

Invite Local Officials to Visit the Farm

Farmers are best equipped to discuss how
farms impact the community



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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

August 25 - September 4:

Du Quoin State Fair

August 29-31:

Farm Progress Show

October 6:

County Resolution Submittal Deadline

November 8:

Statewide Resolution Committee Meeting

December 2-5:

IAA® Annual Meeting





This Fall, Introduce Your Elected Officials to Ag

Follow These 10 Steps to Organize a Farm Visit for County Officials

By Ryan Whitehouse

Farmers have a unique tool when it comes to telling their story. It's an opportunity to make adults feel like kids again by allowing them to drive big machinery and interact with animals: farm visits.

Visiting a farm gives the non-farmer a perspective they can read about but otherwise may never experience in person. One could argue this is the reason agritourism has become so popular. Farmers are best equipped to give one-on-one lessons on how farms impact the community.

This fall, consider inviting members from your county board to the farm. Take them on a tractor. Let them drive the combine. Have them interact with animals. And send them home with some farm-fresh foods.

Illinois Farm Bureau invites members of Congress and the General Assembly to experience on-the-farm storytelling, and it helps the elected officials understand farmers' issues. So, why not broaden this experience to local elected officials? More and more local officials are becoming distanced from agriculture. It's farmers' and the county Farm Bureaus' jobs to make sure they reconnect to America's oldest profession.

As county governments become less connected to the rural way of life, the public policy decisions being made have the potential to adversely impact rural residents and farmers.

Hopefully, this article motivates you, but how do you make the invite? I do not want to oversimplify it, but it really is a simple process. Follow these steps and you will find success.

- 1. Identify which elected officials are a priority.** All members of the county board can be a priority, depending on board size. But if your county board is large and not every member can be reached, start with committee chairs or urban members.
- 2. Identify the farm families.** Remember, elected officials prefer to meet with constituents, but this might not be possible when it comes to urban officials. So, make sure to choose a farm family representative of the values of the county Farm Bureau.
- 3. Identify the farm.** Consider the issues within your county when selecting the farm. One thinks of a combine in the fall, but can you provide an experience that shows off the livestock industry or the specialty crop grower? Remember to tell the entire story of agriculture within your county.
- 4. Send an invitation.** Depending on the status of the working relationship, it can be an email or a text. If your county Farm Bureau is just starting to get to know an official, a letter may be the best choice. This all depends on the relationships. IFB staff is available to discuss this step and assist in drafting the invite.
- 5. Confirm the visit.** Once the invite has been sent, follow-up is essential. This might take working with your network, leadership or membership, but someone will know how to connect you with the elected official.

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- 6. Visit preparation.** The goal is to tell the story, not lobby the official. Let the farmers be themselves. Have them show off the farm. Have them introduce their family. Have them explain why they do what they do. Relax ... this is supposed to be fun!
- 7. Who should attend?** Make the experience a personable one. Besides the farmer and their family, I would suggest inviting the elected official's family. Providing the elected official's family an enjoyable experience only strengthens the connection. And finally, the county Farm Bureau manager should be in attendance to help with coordination and any follow-up questions the elected official might have. The group can get too big, so be mindful of size.
- 8. Pictures, pictures and more pictures.** Enough said. And share on social media.
- 9. Follow up.** Like every relationship, continued outreach and authenticity are key to keeping connections alive. The farm visit is fun, but the goal is to develop a trusted

friendship that lasts. Use the pictures you took at the visit and share with local newspapers, include in the county Farm Bureau publication and send them to the FarmWeek team for the From the Counties page.

- 10. Rinse and repeat.** More friends are better than fewer friends. This was true the first day of kindergarten and it is still true today. The county Farm Bureau is responsible for providing the opportunity to grow these friendships. Farm visits, truthful conversations on ag issues and working to find consensus will help keep agriculture thriving in your county.

Simple, right? To some, this is a very scary task, and that is understandable. But it's essential. The Local Government Team at IFB is ready to help you succeed. Reach out.

Like everything, the more of these farm visits you organize, the more comfortable they will become. Remember, the elected official may be nervous, too. And finally, rely on the membership to make these visits successful. Having county Farm Bureau members involved in the community is critical to agriculture's future success.

Visiting a livestock farm, driving a combine, picking an apple from an orchard all create a positive experience. It tells the story better than any fact or figure.



Farmers Welcome Assessing Officials to the Farm

Over the past two years, farmers from around the state have welcomed groups of assessing officials to visit their farms to help those local officials better understand the variety of farming practices and how the different types of farm buildings contribute to farming operations.

Illinois Farm Bureau has worked with the Illinois Property Assessment Institute (IPAI) to create a class on farm building valuation. This class is a qualifying course for assessing officials, providing instruction on how to value farm buildings for taxation. Assessors are one of the few local officials in Illinois required to meet educational qualifications before holding office and must also complete continuing education throughout their term in office.

In this course, assessing officials discuss a consistent approach to valuing farm buildings and identifying their use on the farm. They also review different types of farm buildings and structures to better determine whether components should be classified as real versus personal property. Personal property is not taxed in Illinois.

In addition, these officials get the opportunity to visit a farm to practice the skills they've learned in the classroom. Both Farm Bureau and the IPAI are grateful to the farmers who have welcomed class participants onto their farm. It's a valuable visit that connects assessing officials to agriculture!

Not only did these local officials learn more about farm buildings, but many, who had no experience in agriculture, asked questions about general farm operations and what it takes to produce necessary ag commodities.



These visits provided the opportunity to view buildings used for machinery, livestock and grain storage; accessory devices to move, dry and protect grain and livestock; and maintenance shops with the necessary size and access to accommodate large equipment.

These visits are just one example of the many opportunities to invite a local official out to the farm. In this case, the assessing officials benefit by gaining a better understanding of agriculture and the many types and functions of farm buildings and farming operations. In turn, visiting with the assessing officials gives farmers a better understanding of the job assessors do and how agriculture is viewed through the eyes of a local official.



Q&A with Mark Miller, Marion County Supervisor of Assessments

Relationships that Come from Farm Visits Beneficial for Farmers

Mark Miller serves as supervisor of assessments in Marion County, a southern Illinois county where farmers produce more than \$110 million worth of crops and livestock annually. But despite being elected in such a rural county, where farmland and buildings make up a large part of the property being assessed, Miller had no background in agriculture.

He has increased his knowledge base by spending time talking to farmers, getting to know their practices and learning about their buildings – a formula he's now passing on to other assessors around the state.

Miller was part of a team that worked with Illinois Farm Bureau and the Illinois Property Assessment Institute (IPAI) to create a two-day course on farm building valuation. About a quarter of the time participants spend in the class is devoted to a farm visit, seeing the buildings they just learned about in the classroom and being able to talk to a farmer about how they're used.

Whether it's him talking one-on-one with farmers in Marion County or him leading a 25-person class on a farm visit, Miller has found that taking the time to build relationships can be helpful – for the assessor and the farmer.

In this Q&A, Miller talks about what farmers have to gain from better relationships with county assessors and other local officials.

LINK: Do very many of the people doing assessments in rural counties have an agriculture background?

Miller: No, the majority of them don't. They come more from a real estate background or they're doing something else; they're school bus drivers or teachers. For the most part,



Local assessing officials visit a farm. Mark Miller, Marion County Supervisor of Assessments, pictured on the far left.

assessing is a part-time job, a way to make some extra money. I don't have any assessors in my county who came from an ag background, which means it's all that much more important to have these courses so we can get a better understanding of farm buildings.

LINK: Is there a desire among assessors and other local officials to build better relationships with farmers?

Miller: The more people I talk to, the more interaction they're having with farmers. The Farmland Assessment Law caused a lot of interaction with the treasurer and the county clerk and the supervisor of assessments, because each year their assessments increase. The challenge is helping them understand our side of it and the fact that we're not there just to increase the values on their property, but we're there actually to help them whenever possible.

LINK: What can a farmer expect when one of the IPAI classes visits their farm?

Miller: On the second day of the class, we take the morning, get on a bus and go visit a local farm. We meet with the farmer, and they explain their operation. We measure buildings, we go inside buildings and we ask questions. We get to practice the skills we worked on the previous day in class.

We're trying to be consistent in how we value farm buildings. This spring was the first time doing a visit, and I immediately realized how important it is for assessors, not just go out and take pictures and measure the buildings, but to actually meet with the farmers whenever possible and build that relationship. It's critical, in my opinion.

LINK: Have you found other ways to integrate the farmer perspective into the course?

Miller: The last class I taught, it was down in Williamson County. Williamson County Farm Bureau Manager Lance Martin attended the

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class, and he brought up several times, “well, this is how the farmer sees it.” I told him after the class that anytime we could get a Farm Bureau person to come and be a part of the class would be great. And he said he learned so much about the assessor’s perspective. The more we can build a relationship with the farmers and our Farm Bureau, the better it’s going to be.

LINK: Can you give an example of how farm visits have helped improve a relationship between an assessor and a farmer?

Miller: When we were building the course, one of the members of our committee said something that’s really worked well. They said to print off a color aerial photograph of their farm. When you go meet with the farmer, you take two copies, one to give to the farmer and one to keep for yourself.

When you get there, you hand this to them and say, “I want you to have this. This is my gift to you. Not only is it going to help you, but it’s going to help me.

“So we’ve got this photograph, and we’re going to walk around to your buildings and talk about each building. We’re going to number them, and in the future, if I’ve got a question about one of those buildings, I can call you

and say, ‘Joe, see over here, building number 3, have you done anything with it? Because the new photographs are showing a change to it.’ And you can say, ‘Oh yeah, I put a lean-to on it.’ Or maybe you call me and say, ‘This building’s not functional anymore; we’re going to tear it down next month.’”

“I don't have any assessors in my county who came from an ag background, which means it's all that much more important to have these courses so we can get a better understanding of farm buildings.”

It’s been the greatest icebreaker ever for the farmer, because now you’ve built a relationship where you’re helping each other. We want to do everything we can to make our relationship good and make sure that every building is valued properly.

IPAI’s ongoing farm building valuation course will be hosted in several counties throughout the state next year. If you or one of your leaders is interested in being enrolled in the class or hosting a farm visit, contact Brenda Matherly at bmatherly@ilfb.org.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Marion County farmers produce more than
\$110 Million
worth of crops and livestock every year.



Using LINK to Build and Maintain Relationships

LINK may be the tool you've been looking for to help with local engagement. In fact, we say as much in the publication's mission statement and call to action. Even the title of this publication, Local Information, News and KnowHow invites readers to "LINK" with local issues and officials.

The mission of the LINK publication is "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."

Our hope is that LINK is not only of value to those who receive it directly but that it will be shared with others who can benefit from the content. In the LINK call to action, we encourage recipients to:

- 1) Share LINK with county Farm Bureau leadership and membership.
- 2) Share it with your local officials as this information may be a LINK to their success.

If you are already sharing the bi-monthly LINK publication with these audiences, this is great, and we say thank you! If you are not currently sharing it, we encourage you to add sharing LINK into your regular activities. It is a great way to build and maintain relationships with local government officials as it provides an opportunity to contact them at least every couple of months. In addition, it creates

credibility for your county Farm Bureau as a go-to source for relevant information.

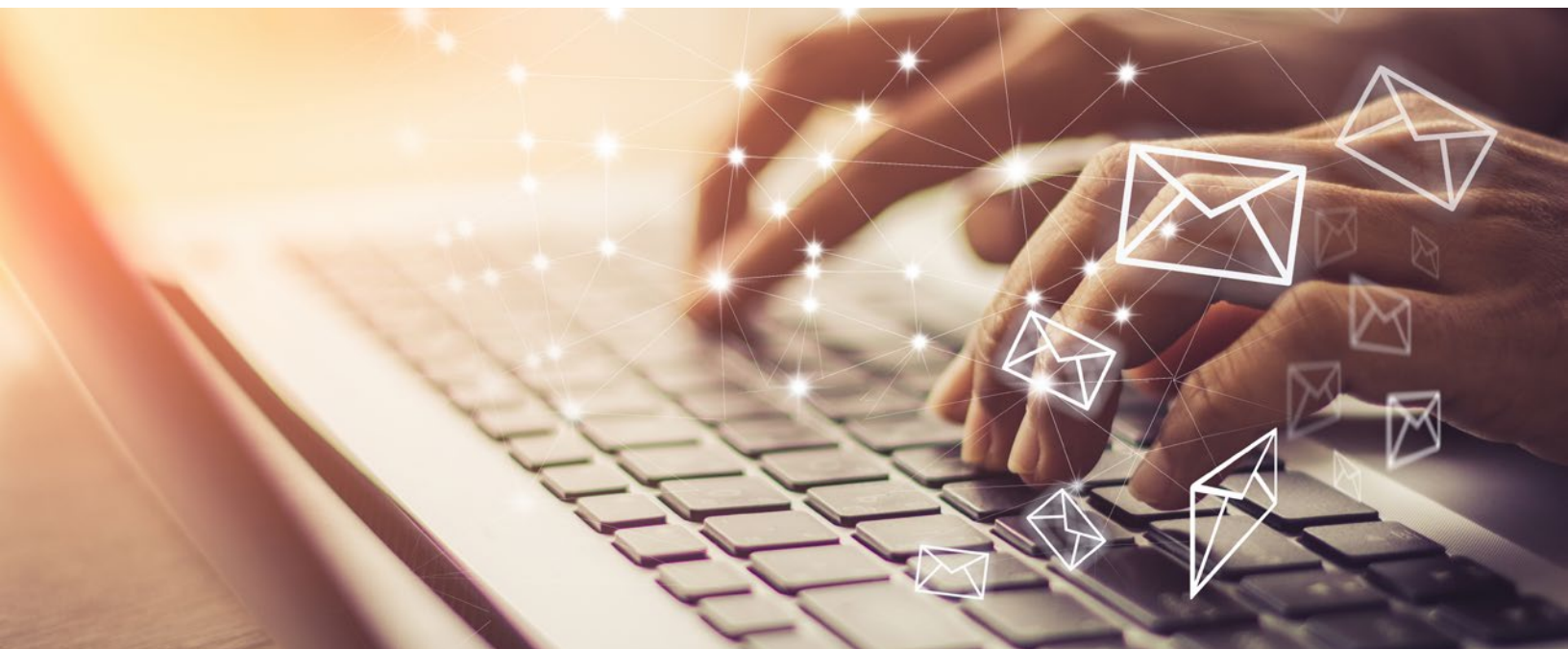
One way to help partially automate the process of sharing LINK is to create a calendar reminder as well as an email distribution list (or lists if you want one for CFB leadership and members and one for local officials). This list makes it easy to forward, while also enabling you to include a brief message to the recipients. Feel free to reach out to your Local Government Team if you'd like suggestions on who to include in your distribution list(s).

As a reminder, past issues of LINK can be a great informational resource when you receive inquiries on various topics from your leadership, members or local government officials. If the question is connected to local government, there is a good chance the topic has already been addressed in one or more LINK issues. Past issues can be found on our [website](#) and on the [Leaders' Portal](#).

In addition, the Leaders' Portal contains a [LINK index](#) document to make it easy to search and find articles on specific topics from all LINK issues from 2015 to the present – be sure to check it out and let us know if you have suggestions to make it better or more user-friendly.

If you have other best practices on how you are using LINK, please send us an email with the details and we will share those in a future issue for others to learn from and utilize.

In the meantime, as you consider welcoming local officials to the farm this fall, remember to use LINK as a tool to stay connected.





LOCAL GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

Building Relationships Using Local Government Priorities

As fall is fast approaching, and you consider inviting local officials out to the farm, this is a good opportunity to review our local government priorities and blend them into your follow-up conversations.

This year, the IFB Board of Directors approved local government priorities for 2023. Those priorities and a summary of each are listed below:

Allies In Agriculture

The local government team, working with county Farm Bureaus, will encourage a partnership with local officials and be available to assist in:

- Understanding local government roles and responsibilities
- Explaining the role of CFBs to units of local government
- Developing and implementing programs encouraging membership to engage

Pro-Agriculture Resolution

The local government team, working with county Farm Bureaus, will work to

pass a Pro-Agriculture Resolution to be adopted by county government(s). The resolution will:

- State the importance of agriculture
- Support development of all types of agriculture
- Pledge support of agriculture from county officials and staff

Local Government Finance and Fiscal Transparency

The local government team, working with county Farm Bureaus, will advocate for a stronger understanding of local government finance and promotion of local government financial transparency and fiscal responsibility. We will also advocate local dollars be used to:

- Provide essential services to residents in the rural area of the county
- Provide vital infrastructure projects enabling agriculture to succeed, and
- Develop and deliver rural broadband

Rural Development

The local government team, working with county Farm Bureaus and other stakeholders, will focus on rural development. These efforts include:

- Partnering with organizations focused on rural development at the local, state and federal levels
- Assessing needs to determine what resources and support will be most impactful

While we feel these priorities are valuable, the farm visits can be more recreational, allowing local officials and their families time to enjoy their experience and build relationships. Over time, and as these relationships develop, communicating our priorities can benefit local officials, our rural communities and agriculture.

We are excited for those counties that have already passed the Pro-Agriculture Resolution and became Allies in Agriculture. Getting these officials out to the farm takes those priority relationships and turns them into friendships.

COMING SOON

Illinois Farm Bureau Rural Development Grant Program!

Stay tuned for our October LINK issue, when we will announce details for IFB's new Rural Development Grant Program!!! With rural development being both an organizational priority and a current local government priority, the Local Government Team is allocating financial resources to support county Farm Bureaus, local communities and/or counties.

This first year will serve as a pilot program to determine the level of interest and demand as well as to evaluate the impact and success of the grants. County Farm Bureaus will not be required to lead rural development projects in order to receive a grant but will be asked to be engaged in and supportive of the project. Our next edition of LINK will lay out the grant criteria and priorities, application process, timelines, reporting requirements and other relevant information.

If you want to get a head start and lay some groundwork in advance of the grant program launch, we encourage you to begin (or continue) having conversations with local officials or organizations in your communities/county(ies) who are engaged with rural economic development efforts. One place to start the conversation is to find out if there is a current and active strategic plan as this will be a high priority item. If there is not a current and active strategic plan, support may also be available to assist the community/county in going through that process.

More information to come in the October LINK issue, but if you have any questions in the meantime, please contact Ryan Tate at rtate@iffb.org.

