



# Jil's Statehouse Report "Ag. Edition"

News from Springfield from State Rep. Jil Tracy  
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April 22, 2008

## Governor Continues his Attack on Illinois Agriculture

To date the Governor has frozen nearly \$40 million that was allocated to agricultural programs in the FY08 budget. Earlier this year we learned the majority of funds for Soil and Water Conservation Districts had not been released. Now, many of the Districts are facing closure. The most recent target of Governor Blagojevich's threats is the University of Illinois Extension program. The Extension provides valuable services for all Illinois residents from rural to urban, children to seniors. The programs offered through Extension teach life lessons and important skills which promote healthier, safer and more productive lives.

The State needs these important programs that have not received their funding. The General Assembly appropriated and budgeted for these programs. It is not for the Governor to now pick and choose arbitrarily which appropriated funds will be withheld. It's very disheartening that our state's top executive doesn't understand or care about the extreme damage to our state and its citizens that will be caused if we lose these valuable, long standing programs.

A month ago Blagojevich dealt his first blow to Illinois agriculture by withholding funds for the 98 Soil and Water Conservation Districts throughout the state and the Partners for Conservation Program. The FY08 State Budget appropriated \$7.4 million for SWCD operational expenses and \$6 million for the Partners for Conservation Program through the Department of Agriculture. As of April 1, only \$1.7 million of the \$7.4 million appropriation has been released to SWCDs and all of the \$6 million appropriated for the Conservation Practices Program has been withheld.

Illinois' 98 SWCDs represent the state's frontline in protecting rivers, streams and other water sources against contamination from urban storm water and agricultural chemicals and sediment. SWCDs assist in delivering programs that prevent erosion from urban development and tillable soil that threatens Illinois' agricultural economy and the sustainability of surface water supplies. The SWCDs employ around 250 people and with the substantial funding cuts the Governor has implicated it is likely numerous staffers would be let go. This, in turn, will not allow the districts to properly run day to day operations. It is also important to remember that the investment of State funds into the operational expenses of SWCDs ensures the distribution of about \$250 million from the federal farm bill to Illinois. To most, it would be a common sense decision to release nearly \$6 million state dollars in return for hundreds of millions in federal revenue, but by now we all know this administration does not operate on a common sense basis.

In his most recent assault on agriculture, the Governor has taken it upon himself to completely eliminate the remaining \$18 million that is due to the University of Illinois Extension Program. The Extension employs approximately 900 people and serves over two and half million Illinois residents with programs ranging from 4-H, nutrition and safety career training to providing advice on soil saving measures for local farmers. If the Governor fails to release the remaining funding due to the U. of I. Extension, about half the employees would see their jobs eliminated and the programs would be severely cut back.

What is really disheartening about the whole situation is the fact that instead of curbing wasteful spending and halting the creation of new programs, this Administration chose to instead declare war on ag-related services that have been around for nearly a century. Agriculture and the history of Illinois go hand in hand. Most would probably consider agriculture the oldest business in this state and in fact it is the largest employing industry. Before demolishing programs that could jeopardize the future of one of Illinois's most reliable economic resources the Governor needs to take a hard look at the priorities of Illinois citizens and not just his pet projects.

I am urging residents to voice their support for these programs through letters to the editor and phone calls to the Governor's office requesting that he immediately release the state funds approved for the above programs. Your activism on this issue is absolutely necessary as we must all work together in order to prove just how valuable these services are for our communities and the future of Illinois agriculture.

## **Ag. Related Legislation**

So far this year the House has debated and passed numerous pieces of legislation related to Illinois agriculture. Most of the bills address specific problems brought to legislators by local constituents, although some are initiatives of legislators who have found flaws in current regulation. Below is legislation that has currently passed the House and is awaiting consideration in the Senate.

- **HB 5776**-the Department of Agriculture shall **not** require premise ID to exhibit or enter livestock or horses at any fair or exhibition in Illinois. If the measure becomes law premise ID would remain a strictly voluntary practice unless it becomes mandated by federal law. The legislation was initiated when residents expressed concern with the Department of Agriculture's decision requiring premise ID for anyone who wants to show livestock at state, county, 4-H or FFA fairs. Many constituents felt that kids who exhibit animals at these events were being unfairly targeted because if their parents did not want to register the property then the kids were the ones who were punished. Since the legislation was passed out of the House the Department of Ag. has reversed its original decision and now made premise ID voluntary for the remainder of the year.
- **HB4843**- creates the Veterinary Loan Repayment Program which provides grants to veterinarians who choose to practice in underserved areas and on large animals. Currently there is a critical shortage of large animal veterinarians in rural Illinois. Attracting vets to these areas can be very difficult due to the fact that those who recently graduated from veterinary school usually cannot afford to pay off their student loans while practicing on large animals. Many instead choose larger towns and cities, leaving farmers and large animal owners with few options where they can take their animals to be treated.
- **HB5942**-would appropriate \$250,000 to the Department of Agriculture for distribution through the Anhydrous Ammonia Security Grant Program which provides funds to buy locks, surveillance equipment and additives that make the chemical useless for producing meth. The program was not funded in last year's budget, but previously not a single anhydrous theft was reported in all the facilities that took advantage of the grants. It is important we continue to stay one step ahead of these criminals who will go to any lengths to produce this destructive drug.