

Maize Matters



www.ilcorn.org

DECLINING FARM ECONOMY, GROWING POLITICAL IMPACT



TL: Karlle Elliott Bowman and Dave Rylander meet with Rep. Eric Sorensen (D-17). TM: A group of farmers, staff and carpenters gather to discuss priorities in Rep. Darin LaHood's office (R-16). TR: Director of Marketing and Communications Lindsay Mitchell and Elliott Bowman smile outside the Capitol. BL: Four of five GROW participants pose for a photo. BM: ICGA meets with Senator Tammy Duckworth. BR: Rep. Mary Miller (R-15) stands alongside ICGA following a congressional visit.

The IL Corn Growers Association (ICGA) is growing its political footprint in Washington, D.C. amidst concerns for the future of the farm economy.

In early March, ICGA called on Congress to protect family farms and spoke with the offices of all 17 Illinois representatives and both senators. Farmer leaders met with nearly 60 non-governmental offices including automakers, conservation groups, airlines and petroleum associations.

"In our Capitol meetings, our farmers explained the impact a

declining farm economy would have on trade, ethanol demand, infrastructure and rural communities," ICGA President and Victoria farmer Dave Rylander said. "The message resonated with downstate and urban elected officials, and we confirmed support for many of our key issues."

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Research Service forecasts farm net income in 2024 at \$116.1 billion, a 37% drop from \$185.5 in 2022. Agricultural economists at the University of Illinois forecast a loss of \$135,000-\$160,000 on every 1,000 acres of corn

(declining farm economy continued) produced in Illinois in 2024.

With these points driving the conversation and a need for legislative action, ICGA reiterated the importance of sound farm policy. Corn farmers discussed urgency for the Next Generation Fuels Act and the passage of a permanent farm bill. Growers also voiced the negative impact the Environmental Protection Agency's Multipollutant Emissions rule will have on corn demand.

In addition to ICGA leadership, five members joined the organization through the Grassroots Orientation to Washington, D.C. or G.R.O.W. program. Participants included Karlie Elliott Bowman of Onedia, Leanne Casner of Rosamond, Clint Gorden from Macon, Lance Muirheid of Oakley, and Bryan Van Bogaert of Elburn.

GROW participants shared personal farm experiences with lawmakers and played an active role in the organization. "Participating in ICGA's GROW program was truly impactful," Bowman said. "The board and staff's dedication to

advocating for policies that directly benefit Illinois corn growers and their families is evident. Their insights, gathered from the fields of Illinois, were expertly communicated to NGOs, governmental agencies, and Capitol Hill, and will make a real difference for farmers across our state."

ICGA also heard from former Congresswoman Cheri Bustos, as well as former Senate Ag Committee staff director Joe Shultz on their predictions on the passage of a 2024 Farm Bill.

Conversations about these priority topics will fuel ICGA in the months to come as farmer leaders seek to create a future for Illinois farmers in which they can operate freely, responsibly, and successfully.



R: ICGA Director Joe Murphy shakes hands with IL Director of Ag Jerry Costello.



Above: ICGA directors Shane Gray and Terry Smith meet with state Senate Republican Whip Jil Tracy (R-50).

SPRINGFIELD SPARKS FOR FARM SUCCESSION

A farm's legacy is one of its most important aspects. No matter if you are a seventh-generation farmer or beginning a career in production agriculture, passing on a farm to the next generation is important to the future.

In 2023, we highlighted the statistic that 96% of Illinois farms are family owned. Illinois estate tax laws create a burden for many family farms, challenging that statistic annually.

In early February, Senator David Koehler (D-Peoria) and Rep. Sharon Chung (D-Bloomington) introduced the Family Farm Preservation Act, a bill amending the estate tax for farm families.

"Recently, my family's farm implemented major changes due to the estate tax," IL Corn Growers Association Vice President and farmer from Waterloo, Garrett Hawkins said. "Anything we can do to make it easier for farmers to pass on their operations to the next generation is good for farmers, rural communities and our state economy."

The bill makes the current \$4 million estate tax threshold an exemption and raises it to \$6 million. The legislation changes the law so only dollars over \$6 million would be taxed instead of the entire amount.

ICGA is proud to work alongside the Illinois Farm Bureau

who spearheaded this change, to ensure farmers are represented at the Capital and the family farm legacy is protected.

ICGA's growing presence in Springfield has allowed the association to play a bigger role in policies important to our membership. During the spring legislative session, the association is magnifying the voice of farmers in clean fuel standard and carbon capture and sequestration negotiations.



Above: Len Corzine became involved with IL Corn in 1994. He has been an active member for the last 30 years, and served as ICGA and NCGA board presidents.

PAC COMMITMENTS: TIME, TREASURE, TALENT

Leon (Len) Corzine has many years under his belt as a leader and member of the IL Corn Growers Association.

Corzine has been involved with ICGA for 30 years and contributed his time and talent as the President of ICGA and NCGA. Corzine sees the value in political action and is a longtime supporter of ICGA's PAC.

How can growers best be involved with the ICGA political action committee?

It's important to pay attention to the messaging. The office does a good job of getting out information on hot button issues and highlighting how we can respond by email to our elected officials. I like to alter the letters our association puts together through our Call-to-Action system and make it a bit more personal. But the key is to respond. It takes just a few minutes to do it and numbers make a difference. We need responses so they see the issue is important.

Why do you support the ICGA PAC?

I support ICGA's PAC partially because I've been involved with the association for a long time. However, I had the opportunity to serve on NCGA's board and found ICGA does one of the best jobs on the national scene in this space. Although I might be biased! We have got to have farmers in the room to make a difference, and we do make a difference. I've seen it. Our work with ICGA's PAC has a direct impact on our farming operations.

"March was a busy month with many bills introduced in our state legislature impacting agriculture," ICGA President Dave Rylander said. "We continue to work on offense and defense, building relationships with our state elected officials to benefit our farmers."

With many more discussions ahead for corn growers at the state Capitol, the General Assembly will be busy before its adjournment, May 24.

You served ICGA as a grower for a lot of years. How does the contribution of time and talent help further corn growers politically?

I've been lucky to be involved with a great team, but also believe there are times when the good Lord gives you opportunities. The stars lined up with my family and farm situation where I could commit time to participate. It takes time not just going to the meetings, but also doing the homework to know the issues. As board members, we are there to push and let people know what is important to us. There are a lot of times there's an issue that will have a dramatic impact on the way we farm and if we're silent it will go the wrong way.

Why is it important to be politically active and plugged in as a corn grower?

There are decisions being made in Washington, D.C. and Springfield that are going to affect the way we farm and live. We need to have a voice in it, and if we are not proactive, they are still going to make those decisions. We want to influence them as much as we can to make decisions that are in our favor, helping our family farms. If we are silent the opposition is going to be proactive, and we've got to be as well.



IL CORN
WWW.ILCORN.ORG

IL Corn Growers Association
P.O. Box 1623 Bloomington, IL 61702-1623

FOLLOW US:



@ILCORN

SOLID SOLUTIONS REQUIRE SHOWING UP

By PAC Committee Chairman, Jim Reed

Outcomes are decided by those that show up. The success of teams in the recent NCAA basketball tournament (Go Illini) are directly related to the time and commitment spent preparing for this season. The players showed up for practice, showed up for film, showed up for class and showed up for the game. If any member of the team didn't contribute to the effort, the whole team would not be as successful. I first got involved with campaigns and politics when I was in the eighth grade. I learned about the process and met dedicated candidates that would make decisions about my future. Being a volunteer with a campaign is a great way to have an influence on the issues important to you and your family. But many of you don't always have the time to get involved at that level. This is where your IL Corn PAC can help.

I now serve as the IL Corn Growers Association Political Action Committee (IL Corn PAC) Chairman. During my several years on the PAC Committee, I have come to appreciate the influence our members who show up have on policy and legislation. We have a greater chance of a positive outcome when we show up early and often to express our needs to our elected officials. When we all show up and contribute our relevancy is impressive.

Here are some lessons I've learned about ICGA's political relevancy and involvement

1. Agriculture is a bipartisan issue

Although we have our own political leanings, agriculture is one of the topics everyone can rally behind. From rural to urban lawmakers,

every person in every district needs our farmers to survive. Through my years with ICGA, I have been pleasantly surprised by the bipartisan work completed by elected officials to support our priorities. ICGA has champions for our issues in both political parties. As a blue state with a large urban population, Illinois has the opportunity to work with diverse representatives cultivating unique relationships from other ag states.

2. Start somewhere- it's better than never starting at all

Although small beginnings can be discouraging, it's the only way to eventually have a big impact. You must start somewhere. If you are frustrated with the amount of influence you currently have, you must get engaged and press forward. Do one more thing than you did before and grow in involvement each year. Over the years, I have seen how engagement creates change by showing up once and then again.

3. Government is for the people and by the people, but actually only by the people that show up.

The world is run by people that show up and are heard. I've watched the influence farmers have when they are sharing their concerns about the issues that directly impact their families. Our government officials and elected representatives value your input. Being involved with ICGA and the PAC helps to amplify your voice. I don't have to remind you state and federal policy can be complex. Your representative will receive mountains of input on every issue, but they value hearing from their constituents. Your opportunity to educate and influence can only happen if you show up. Reach out, ask questions, expect answers - you'll never know what influence you might have.