



Zeroing Illinois Agricultural Education Line Item Means Uncertain Future for State's Youth As Illinois Proposes Cutting Long-Term Investment in Agriculture

RANTOUL, ILL. (Feb. 23, 2016)— The proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2017 is reverberating across the state. Illinois' short-term fiscal woes are creating serious headwinds for long-term investment. Nowhere is this more apparent than for agricultural education and the industry it serves.

On Wednesday, the line item funding agricultural education was proposed to be cut. At \$1.8 million, it would be easy to dismiss the rate of return it provides or the industry it supports. But 25 percent of all jobs in Illinois are directly or indirectly related to agriculture, and this proposed cut comes just as the demand for agricultural teachers is exceeding the supply from our state universities by over 32 per year.

"While we acknowledge the need for drastic action on the part of our state government, we are strongly opposed to this cut," said Andrew Bowman Chair of the Illinois Leadership Council for Agricultural Education (ILCAE). "Illinois agricultural education is the leader in combining instruction with real world experience and leadership training as recognized by the Illinois Pathways Initiative and the Illinois Business Roundtable."

The agricultural education line item is leveraged into many different programs. It provides 321 secondary agriculture programs with grant funds for purchase of instructional resources. 78 percent of these programs offer academic graduation credits in science, math and consumer education. Teachers are supported by six full-time staff through the Facilitating Coordinators for Agricultural Education (FCAE) project which provides continuing education and professional development. Curriculum and assessments aligned to Common Core State Standards and Next Generation Science Standards give teachers access to 890 lesson plans and over 13,000 assessment questions. Over 549,000 students in 2,150 education centers are reached annually via Ag In the Classroom efforts at the elementary level and an additional 29,000 students in secondary programs.

"These facts partially explain why the Illinois State Board of Education recommends our funding actually increase from \$1.8Million to \$3.0Million—we're a great investment," Bowman added.

Mindy Bunselmeyer, Executive Director of the Illinois FFA, agreed. "We train the future leaders and employees for one in four Illinois jobs. And with less than four percent of high schoolers taking an agriculture course, we need more funding, not less. Students deserve the best access to 25 percent of our jobs." Illinois FFA is the state's largest secondary student group boasting over 17,500 members.

And there are many career opportunities in agriculture even as the larger economy struggles to add new jobs. According to a study released in May by Purdue University, there are 57,900 new job opportunities in agriculture expected annually, but only 60 percent will be filled by people with agricultural majors.

"What better way to prepare our youth for these amazing careers than through work-based learning?" Bunselmeyer asked, "Students enrolled in agriculture courses earned over \$11 Million while learning life-changing skills last year. That by itself is a 611 percent rate of return to current funding for the line item."



Illinois Leadership Council for Agricultural Education

For its part, ILCAE is seeking private sector solutions to supplement public sector responsibility.

“ILCAE knows that the challenges of Illinois agricultural education require both public and private funding,” Bowman said. He notes that their industry members are building an investment portfolio model into their proven educational model. This framework, based upon the concepts of Talent Pipeline Management and Impact Investing, matches private sector investors to educational providers. The idea is that business needs can drive revenue to education. As an investment, metrics for accountability are developed by the business. Educators thus need to provide a rate of return.

“What if a food manufacturer sponsored our FFA Food Science Career Development Event or a leading marketing firm developed Agricultural Communications curricula for our teachers?” Bowman asked.

“Those are a few of many examples that would engage businesses to help solve our funding problems. But it needs to supplement, not replace state funds.”

Today, more than 29,000 secondary and 549,000 elementary students are waiting to see if this proposed cut moves forward and whether ILCAE’s new model gains traction. But the question for tomorrow is if Illinois can effectively invest in 25 percent of its future jobs.

About the Illinois Leadership Council for Agricultural Education (ILCAE)

ILCAE works to secure the future of agriculture in Illinois through the continual advancement of quality agriculture education. This volunteer organization representing the agriculture industry works to promote education in and about agriculture, address the changing needs of agricultural education to strengthen its viability and competitiveness to serve industry and is working to develop investment opportunities in agricultural education.

About the Illinois Association FFA

The Illinois Association FFA is dedicated to making a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education.

About Facilitating Coordination in Agricultural Education (FCAE)

FCAE is a state project administered through the Illinois State Board of Education in cooperation with and advisement by the Illinois Committee for Agricultural Education (ICAE). FCAE addresses the aims of Public Act 84-1452 involving the implementation of identified goals for improving education in and about Agriculture in Illinois.

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Purdue Report – Employment Opportunities for College Graduates in Food, Agriculture, Renewable Natural Resources and the Environment
<https://www.purdue.edu/usda/employment/>

ILCAE and FCAE
<http://www.agriculturaleducation.org/>

Illinois Association FFA
<http://www.illinoisffa.org>