

THE FARM FREQUENCY

PLANTING EDITION

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In partnership with Prairie Communications, Warren-Henderson Farm Bureau, and Kellogg Printing.

Proteins Growing Role
in Global Diets (pg 2)

Extension Names New
County Director (Pg 3)

Community
Recognitions (Pg 4)

Maritime Shipping
Potential to Drive Corn
Demand (Pg 7)

Brazils Livestock
Industry (Pg 8)

Rural Schools Blending
Ag and Computer
Science (Pg 11)

FFA Wrapped (Pg 14)

Rep. Hammond
Honored with Ag
Service Award (Pg 18)



Photo taken by Bryan Arnold

Protein on the Rise as Diets and Incomes Shift Worldwide

by Kailey Foster

Rising global economies, especially in developing countries, are leading to a surge in protein consumption. This shift is driven not only by the increasing purchasing power of consumers worldwide, but also by changing views on the role of protein in diets, said Illinois Corn Growers Association Board Member Rob Elliott.

“People are looking at protein a little bit differently—more positively than they have in the past,” said Elliott. “This whole GLP-1 medicine trend seems to be driving that. As much concern as we had about the RFK Jr. discussion, it’s actually probably come out okay when it comes to diet and the meat sector.”

With this increased demand, export markets are seeing roughly a two percent annual rise in protein. These changes have been prominent in Southeast Asia, Latin

America, and North America.

“There are a lot of countries around the world that are demanding improvements in their diets, whether it’s protein or vegetable products—

that’s a bright spot,” said Ron Moore, former American Soybean Association president.

“Disposable income in developing countries is increasing. And what do people do when they have more disposable income? They want a better diet.”

The increased demand for protein is also being driven by social media trends promoting healthier lifestyles. Research from Cargill found that in the United States, 61 percent of consumers have increased their protein intake since 2024.



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Online Tools Transform Traditional Auction Industry

by Kailey Foster

In the age of rapidly evolving technology, even the most traditional industries have had to adapt to stay relevant, including the auction world. Thad Tharp, owner of Tharp Auction Service, said digital tools are transforming how buyers and sellers connect.

“The auction method of marketing has been around for hundreds of years — a trusted, tried-and-true way of marketing any asset class,” shared Tharp. “The internet and modern technology have really opened the gates, giving us the ability to reach people anywhere in the world. I feel very fortunate to have some young people on our team who are helping me be efficient in using that technology and leveraging that database to reach buyers and bidders from all over the country — and all over the world.”

In a recent sale, Tharp said they sold a road grader from Warren County to a buyer in Pakistan—a transaction made possible through the online format.



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New County Director Named as Lisa Torrance Retires from Extension

by Kailey Foster

The University of Illinois Extension has welcomed Tara Heath as the new County Director for Henderson, Knox, McDonough, and Warren counties.

A lifelong resident of McDonough County, Heath brings extensive experience in local agriculture and Extension to her new role.

"I was raised on a farm outside of Macomb, and I've lived in McDonough County all my life," said Heath. "I went to school at Western Illinois University and got my degree in agriculture, and stayed and worked at WIU for several years before joining Extension."



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Before stepping into her new position, Heath served as a Commercial Ag Educator for Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell Counties.

"I really enjoyed that work for Extension, and I'm super excited to come home," she added.

Heath comes into the role as longtime County Director Lisa Torrance steps into retirement after 24 years of working with Extension.

As Torrance reflects on her career, she noted just how much her role has evolved over the years.

"It has changed a lot. The biggest change is that when I came in and was over one county and about three or four people, and now I'm supervising four counties, and have somewhere between 15 and 20 people most of the time, depending on the time of the year that I'm supervising."

Torrance shares some of the highlights from working in Extension including community programs such as Welcome to the Real World, Youth Leadership Academies, and County Fairs.



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COMMUNITY RECOGNITIONS

United FFA Advisor Named District One Golden Owl Winner

by Kailey Foster

United FFA Advisor Scott Riden was recently named the District One winner of the Golden Owl Award. The Golden Owl, which is awarded through the Illinois Association of Vocational Agriculture Teachers (IAVAT), recognizes agriculture teachers who go “above and beyond” for their students.

Riden was selected as one of the five district winners from a pool of 25 section winners, all representing middle and high school agriculture teachers across the state.

“It’s a testament to my students. I’ve been fortunate enough to have some very good students who have been very successful, and they, in turn, make their old ag teacher look good,” shared Riden. “It’s quite an honor to be recognized. The other four candidates are great teachers as well. Since this is my last year, it’s especially neat to be recognized before I retire.”

Before becoming an agriculture teacher and FFA advisor, Riden was part of the Northwestern High School FFA chapter. Through his years as a FFA member and advisor, he has watched the organization evolve.

“I started teaching when it was still the Future Farmers of America, and at the first National Convention I attended, they changed the name to the National FFA Organization, as it is today,” shared Riden. “It has really evolved, especially the leadership aspect of FFA. There are a lot more events to participate in, and many contests have evolved over the years. But mainly it’s the leadership and confidence students gain from participating in Career Development Events and Leadership Development Events. They do well, gain confidence, and that’s what I like to see.”

The Golden Owl district winners are finalists for the Illinois Agriculture Educator of the Year award, which will be announced this June at the IAVAT conference.



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Local Farmers Recognized for Lifelong Service to Agriculture

by Kelsey Crain

Each year, the Warren-Henderson Farm Bureau presents an Ag Service Award to recognize outstanding service to the local agricultural community. This year, the honor was awarded to Henderson County residents Randy and Paula Bigger. President Jake Armstrong said their years of dedication made them well deserving of the recognition:

“Great outstanding individuals, who have 40, 50 years plus service the Henderson County community. If you think it, they have probably done it or been involved with it, whether it is farming operations, other businesses, school board, churches, all of it. They just had a top-notch resume. That is what that award is for, to recognize outstanding community individuals in the agricultural field and give them a little recognition,” shared Armstrong.

Schleich Honored with 2026 Beef Backer Award

by Kailey Foster

The Tri-County Cattlemen present the Beef Backer Award to an individual or business that has shown longstanding support for the organization and the beef industry. This year, the honor went to Robert Schleich.

“I was very surprised, but I’ve raised cattle all my life, and what a wonderful award, so I’m very humbled,” Schleich shared. “I started raising cattle when I was in junior high, and I’ve had them ever since. My father had cattle before me, and my grandfather, and now my sons. We run about 80 head of cows and really enjoy it.”

Schleich was recognized at the Tri-County Cattlemen’s 2026 Annual Banquet, where Tri-County Cattlemen President John Kane explained why Schleich was this year’s choice. Kane noted that the Beef Backer Award goes to someone who has supported the group for many years, often through involvement, attendance, and strong contributions.

“He has been a longtime supporter of me and a mentor to me,” Kane said. “He was honestly the first person I thought of when selecting a recipient. He’s always there for the kids and usually likes to donate a lot of money to this organization.”

Kane added that Schleich’s support goes beyond the banquets, his longtime involvement in the beef industry, continued cattle operation, and family’s multi-generation commitment make him an outstanding example of local agricultural dedication.



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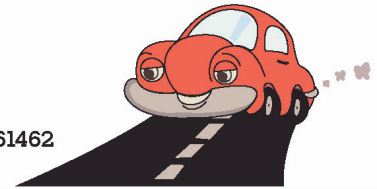
“We tend to stay in the countryside and on our tractors, do good, and just give back. It is nice to honor those people and give them the recognition they deserve after a long career of service to their community,” Armstrong added.

The Bigger’s were presented their Ag Service Award at the Warren-Henderson Farm Bureau’s Murder Mystery Dinner and Foundation Auction in early March.

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Government Payments and Crop Insurance Strengthen 2026 Outlook for Farmers

by Kailey Foster

Before the start of the Iran conflict, 2026 farm economics was shaping up to be in a better position than 2025. Chris Gavin, President of 1870's Holding Company, said this improvement was not only due to government payouts and the One, Big, Beautiful Bill, but also because of crop insurance subsidies.

"The government payments—the bridge payment currently being distributed, along with the ARC (agriculture risk coverage) and PLC (price lost coverage) payments tied to what we marketed last fall—look like they're going to provide another boost to farmers' net income," said Gavin.

"We still don't know what yields will look like yet, but we've done some work on break-even levels for farmers. And with the crop insurance deadline having passed on March 15, those decisions are now set—everyone's made their choices."

Gavin added that for his family's operation, they've taken a different approach than in past years by investing more heavily in crop insurance for the 2026 crop, using tools such as HarvestIQ to help build a safety net.

"What the One, Big, Beautiful Bill has done is help raise that safety net," added Gavin. "Overall, I'd say farmers are in pretty good shape. Their balance sheets are solid—though liquidity has tightened, mainly because of machinery payments. That's taken a toll on cash flow. But in terms of net worth and equity, farmers are still in a strong position."

Amid these uncertainties, farmers are relying on a stronger safety net, careful planning, and technological tools to navigate the season ahead.

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Maritime Shipping Could Drive Massive Corn Demand Through Ethanol Fuel

by Kailey Foster

An industry that burns over 90 billion gallons of fossil fuels annually, the maritime shipping industry presents an opportunity to grow demand for corn by switching to ethanol fuel. Illinois Corn Growers Board member Rob Elliott explained that the industry is looking for ways to adopt cleaner fuel sources instead of the heavy fuel oil it currently uses.

“One of their major players, Maersk, is an extremely large shipper- you might see their containers going by as you’re waiting at a railroad crossing. They’re a large shipper, and many of those big shipping containers go from one part of the world to another,” said Elliott.

By making ethanol the fuel of choice for a company such as Maersk, Elliott said there could be a significant increase in corn demand.

“Maersk is working on and testing a 100% ethanol-fueled engine. If those all came into play, like I said, at that 90 billion gallons, it would be a significant increase in our corn demand.”

Elliott added that the rail industry, which uses a billion gallons of mainly low-sulfur diesel fuel annually, would be another opportunity for both the ethanol and corn industries.

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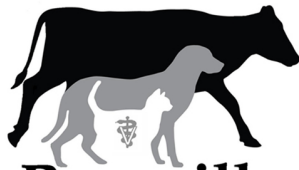
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BRAZIL LIVESTOCK INDUSTRY

Conversation with Brazil Veterinarian Marco Vinicius

English Translation by Sebastiao Neto

Marco Vinicius is a veterinarian specializing in dairy cattle in Goiás, Brazil. In this Q&A, he joined WRAM's Kailey Foster and Sebastiao Neto to share insights on common livestock health issues, biosecurity practices, and the main challenges faced by farmers. He also discussed differences between Brazilian and U.S. cattle production and the growing role of technology in farming.



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Q: What are the most common health problems you see on livestock in Brazil and what biosecurity steps are taken to minimize the risks?

A: The health problems that are being problems recently for our local farmers, are the same spotted in the USA, which are Nitrates, Mastitis, Ketosis, and Retained Placenta, and we did not have any cases of major diseases recently that could be trouble for livestock and production. Regarding the biosecurity steps taken to try to control the growth of diseases or any issues in general, they are very strict. Most livestock farmers have a special environment

that is highly secured, and thoroughly cleaned and protected. When visitors, or workers, are to go into the isolated environment they are kept in, they are required to take a contamination shower, and get into special biohazard clothing to avoid contact with those animals and not cause diseases or any harm to their health.

Q: What are the biggest challenges you find as a vet dealing with farmers in Brazil?

A: The biggest challenge I face as a Dairy Veterinarian is to get farmers to understand how important it is to have a comfortable and well taken care of place for your livestock to feel well and give you the most production return in the end. One other point that has been a challenge is to get them to understand that certain breeds are going to have a better result under the dairy production, and others will be better under a meat production, and they sometimes get disappointed when not reaching the production goal, and the only reason is that they do not have the adequate breed for the product they are looking for.



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Q: What is, in your opinion, the biggest difference between Brazilian and American cattle?

A: The biggest difference I can see between the cattle is that in the USA, there is a higher selection pressure over the animals, and they go under a more strict pick than in Brazil. One other factor that calls my attention is how the environment, and the weather conditions favor USA, as well, since in Brazil the climate is warmer and it can get too hot for the livestock sometimes, which ended up impacting on production, since there are no indoor climate controlled places for animals. One last thing that makes a difference is the quality of the food you give your livestock, and USA have a big quality production of corn that is turned into food for them, and that is one more point that can be seen as a strong point also for both countries.



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Jared Kunkle Jim Jones

Q: What role is technology playing on production in Brazil, and how is the implementation happening?

A: Technology plays a strong role in a few areas, but not as strong as others. For example, I just now had a farmer implementing robotics on his farm, which is still under testing, but they've gotten good results in the first month. The biggest challenge when it comes to this is the high prices for those softwares, and robots, which are very expensive in Brazil for many reasons, such as taxes, and import prices.



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Growing Energy Demand Sparks Farmland Concerns Locally

by Parker Cassidy

Illinois lawmakers are continuing to take a closer look at renewable energy as demand continues to grow across the state. State Senator Mike Halpin said energy production is struggling to keep up with that demand, which is becoming a growing concern.

“When it comes to other renewable energy, we’re certainly incentivizing that and trying to make that easier by making sure that there’s a statewide set of regulations for where and when they can be placed. The biggest problem is that the production of energy is being far outpaced by the demand for energy. Every one of us holding one of these little devices, the iPads and the other tablets that our kids are using, AI data centers, all of that is just spiking the demand for that energy. Which results in us as homeowners and residential users competing for that energy with big tech, and it’s raising our prices.”

Halpin said the issue is expected to remain a major topic of discussion as lawmakers look for ways to boost energy production moving forward.

As these projects expand,

so has the debate about how they could impact farmland locally. Jake Armstrong, President of the Warren-Henderson Farm Bureau, said land use decisions ultimately come down to the property owner, but location still matters.

“I tend to view it as it’s your land. If you want to put up solar panels on it, put solar panels on it. Put a wind farm, great. If you want to farm crops, have at it. You want to build a house, a shopping mall, grain elevator, I don’t care. It’s

your land, it’s your right to do whatever you would like with it. Locally, Warren County tends to be a little anti that.

They like to preserve that farmland in farmland. I generally agree that we should be putting solar panels and wind turbines where they’re most effective. I think green technology is a solution we can use going forward, if we implement those properly.”

The conversation around renewable energy and farmland use is expected to continue at both the state and local levels.



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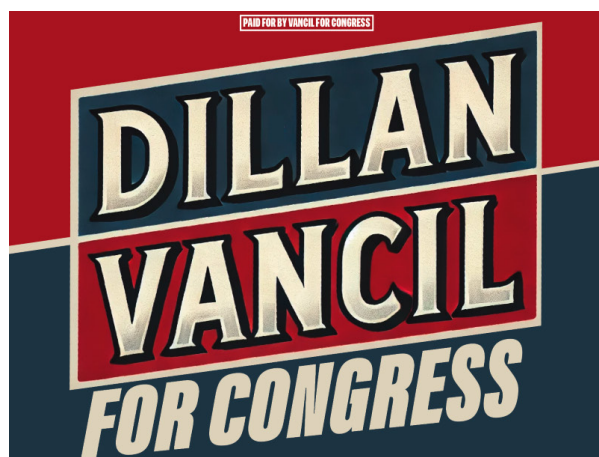
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Rural Schools Blending Agriculture and Computer Science

by Kelsey Crain



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The Association of Illinois Rural and Small Schools has launched the Rural Illinois CTE Project in partnership with the Illinois State Board of Education. The initiative aims to better understand what rural districts currently offer through career and technical education (CTE), identify challenges and opportunities, and provide direct local support to help expand these programs. As part of ongoing efforts to strengthen career readiness, Program Director John Glasgow highlighted a pilot program that blends agricultural education with computer science.

“Students in a rural district have this opportunity to be broadly engaged. Another asset to being in a rural district is flexibility and freedom. Teachers consistently across the nation in a rural district will say they have way more autonomy to create the class they want, to lead the class they want, and to change with students and time. I took that as a starting point,” reported Glasgow. “Ag is the most offered CTE course in rural Illinois districts. What is difficult though is we also need a lot of computer science skills, but that is very difficult for rural districts to do. So, one pilot we have been working on is allowing ag ed classes to teach computer science skills.”

Through the program, interested ag educators can attend workshops to learn how to integrate the computer science skills into their existing curriculum.

“Really, it comes down to just needing one teacher. You need an ag teacher,” Glasgow added. “An ag teacher with an interest and ability to want to go out and learn these skills. What we do for the computer science skills is a workshop for ag teachers to work with our partners at the Learning Technology Center to see how they can incorporate what is called a micro:bit into lessons they already have.”

According to Glasgow, this approach will help expand access to in-demand technical skills without requiring schools to build entirely new programs.

There are approximately 862 public school districts in Illinois. Of those, 491 are classified as rural by the Association of Illinois Rural and Small Schools.

Raising a Glass to the Farmers Behind the Brew

by Kelsey Crain

Every pint of beer has a story, and it all starts with local farmers planting the crop that makes the brewing process all possible, shared G&M Distributors President Adam Vitale.

“Without farmers there is no alcohol. One of our biggest brands, Busch Light, the majority of corn for all the Busch Light in the United States comes from Illinois. The farmers in Illinois are massively important to Busch Light. That is why agriculture is just absolutely critical to beer.”

One of the most widely celebrated unofficial drinking holidays, National Beer Day marks the end of Prohibition and the legal sale of beer. Dating back to 1933, the first case of beer sold was delivered to the White House.

“Post Prohibition, so that was when the government decided that alcohol should be legal again, they started off with beer,” informed Vitale. “Before wine and spirits were legal, beer was the first product that became legal. It became legal on April 7, 1933. The first case of beer that was legally sold in the United States was actually delivered by the now world-famous Budweiser Clydesdales to the White House to President Roosevelt.”

The next time you take a sip of beer, think beyond its’ history. Think of the farmers whose work helped put it in your hand.



To Plant or Not to Plant

by Kailey Foster

Each year, farmers feel pressured to get into the field in a “timely” manner to complete planting. But what actually constitutes a timely planting season?

“When they say timely, what they kind of mean is early,” shared Lance Tarochione, Bayer Technical Agronomist.

“I would consider May 10 to be timely. Most farmers would not consider May 10 to be timely because once you get out of April and into May, people start feeling a lot of pressure. We end up making questionable agronomic decisions about when we do things because of that pressure we put on ourselves.”

Tarochione added that planting date has less impact on U.S. average corn yield than many might think.

“If you do a planting date study in a particular field, the results will probably show that the best time to plant corn is somewhere between April

20 and May 15. But there’s not a dramatic drop-off in corn yield—especially in central Illinois—until we get past May 15 or May 20. Other parts of the country could be different.”

After a dry fall and winter, spring storms help replenish soil moisture ahead of planting season.



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Grain Logistics Improve as Midwestern Rivers Replenish

by Kailey Foster

Water levels on the mid-Mississippi and Illinois Rivers are in a good position going into the month of May. Dan Bowman, a grain merchandiser with ADM, reported in late April that river levels had risen to flood stage in some areas, causing some barge ports to shut down.

"It feels like we saw that a time or two, maybe in the last year or so, when we had these low water situations, we'd see some spikes and then we lose it," said Bowman. "Now, it feels like we're replenishing a lot of these tributary streams and rivers that feed the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers."

According to the National Weather Service, in the month of April, Burlington, Iowa recorded just under 6.5 inches of precipitation. Bowman added that this year's precipitation may help the rivers to sustain levels necessary to keep grain traffic moving.

"It looks like maybe we'll be able to sustain levels that have been a foot or two higher than what they have been in the last couple years, which is nice to see. You just don't want to see those sandbars on the Mississippi River when you cross that bridge every day," said Bowman.

In 2025, the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service reported barge grain movement on the Mississippi River System saw an 11 percent increase from 2024-- the largest increase since 2022.

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The Abingdon-Avon FFA Chapter has demonstrated a strong commitment to leadership, competition, and agricultural education throughout the 2025-2026 school year, earning notable achievements while continuing to expand student involvement across a wide range of career and leadership development events.

At the state level, members of the chapter achieved impressive success. Aliyah Janssen earned a 4th place finish in the Agriculture Education Career Development Event (CDE), showcasing her knowledge and dedication to the field. In addition, the chapter secured a 3rd place finish in Dairy Cattle Judging reasons, reflecting the team's skill in evaluation and communication.

Looking ahead, several members are preparing to compete at the district level. Anna Serven and Josie Featherlin will represent the chapter in their respective public speaking categories, while the Agricultural Issues team is gearing up for competition in June. The chapter also recognizes its graduating seniors for their dedication and contributions over the years. The 2026 senior class includes Izzy Kemp, Anna Serven, Lily Terwilliger, Brenna Jennings, Lucas Andrews, Cole Sheckler, Brogen Owens, Alex Foutch, Jonny Simmons, Garron Mason, and Ben Janssen.

Guiding the organization into the future is a newly appointed officer team. Aliyah Janssen will serve as President, with Taylor Hendel as Vice President and Cori Anderson as Secretary. Additional officers include Collin Jennings as Reporter, Terrance Reffett as Treasurer, Abby Kemp as Sentinel, Klaire Anderson as Chaplain, Josie Featherlin as Historian, and Maci Brooks overseeing plot and greenhouse operations. Advisors Makayla Worthington and Colby Trone continue to provide leadership and support to the chapter.

With strong participation, competitive success, and dedicated leadership, the Abingdon-Avon FFA Chapter continues to uphold the values of agricultural education and student development, positioning itself for continued achievement in the years ahead.

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Monmouth- Roseville FFA

by Kailey Foster

The Monmouth-Roseville FFA Chapter found success across multiple levels of competition this spring.

On February 14, the chapter participated in the Section SAE Interviews at Mercer County High School. Camden Johnson earned first place in Small Animal Production and Care, and Macy Upton placed first in Diversified Livestock, both advancing to the district-level competition. Mallory Corzatt earned second place in Sheep Production Entrepreneurship.

At the district level, Camden Johnson continued his success by earning first place, advancing to the state competition. He was later named the Illinois FFA Small Animal Care State Runner-Up.



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Jessica Plasters

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United FFA

by Kailey Foster

The United FFA Chapter earned numerous honors this spring semester at the district, section, and state levels.

At the District Record Book contest, Aiden Martin placed first in Diversified Crop Production, advancing to the state level where he ranked in the top five and moved on to State Awards Day. Reagan Shike earned second place in Beef Production Placement, while Nolan Jenks, Rose Leary, Evan Jenks, and Peyton Martin each earned third-place finishes in Grain Production, Swine Production, Fiber and Oil Production, and Diversified Agricultural Production.

At the Section 4 Public Speaking contest, Ada Kunkle earned second place in Creed Speaking, Reagan Shike placed second in Prepared Public Speaking, and Meredith Yung earned second in Extemporaneous Public Speaking. All three advanced to the district contest in May.

The Parliamentary Procedure team placed second at sectionals before winning the District I contest, earning a spot at state. Aiden Martin was recognized as top chairman, and Delaney Burns was named second-place floor member at the district level.

Livestock judging teams also had a strong season, earning multiple top finishes, including first overall at the ICC contest. Reagan Shike was named high individual at ICC, and the team later placed sixth overall at the State Livestock Judging CDE.





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West Central FFA

submitted by the West Central FFA Chapter

The West Central FFA Chapter held its annual banquet on Monday, March 23, celebrating a successful year of student achievement, leadership, and service. Members were recognized for their accomplishments in Career Development Events, including strong finishes in forestry, agricultural education, food science, poultry judging, and livestock judging.

Students were also honored for their Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAEs), which included hands-on work in areas such as grain, beef, goat, and swine production. The chapter recognized State Degree and Proficiency Award applicants for their outstanding dedication and commitment.

Service efforts were highlighted throughout the evening, including delivering over 200 meals to local farmers through Fuel the Farmers, hosting Ag Day events for younger students, and organizing activities such as the Teacher Appreciation Breakfast and Wreath Week.

The 2026-2027 officer team was also elected:

- President: Cooper Gibb
- Vice President: Kaylee Mills
- Secretary: Alivia Price
- Treasurer: Blake Ricketts
- Reporter: Abby Purchase
- Sentinel: Hayden Forbes
- Historian: Kaydence Shaw
- Chaplain: Jeremy Ford
- Parliamentarian: Graham Kelly



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During the banquet, 60 members received their Greenhand Degree, and 26 earned their Chapter Degree. Two individuals were awarded Honorary Degrees, and students were recognized for excellence in service, leadership, and scholarship. Additionally, six senior members were recognized for their hard work and dedication to the chapter.

The chapter looks forward to attending State Convention in June, where two members will receive their State Degree.



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Golden Manes of Valor Bringing Healing Through Horses

by Parker Cassidy

Golden Manes of Valor is a new nonprofit in Henderson County focused on helping people heal through equine, non-equine and nature-based therapy.

The organization was founded by Army veterans Tammy Coon and Linda Steinholtz, with a mission to serve veterans, first responders, and others in need.

Coon said the idea for the program came from personal loss and a desire to honor her family.

“Unfortunately, I lost my Irish twin sister. We were 11 months apart, best friends. I’m the youngest of eight. She was next in line. Lost her. It just broke my heart. Then I lost, two weeks later, my stepdad of 46 years, and then my mother six months later. So it was all very devastating. And it was like, what can I do in their honor?”

“I inherited their farm in Oquawka, Linda and I discussed it, and we decided we’re going to start up this nonprofit called Golden Manes of Valor. Golden stands for my sister’s hair, which she had blonde hair, but it’s also for the elderly and the special needs. Manes is for my parents love of horses; they trail rode every weekend. Valor is for first responders and military. That’s our mission statement.”

Coon said the program is open to anyone who may need a break.

“It’s incredible what mini horses can do for you, the therapeutic value of it, nature, the non-equine aspect of it, there is so much. Linda and the rest of the team of volunteers have put together an incredible program of equine and non-equine activities.”

Golden Manes of Valor is located at 2520 County Highway 3 in Oquawka.

For more information on Golden Manes of Valor, you can find them on Facebook or visit goldenmanesofvalor.com.



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Hammond Honored with Ag Service Award at Ag Roundtable

by Mike Weaver

Illinois State Representative Norine Hammond was presented with an Ag Service Award plaque during the Spring WRAM Ag Roundtable held in March, recognizing her long-standing support of agriculture in West Central Illinois.

Moderator of the roundtable and WRAM General Manager Vanessa Wetterling praised Hammond's dedication, saying, "This person has been at literally every one of these ag roundtables for as long as I can remember and has consistently supported agriculture in the West Central Illinois area for nearly two decades. And that is State Representative Norine Hammond."

State Senator Neil Anderson also commended Hammond's efforts. "I can't say enough about the work you've done in West Central Illinois, especially when it comes to agriculture," Anderson said. "One thing we face in Springfield is that people across the state often downplay the importance of agriculture, and you have done a great job making sure that doesn't happen while fighting for our farmers."

State Representative Dan Swanson echoed those sentiments, highlighting Hammond's leadership. "Leader Hammond, that farm voice has to be loud in the legislature, and you certainly have been a strong proponent for agriculture throughout the state of Illinois, especially here in Western Illinois. We're going to miss your leadership in the ag community."

In accepting the award, Hammond expressed her appreciation for the roundtable and its audience.

"To all of the folks here at the roundtable, and to those listening now and over the years, this has always been an incredible opportunity," Hammond said. "It's unfortunate that more areas of our state don't have the chance to hear directly from experts about what's happening in agriculture and agribusiness. I've learned so much and have taken that knowledge with me to my role as president of the state ag and rural leaders group. I will continue in that role for some time and remain a voice for agriculture and agribusiness. Thank you all so much."



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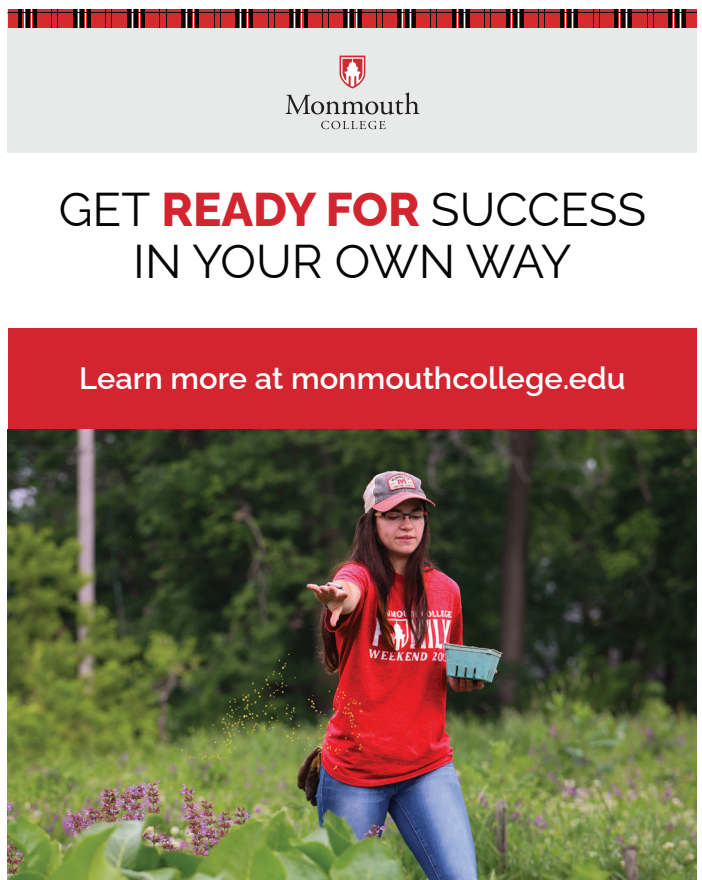
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Push to Raise Illinois Minimum Wage Sparks Concern

by Kailey Foster

As of January 1, 2025, Illinois minimum wage has been raised to \$15 per hour for adult workers. This increase has remained unchanged since then. However, Illinois legislation has been filed to raise the minimum wage further, to \$27 per hour by 2032.

State Senator Neil Anderson said the bill would impact not only local farmers, but the broader community.

“When you talk about thin margins and the cost of paying employees, and then add in what that does—especially in our farming community—to workers’ compensation costs, you’re doubling your employee costs. That is a big concern,” Anderson said.

Representative Dan Swanson added that as the minimum wage rises, so does the use of kiosk systems in stores and restaurants.

“Even at \$15 an hour, it’s tough to be able to staff.

We’ve read newspapers and heard reports about what’s happening in California as they’ve continued to increase their minimum wage—how businesses are closing. I know there are a lot of other factors involved, but while many people would welcome a \$27-an-hour wage, the impacts across the state of Illinois would not be economically sound,” Swanson said.

In addition to discussions at the state level, multiple Illinois lawmakers are among the sponsors of a proposed congressional bill that would raise the national minimum wage to \$25 per hour.



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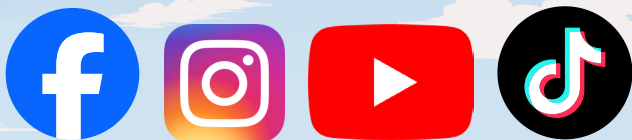


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