



Winter Programs

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- 9 - **Private Pesticide Applicator Test Only**, Freeport (p. 2)
- 23 & 24 - **Driftless Region Beef Conference**, Dubuque (p. 3)
- 25 - **Winter Trails & Naturalist Tales**, Pecatonica
- 29 - **Northwest Illinois Agronomy Summit**, Freeport (p. 1)

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- 6 - **Private Pesticide Applicator Test Only**, Elizabeth (p. 2)
- 17 - **Stateline Fruit and Vegetable Growers Conference**, Rockford
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- 22 - **Joys of Gardening**, Freeport
- 27 - **Master Gardener Training begins**

March

- 1 - **Tri-State Forestry Conference**, Dubuque
- 8 - **Gardening for Food, Flowers & Fun**, Rockford
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- 11 - **Morrow Plots & Centennial Soil Project**, Freeport, (p. 2)
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Visit go.illinois.edu/jsw for more details on these events.

New E-Newsletter focuses on crops

Agronomy/Crop Sciences Educator Kathryn Seebruck has started a new newsletter titled "***Everything Agronomy***." This monthly e-newsletter brings information and updates about University agronomic research, useful resources, programs you may be interested in learning more about or being a part of, and local events—all in one quick and easy-to-read email. Sign up for the newsletter online at: go.illinois.edu/everythingagronomy.

Northwest Illinois Agronomy Summit to be Held in Freeport

Every growing season, corn and soybean producers have to make numerous management decisions that affect their bottom line. And as agriculture technology and research advance at a rapid pace, it can be difficult to keep up with the latest recommendations.

To provide producers with the latest research updates and to equip them with information that will help them to confidently make these important management decisions, University of Illinois Extension is pleased to announce that the annual Northwest Illinois Agronomy Summit will be held at Highland Community College Conference Center in Freeport on Wednesday, January 29 beginning at 10 a.m.

This year's conference will feature research updates from University of Illinois faculty specialists, highlighting best management practices in the areas of soil fertility, corn and soybean management, and weed control.

Presentation topics include:

- *What We Know Today About Biologicals in Illinois Row Crops*, Connor Sible, U of I Crop Sciences Research Assistant Professor
- *Corn and Soybean Management Considerations for 2025*, Connor Sible, U of I Crop Sciences Research Assistant Professor
- *Managing P & K to Optimize Corn Response to N in Northern Illinois Soils*, John Jones, U of I Crop Sciences Assistant Professor of Agronomy & Soil Fertility Extension Specialist
- *Resistance, Mitigations, and Metribuzin: Aspects of Weed Management in 2025*, Aaron Hager, U of I Crop Sciences Professor and Weed Science Extension Specialist
- *Highland Community College Agriculture Research Update*, Justin Ebert, Agriculture Instructor, Highland Community College

To register or for more information, visit go.illinois.edu/agsummit or call (815) 235-4125. Registration is required to attend. Registration cost is \$25.





Explore the History of the U of I Morrow Plots

Join us for an engaging evening as we delve into the rich history of agricultural research at the University of Illinois' Morrow Plots and Centennial Soil Archive Project. This informative event will take place on March 11, at 6 p.m. at the Stephenson County Farm Bureau Building, Freeport.

Dr. Margenot, associate professor of soil science and director of the Morrow Plots, will take us on a historical journey, exploring the inception of the Morrow Plots, the oldest experimental agricultural field in the United States. He will discuss how these plots have evolved over the years and how the University has adapted to preserve this vital resource.

In addition, Dr. Margenot will share insights into the Illinois Centennial Soil Archive Project. This project has significantly impacted Illinois agriculture throughout the 20th century, providing invaluable data for researchers and farmers alike. Also, he will share an update about the new Alma Mater plots, which will research soil management practices.

Registration is required to attend the event. Register online at go.illinois.edu/morrowplotsevent or by calling (815) 235-4125. Cost is \$30 and includes meal.

Extension Hosts Informational Session on Phosphorus and Potassium Omission Trials

Farmers and agronomists are invited to attend an important informational session on the Phosphorus and Potassium Omission Trials being conducted statewide by the University of Illinois Department of Crop Sciences Soils Lab.

This session will feature researcher Dr. Andrew Margenot, who will discuss the ongoing study. The research aims to provide critical updates to soil test values for phosphorus and potassium. These updates are essential for optimizing crop nutrition and enhancing farming practices across the state.

The session will focus on the requirements for participating in the field trials. This is a unique opportunity to learn how your farm may fit into this vital on-farm trial.

The Informational Session will be held on March 11, at 1:30 p.m. at the Stephenson County Farm Bureau Building, Freeport. Registration is required to attend. Register at go.illinois.edu/pandktrials

Training & Testing Options for Private Pesticide Applicators

Private Pesticide Applicators who need their license renewed can take the Private Applicator test on the following dates locally:

- January 9 — Freeport, IL
- February 6 — Elizabeth, IL
- March 19 — Freeport, IL

These are **TEST ONLY** sites and there is no charge, but seating will be limited. **Pre-registration is required** by visiting the Illinois Department of Ag website:

go.illinois.edu/patest

Private Applicators that would like to take the **TRAINING AND TESTING** can do so locally on:

- March 25 — Rockford, IL

Registration for this training and testing can be found at

go.illinois.edu/patrainandtest

Study materials can be purchased at your local office; call ahead to check availability. Additional Training and testing sites and online training options can be found at

go.illinois.edu/psep-study

University of Illinois Vegetable Research Partnership with Freeport High School's Student Garden

Starting in 2025, Grant McCarty, University of Illinois Extension's local foods and small farms educator, will collaborate with Freeport High School's student garden on a cucumber and tomato research project. The project will focus on using high tunnels with cover crops, reduced tillage, and irrigation practices. McCarty will guide students in data collection and analysis, helping to provide valuable recommendations for local growers on crop varieties and farming practices. This partnership also offers students a rare opportunity to contribute to University of Illinois research.

This project builds on previous work McCarty conducted with students on day-neutral strawberries from 2022 to 2023. Together, they tested three varieties of day-neutral strawberries to assess their viability for Northern Illinois farms. The research, conducted alongside another farm, provided insights into the challenges Northern Illinois growers may face when adopting these strawberries in an annual farming system.

Both research projects were funded by the Illinois Department of Agriculture's Specialty Crops Block Grant Program, one of the few programs that regularly support Unit-based educators. This funding facilitates ongoing expert guidance and enables unique partnerships for hyper-local, relevant research.

Expert Assistance on Farming Questions

In addition to programming, expert assistance is a key service provided to farmers and growers through email, in-person consultations, and farm visits. University of Illinois Educators Grant McCarty, Kathryn Seebruck, and Jay Solomon, along with Program Coordinators Alex Burbach and Nikki Keltner assist stakeholders in their respective areas of expertise. This past year was no different than previous years, with a significant portion of expert consultations given during the growing season.

Grant McCarty, Local Foods and Small Farms Educator, handles a significant portion of expert consultations during the growing season. In 2024, McCarty provided nearly 120 unique consultations to new and established growers, often working with them throughout the season as issues arise. For example, he might assist an apple grower with weed management in spring, disease control in summer, and post-harvest challenges in fall. McCarty acts as an on-call resource during the growing season, addressing urgent problems like pests or disease to help save crops.

Kathryn Seebruck, Agronomy and Crop Sciences Educator, works directly with producers to support their production of row crops and forages. Her background in weed science and the research she has conducted related to herbicide resistance make her a valuable resource. Seebruck is also an Illinois AgrAbility Ambassador and can help connect farmers and farm workers with disabilities or chronic diseases to resources that help them continue their farming lifestyle.

Jay Solomon, Natural Resources, Environment and Energy Educator, offers expertise involving energy conservation, renewable energy, and enhancement/protection of natural resources. Invasive plant species management, livestock facilities, manure management, animal mortality management and renewable energy applications are just a few areas Solomon specializes in.

Program Coordinators Nikki Keltner and Alex Burbach handle a variety of situations, from cash rent prices of farm acreage to questions about horticulture, including landscape aesthetics, sustainable practices, food production, and more.

Staff also meet with new farmers interested in starting their own operations. These initial consultations allow farmers to discuss their goals and learn how U of I Extension can support them. Additionally, expert assistance helps Unit agriculture educators and program coordinators better understand the challenges faced by Northern Illinois farmers, influencing local and state research as well as winter programming.

13th Annual Driftless Region Beef Conference Set for January 2025

The 13th annual Driftless Region Beef Conference, hosted by University Extension services in Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin, will take place on January 23-24, at the Grand River Convention Center in Dubuque, IA. This event aims to provide valuable educational sessions for beef producers in the Midwest, a region home to nearly 2.5 million cattle.

Thursday will start out with Keynote Speakers Dr. Derell Peel from Oklahoma State University and Dr. Troy Rowan from University of Tennessee. Also speaking will be Dr. Marta Kohmann from the University of Wisconsin. Rounding out Thursday evening will be the popular “Bull Pen” discussion featuring a panel of locker plant managers from the Driftless Area.

Friday will start with a breakfast session on the challenges of family farm transitions. Following the breakfast session, breakout sessions will be offered on a variety of topics. One track will focus on the cow herd while the other focuses more on feedlot aspects.

The cow-herd focused sessions will include:

- *Crossbreeding: The Beef Industry’s Last Free Lunch*, Dr. Rowan, University of Tennessee
- *Impact of Age and Body Weight at Time of Breeding on Heifer Reproductive Success*, Dan Shike, University of Illinois
- *Benefits and Options for Shrub Control in Pastures*, Mark Renz, University of Wisconsin

The feedlot focused sessions will include:

- *Risk Management in a High-Priced Market*, Joseph Lensing, Iowa State University
- *Effects of Market Timing and Performance Technologies on Marketing Decisions for High Quality Midwest Cattle*, Erika Woolfolk, Iowa State University
- *Beef X Dairy Lifetime Performance Project*, Denise Schwab, Iowa State University
- *Causes and Costs of Erratic Intake in the Feedyard*, Josh McCann, University of Illinois

To wrap up the conference, Dr. Peel will discuss the current cattle market situation and factors affecting producer profitability.

The early registration fee of \$120 per person must be received prior to midnight on January 10. After that, the price increases to \$145 per person. To register please visit www.aep.iastate.edu/beef/ where you can also find more information on topics, speakers, and lodging.



What to Know About EPA's Final Herbicide Strategy

As the organization that registers pesticide products, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is required to comply with Endangered Species Act (ESA) obligations to ensure these products are not likely to jeopardize federally threatened or endangered species or their habitats. Until recently, the EPA has failed to comply with ESA obligations and has since begun to develop new strategies to meet them, starting with the Herbicide Strategy.

The Herbicide Strategy will be implemented on new products and products being re-registered, enabling ESA compliance in a timely manner. Herbicide labels will start to change in 1-3 years. If an herbicide can potentially impact a listed species or its habitat, the strategy requires mitigations for spray drift and runoff/erosion to protect the species and habitat from herbicide exposure.

More restrictive mitigation may be warranted in specific geographic areas called Pesticide Use Limitation Areas (PULAs). The applicator must visit EPA's Bulletins Live! Two webpage on the day of application or up to six months prior to determine if fields are within listed species PULAs.

The EPA's spray drift mitigation measures include minimum droplet size, maximum windspeed, maximum release height requirements, and downwind spray drift buffers when needed. Various mitigation strategies can be used to reduce the size of the required buffers. Each mitigation reduces the buffer as a percentage of the maximum, and they are additive. Runoff/erosion mitigations can include field characteristics like $\leq 3\%$ slope, in-field mitigation measures such as cover crops, application parameters such as soil incorporation, etc. Mitigations and a runoff point calculator can be found on the EPA's Mitigation Menu website. Each mitigation has a point value, each product label will outline requirements of 0 to 9 mitigation points, and these points are additive. Relief points have also been assigned for counties with medium, low, and very low runoff potential.

The EPA is working to develop ESA strategies for fungicides, insecticides, and rodenticides. The draft Insecticide Strategy was open for public comment until September 23. The Rodenticide Strategy was released November 22.

Talking Crop Podcast Wraps Up First Season

The first season of Talking Crop has wrapped up and features ten episodes with various guest experts. A variety of topics including cover crops, weed and insect control, nutrient loss reduction, digital ag, and more were covered during these episodes.

The podcast was led by Kathryn Seebruck, University of Illinois Extension Agronomy Educator serving Jo Daviess, Stephenson, and Winnebago Counties. Focused on row crops, the purpose of the podcast was to provide farmers and agribusiness representatives with research updates and management considerations.

The next season will begin in May 2025. In the meantime, check out the 2024 podcasts online. Talking Crop can be found on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, YouTube, and the Extension website, go.illinois.edu/JSWpodcasts

Farm Commons Webinar Series Aims to Help Farmers Start Farm Businesses Successfully

Legal risks can be fatal to a farm business. Having important information up front can help individuals expand operations, set up new businesses, build resiliency, and make the right decisions for themselves and their families.

The Legal Series for Illinois Small Farms is a quarterly webinar series for all Illinois small farmers brought to you by Illinois Extension's Local Food Systems and Small Farms team and presented by Farm Commons. Farm Commons is a nonprofit organization that assists farmers in solving business law challenges. The last two of the four-part series includes:

Land Leasing Basics - March 17, 7 p.m. - online

Leasing farmland is so commonplace that landowners, farmers, and ranchers may not think twice about the lease itself. Until things go wrong. Prevent problems with a strong lease while building a path to a resilient future. Leasing basics will help to understand what a lease should include and how to put it in writing. Register online for this free event: go.illinois.edu/LandLeasingBasics

Farm Property Insurance - June 23, 7 p.m. - online

Running a farm or ranch operation often depends on buildings, equipment, vehicles, and supplies for day-to-day success. If these valuable resources are lost or damaged, it can be devastating to profitability. Learn the basics of farm property insurance and what it covers in the final session of the webinar series. Register online for this free event: go.illinois.edu/FarmPropertyInsurance



Register for a Local 2024 Certified Livestock Manager Training Session

Depending on an operation's size, livestock manager training certification is required for many Illinois production livestock facilities. Having certified individuals on staff strengthens an operation through shared knowledge and building conversations with individuals responsible for livestock care.

University of Illinois Extension and Illinois Department of Agriculture recently announced the 2025 Certified Livestock Manager Training Workshop (CLMT) schedule. These workshops meet the Illinois Livestock Management Facilities Act (LMFA) training requirements for Illinois livestock managers.

The LMFA requires facilities designed for 300 or more animal units to have at least one employee certified in environmentally aware manure management techniques. Facilities designed for 301 to 999 animal units must have at least one employee attend a workshop OR complete the online training. Facilities with more than 1,000 animal units must have a certified livestock manager attend a workshop and pass the IDOA exam OR complete the online training and pass the online test.

A range of topics related to the operation, management, and utilization of livestock waste and waste facilities will be covered. Additionally, the latest regulations, best management practices, and research for manure-related issues will be discussed. The training manual used will be the "Livestock and Poultry Environmental Stewardship Curriculum." It is available at go.illinois.edu/manual.

Pre-registration is required to attend an in-person workshop. For complete details and to register, visit the website: go.illinois.edu/CLMT. Class size is limited in some locations due to space constraints.

There are seven workshops scheduled for February 2025 throughout Illinois. See the website for all locations, or choose one of the local dates listed below:

- February 18 — Freeport, IL
- February 19 — Sycamore, IL

Each location will open at 8:30 a.m., and training will begin at 9 a.m. The training lasts 3.5 hours, and IDOA staff will administer the exam after the training. A Spanish version of the exam is available. Ahora ya está disponible una versión en español del examen para CLMT! The Illinois Extension training fee is \$40, and IDOA's certification fee is \$30.

Cannot attend a workshop? Online training and testing are available year-round and follow the same format as the in-person workshops. Online training involves nine modules of 10- to 20-minute videos that can be viewed at an individual's own pace. Those who have more than 1,000 animal units may take the test online.

All participants must register at go.illinois.edu/CLMT. If you need a reasonable accommodation to participate in or have questions about the CLMT program, please contact University of Illinois Extension at (815) 235-4125 or Stanley Solomon at jssolomo@illinois.edu

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Illinois Extension

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Extension: Your Trusted Source for Reliable, Research-Based Information

With the vast amount of information online, it can be overwhelming to find reliable sources. The internet can often be misleading, but Extension is here to guide you! We offer research-based programs and expertise in areas such as agriculture, sustainability, natural resources, gardening, nutrition, wellness, parenting, youth leadership, and community and economic development.

For trustworthy, research-backed answers to almost any question, simply turn to Extension. With 22 employees serving Jo Daviess, Stephenson, and Winnebago Counties, we are ready to assist you.

Next time you're searching for accurate information, reach out to one of our experts! Call the office nearest to you or send an email to uie-jsw@illinois.edu

Stanley (Jay) Solomon, Environmental & Energy
Stewardship Educator

Grant McCarty, Local Foods and Small Farms Educator

Kathryn Seebruck, Agronomy/Crop Sciences Educator

Alex Burbach, Program Coordinator

Nikki Keltner, Program Coordinator

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If you need reasonable accommodations to participate in any of the programs in this newsletter, please contact the hosting office.

College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences