

Growing Illinois Through Agricultural Education

While the perception may be that agriculture in Illinois is all about field plows and sows, agriculture in Illinois also encompasses such careers as turf management, business and food science. As such, agricultural education, especially urban agricultural education, is one of the main linchpins for Illinois' social, economic and environmental future.

Agriculture is the largest employer in Illinois, and nearly three-quarters of job growth is related to agriculture. Urban areas are key contributors to a growing workforce, and more high school and college graduates are needed to fill diverse industry jobs.

To fill the rising number of career openings, more graduates are needed in more than 300 agricultural careers. About 75 percent of high school graduates who study agriculture go to college.

Pat Callahan, a mother of two from the western Chicago suburbs works in the school system, and recognizes the value in promoting agricultural education.

"Parents in this area work in finance and sales and are doctors or lawyers. Many kids have no personal reference point to people working in agriculture," says Callahan. "More students need to know there is a world of career opportunities out there, and that the Illinois agriculture industry is not just about farming."

While the importance of agricultural education is spreading in Illinois' urban areas, community leaders can help spark interest in more schools. During the last decade, Illinois' agricultural education enrollment has doubled to 26,329 students. Today, 60 percent are urban students, and 34 percent are female. Chicago Mayor Richard Daley has recognized the value, and announced a new high school in Garfield Park that will replicate the successful model used at the Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences.

"Who knew that to be a good golf course manager you should study agriculture," says Callahan. "The more kids know about the diversity of the agriculture industry, the more they will be interested in ag careers. I recognize agriculture is extremely important to the Illinois economy. People in Chicago, as well as other urban areas of



Pat Callahan, Chicago-area mother of two, believes agricultural education is important to the state's economy.

Illinois, need to learn more about agriculture and all of the opportunities the industry offers."

Bring Agricultural Education to Your Community

How can you explore agricultural education options for your community or school?

- Begin by visiting www.agricultural-education.org for more information, and explore the more than 300 career options in agriculture.

- Find out whether you live in one of the more than 60 counties in Illinois that are served by agricultural literacy coordinators who conduct classroom presentations and provide elementary teachers with classroom resources about agriculture.

- Provide the following key points to your school's leaders and board of education:

- Agricultural education is a multidisciplinary education that teaches and reinforces science, math, language arts and social science principles.

- Illinois' nation-leading agricultural education curriculum has more than 600 academically rigorous, standards-aligned lessons that include performance-based, academic assessments to evaluate student progress toward meeting or exceeding Illinois Learning Standards.

- First-year agriculture programs receive a start-up grant of \$5,000.