



State Education Not Addressing 1 in 4 Jobs

Teacher Recruitment and Retention Woes May Mean Uncertain Future for Illinois Agriculture

RANTOUL, ILL. (Feb. 2, 2016)— The future may not be so bright for the Illinois' agriculture industry, one of the state's leading economic drivers, if more agricultural education teachers aren't recruited and retained, and soon. Specifically, 25% of all jobs in Illinois are directly or indirectly related to agriculture.

A recent study by the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools (IARSS) finds that schools are struggling to fill positions and find qualified candidates. Those involved with agricultural education in Illinois could not agree more. Over the past five years, demand for graduates in agriculture education has exceeded supply by an average of 32 per year. The shortage of teacher candidates comes at the most inopportune time as Agricultural Education in Illinois is growing in order to supply the agriculture industry with the talent necessary.

Only 65% of high school districts offer agriculture programs and less than 4% of the secondary student body takes an agriculture course. This industry perspective fine-tunes the results of the IARSS findings which identified that 60% of Illinois school districts report trouble filling teaching positions and 75% of these districts are seeing fewer qualified candidates than in past years. Those numbers are much higher in rural districts, the Teacher Shortage Study notes.

Ultimately, the problem for agriculture is about teacher recruitment and retention.

Andrew Bowman Chair of the Illinois Leadership Council for Agricultural Education (ILCAE) said, "If you're passionate about teaching but have large student loans to pay off, then you're probably going to industry not the classroom."

Bowman cites statistics from a Purdue University study released in May where 57,900 new job opportunities are expected annually, but only 60% of those jobs will be filled by people with agricultural majors. As demand outpaces supply, salaries increase and school districts are less competitive.

"Our average first-year agricultural teacher salary is \$36,975 compared to a \$44,900 average for WIU and UofI ag-majors taking industry positions. If you're in debt, how do you say no to nearly an extra \$10,000? It's unfortunate, but about 10% of our teachers could qualify for public housing based on Illinois' median income," Bowman said.

It's a problem that the Facilitating Coordination in Agricultural Education team (FCAE) fights constantly.

Jess Smithers, FCAE Coordinator, points out that the demand for agricultural instructors is growing dramatically with an average of more than sixty vacancies annually for agriculture teachers despite an average of six new agriculture programs over the last five years. But with only an average of twenty agricultural teachers graduating each year from Illinois universities, FCAE has had to resort to alternatively licensed, retired, and out-of-state candidates to meet the annual demand.



Illinois Leadership Council for Agricultural Education

Smithers said, “It’s not ideal, but it gives students access to classroom instruction, work-based learning and leadership development. We seek the best candidates, but worry about filling the next vacancy.”

Industry is recognizing the alarming trend.

Doug Hanson, former agricultural teacher at Waterloo and Clifton Central High Schools, now with ProHarvest Seeds, and current ILCAE Board Member, sees great potential. He said, “Our current state funding, which is only \$1.8 million, is nowhere near enough. But we are working on solutions to increase teacher pay.”

ILCAE is also seeking to have agricultural education identified as a designated teacher shortage area by the Illinois State Board of Education, opening up loan forgiveness options. Since this is federal money, the state of Illinois pays nothing.

“That’s a common sense approach that won’t require arm-twisting in Springfield,” Hanson added.

Bowman agrees, stating that ILCAE membership is also seeking to extend agricultural teachers’ contracts to increase their pay and also engage businesses statewide to invest in agricultural education.

He said, “We understand state funds are tight. And we understand that the private sector must provide resources to supplement, not replace, state funds. The solution is investors taking action in addition to donors writing checks.”

One in four future jobs in Illinois may depend on how successful ILCAE is in these endeavors.

About the Illinois Leadership Council for Agricultural Education (ILCAE)

ILCAE works to secure the future of agriculture in Illinois is prosperous 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 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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IARSS Study – Illinois Educator Shortage Crisis

http://iarss.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/IllinoisTeacherShortage_12-10-15_kd-2.pdf

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/>