-ready animals.

The meat processing plant will help address supply and demand discrepancies, while also generating new business opportunities for the community.

Saline River Farms plans to open a 5,000- to 6,000-square-foot retail store on the site and service on-demand meat orders through shipping and distribution channels with the use of dry ice, similar to Omaha Steaks.

“We’re going to hopefully open markets across the country,” Clark said. “Producers I’ve talked to are excited and maybe they’ll be a little bit more profitable.”

Clark remains hopeful the new processing plant could open as early as the fall of 2022, or possibly by early 2023.

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Fourth-generation farmer **Jarrad Colwell** has been involved in the hog industry his entire career, from raising a few head for local sales to custom-trucking. But he and his wife, Kara, stepped up their involvement in the hog industry, while also possibly building in an opportunity for their children to be part of the operation in the future. They opened a new 2,400-head hog barn on their Morgan County farm early last year.

“It’s hard in this area to buy land and get it to cash flow,” said Jarrad, who operates the row crop side of the family farm with his brother, Brian. “I’ve always loved pigs and this (barn) is something that cash flows. Now, we can start the next generation.”

The Colwells have four children, Dylan (15), Aliviah (12), Makinsey (8) and Kelsie (2), with a fifth due to arrive in March. Kara manages the business side of the farm and also works at a local hospital.

“Adding this barn is a way to diversify our farm and start a legacy for our children,” Jarrad said. “We will enjoy doing this together, as a family.”

The **Olson family** made a similar move on their Logan County farm, opening a 2,400-head wean-to-finish barn.

“It really made sense as an opportunity to grow and diversify what we’re doing, yet keep it in the scope of the grain farm,” said Blane Olson, who returned to the farm out of college about 15 years ago.

The Olsons focused on show pigs for a number of years, a tradition passed down to Blane and Kristi’s four children, Braden, Kelten, Luke and Coley, which eventually prospered into a side business promoting and selling their purebred Durocs to other 4-H members.

“We will enjoy doing this together, as a family.”

“For Kristi and I, it’s important to build and grow our farm to give our four kids at least the opportunity to come back (into the operation as adults) in some capacity,” Blane said. “It’s big to continue to build on that legacy to the fourth generation.”

Many Illinois beef producers make farming a family affair as well.

At Foxglove Acres Ranch in Wabash County, for example, **Sam Deisher** farms with his parents, Dave and Kris, and siblings, Jacob and Isabelle.

The family focuses on where the meat comes from when selling to customers at farmers markets or through their freezer beef business.

“It’s definitely tough dealing with family dynamics, but worth it in the long run,” said **Trevor Maiers**, who raises cattle with his dad, Tim, in Adams County.

When multiple generations are involved in a farm, deciding whether to be a part of it is a big - often difficult – decision many farm kids have to make.

Maiers is proud of the role his family plays in providing quality beef for American families and hopes to continue the legacy.

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Graphics Highlight Ag’s Local Economic Value

Illinois Farm Bureau created a series of county-specific graphics that quantify the economic value of agriculture, including livestock production, on the local economy.

Graphics exist for most Illinois’ counties in which adequate data is available, and county Farm Bureau leaders are encouraged to download their graphic and use them in discussions with local officials.

Click and scroll down to the County Economy Reports section to see if a graphic is available for your county. If you don’t see yours, contact IFB Senior Economist Mike Doherty.

Examples of the graphics from Schuyler, DeKalb and Richland Counties:

**DEKALB COUNTY**
ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION OF AG TO THE COUNTY
95% of farms are family-managed and owned businesses

- Total Jobs - 2,594
- Added Jobs From Livestock - 564
- Total Value Added - $285.3 million
- Value Added from Livestock - $59.9 million
- Added Household Income - $114.7 million
- Added Household Income from Livestock - $17 million
- Market Value of Crops - $234 million
- Market Value of Livestock - $150.2 million

**RICHLAND COUNTY**
ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION OF AG TO THE COUNTY
95% of farms are family-managed and owned businesses

- Total Jobs - 1,072
- Added Jobs From Livestock - 587
- Total Value Added - $77.8 million
- Value Added from Livestock - $41.2 million
- Added Household Income - $52.6 million
- Added Household Income from Livestock - $27.7 million
- Market Value of Crops - $69 million
- Market Value of Livestock - $50.8 million

**SCHUYLER COUNTY**
ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION OF AG TO THE COUNTY
95% of farms are family-managed and owned businesses

- Total Jobs - 679
- Added Jobs From Livestock - 337
- Total Value Added - $43.7 million
- Value Added from Livestock - $16.2 million
- Added Household Income - $40.9 million
- Added Household Income from Livestock - $14 million
- Market Value of Crops - $75.2 million
- Market Value of Livestock - $41.2 million
- Total Farmers - 953
- Farmland As A Percentage Of Property Tax Base - 52%

Sources:
2019 Illinois Agriculture Economic Contribution Study
2019 Illinois Farmland Values & Lease Trends
USDA 2017 Census of Agriculture