



Expanding horizons for Illinois' ag-based economies

## In Focus

### ***In Focus: Welcome!***

Welcome to the third edition of *In Focus*, Vision for Illinois Agriculture's (VIA) periodic electronic newsletter. The aim of this newsletter is to keep you up-to-speed on VIA developments, and help your organization provide input to gain benefit throughout Illinois agriculture. Add our address to your email software to ensure consistent delivery! And please forward this newsletter to colleagues, or add addresses to the mailing list by emailing [diplacid@ifib.org](mailto:diplacid@ifib.org).

### **Gauging Future Leaders — More Higher Ed Ag Enrollees**

Increases of students enrolling in agricultural colleges in Illinois provides encouraging information for members of the VIA Workforce Development Team. Western Illinois University, Illinois State University and Southern Illinois University have seen a 7-8 percent increase in undergraduate enrollments in their colleges of agriculture in the past year. However, both institutions acknowledge that the impact of the downturn in the economy in terms of personnel, industry, and state budgets is yet to be realized and the effects on enrollment numbers.

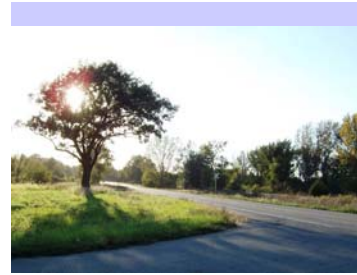
Southern Illinois University numbers rose from 773 undergraduates in 2007 to 827 in the fall of 2008. Western Illinois University's numbers rose from 307 in 2007 to 327 in the fall of '08, nearly a nine percent increase. Illinois State University's enrollment has grown from 238 in the Spring of 2008 to 255 in Fall, '08.

The University of Illinois has remained steady in enrollment numbers, with enrollment of 2,300 students in the college in 2008. Officials note a steady increase in academic credentials for both the applicant pool and students that matriculate into the college. Laurie Kramer, Associate Dean for Academic Programs, notes that partnerships established with community colleges have led to a new initiative that will assist community college students access to UI teachers through online courses in areas where the community college may have diminished teaching capacity. ACES hopes to recruit more transfers through this program.

UI will also launch three Professional Science Masters programs in Agricultural Production, Bioenergy, and Food Science and Human Nutrition, that will combine scientific understanding within the context of business and management. Applications are now being accepted for all three programs.

### **Ag Spotlight on Illinois WorkNet Website**

December 2008



### **Upcoming VIA Meetings January 8 & 9**

The *Vision for Illinois Agriculture* planning committee will meet on January 8, 2009, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. in the Growmark Board Room, IAA Building, 1701 W. Towanda Avenue, Bloomington. On January 9, the Business Climate Implementation Team will meet at the 1st Farm Credit Services Building, 2000 Jacobsen Drive in Normal from 9:00 a.m.—3:00 p.m.

For more information, please contact Chris Magnuson at 309- 557- 3144 or [cmagnuson@ifib.org](mailto:cmagnuson@ifib.org).

### **Learn More!**

For more information about the Illinois Agriculture Vision, please visit our website at [www.illinoisagriculturevision.org](http://www.illinoisagriculturevision.org).

### **Vision Sponsors**

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Agriculture has been identified as one of the high-growth industries in Illinois according to Jeanne Kitchens, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity's Illinois WorkNet Website. The site, [www.illinoisworknet.com](http://www.illinoisworknet.com), has been online for a year, and was designed to encourage employment development in Illinois in key growth areas. The Vision for Illinois Agriculture project drew the attention of the DCEO and Illinois Worknet staff as they worked on the idea of adding an agriculture portal to the initial four area portals on the new website (healthcare, information technology, manufacturing, and transportation, distribution and logistics).

A committee of 20 people in the agricultural industry has been formed to get the site online, and will meet four to five times during the next six months to develop a report that will establish the baseline of information available. In addition, they will identify five to six issues that should be addressing agricultural workforce challenges and opportunities.

A face-to-face meeting will be held in the spring after the task force has reported its findings and the VIA workforce task force will work to bring the site online.

### **Workforce Development Implementation Team Views Existing Information on Illinois Ag Workers**

Members of the VIA Workforce Development Implementation Team held a webinar December 3 to showcase current research available on the agriculture workforce in Illinois. The team will use this information to move through their identified task of gathering a base of workforce studies that will help them recommend where deficits are in information on workforce skills in Illinois.

Dr. Chris Merrett, Director of the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs housed at Western Illinois University, reported that today there is sufficient historical data from the University of Illinois' 1988 and 1998 studies on workforce skills by Illinois agricultural employers. Now, updated information to determine current trends is needed. Merrett can compare Illinois with other Midwestern states in terms of employment impact, and hopes to use this and existing information by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. Jennifer Neef, College of ACES, reported that their college is seeking information from employees about why future agricultural employees choose to enter the field.

Ann Reed, iBIO Institute, shared information on their recently developed "Finding Your Future" project. The Institute designed the project to establish a baseline of bioscience workforce statistics across industry sectors.

The group collectively decided to gather additional information that would define needs and create a complete picture of the agricultural workforce both present and future. Information to be sought includes where high school students in agricultural courses choose to major, what engages and retains employees in the agricultural sector, and defining the agricultural sector from job descriptions.

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