



Combined conference covers specialty crops, local food markets

This combined Illinois Food, Farmers Market and Specialty Crop Conference is a collaboration among the Illinois Farm Bureau, Illinois Specialty Growers Association and Illinois Farmers Market Association to bring together more people than ever from across Illinois' local food, specialty crop and farmers market supply chains. Available in both in-person and virtual formats, this unique gathering combines the best parts of the events previously known as the Illinois Specialty Crop Conference and the Live Local: Local Food and Farmers Market conference.

This one-of-a-kind event brings together farmers and agribusiness leaders from across the state with other partners throughout the Illinois local food supply chain. By more efficiently connecting the supply chain, more income is generated; fewer businesses handle the product in processing and transit; and the products are harvested and packaged at a fresher stage. These improvements benefit the local economies and food opportunities of communities across the state.

You asked, and we listened. Producers want to know more about getting the most from their farms. Local food interests

and farmers markets want to work with excellent producers to promote our state's local food systems. These efforts to build relationships don't stop at the fencerow or market gate. So, we've found a way to connect the right people to enhance the robust Illinois local and specialty agriculture system.

What you can expect at the conference

Aside from the networking opportunities to develop and share new ideas, attendees of the From Food to Flowers: Everything Local Hybrid Conference will have the chance to:

- ▶ Hear perspectives from general session keynote speakers who understand and champion the specialty and local food markets.
- ▶ Engage in breakout tracks ranging from grower production practices and business development to farmers market management and community food systems.
- ▶ Attend workshops on GAP certification, farm-to-school training, social media management and more.
- ▶ Interact with vendors, associations and non-profits at the conference's trade show.

Kelly Sadowski joins MCFB team as membership/AITC assistant

I am really happy to be part of the McHenry County Farm Bureau team. As the full-time Membership/Ag in the Classroom assistant, I will be responsible for the smooth operations of dues collections, maintaining membership records and providing membership benefit support to members and affiliated company personnel. I will also provide support to the Ag in the Classroom program, assisting with phone calls, correspondence, organization of materials, scheduling, and assisting with special events. Prior to accepting this position, I had provided some office support to the organization and volunteered with the Ag in the Classroom program. I'm excited to have a more involved role going forward.

In the past, I have worked for



Kelly Sadowski

School District 47, Countryside Nursery and most recently at a GI Doctors Practice. I also worked for 11 years with The University of Illinois Extension, McHenry County, helping to run their 4-H program. There I did a lot of programming, youth development, presentations and leadership training. I have been on Extension Counsel and participated in other leadership activities. I was a 4-H leader for many years and enjoyed getting kids excited about learning many things which often were agricultural. I also served on the McHenry County Fair Board rep-

resenting Algonquin Township. I earned my Master Gardener certification and helped organize a Junior Master Gardener program in McHenry County.

I am the mother of three adult children who were very involved in the 4-H program and use those skills they learned in their current careers.

At this time, I have one amazing granddaughter, and look forward to any chance we get to see her as she lives in Utah. I am happily married to Tim, and we enjoy a lot of outdoor activities together. I love learning. I enjoy gardening, reading and cooking.

I look forward to this new opportunity to work with the many individuals who make McHenry County such a great community to work, play and live in.

Jean new Country agency manager

Tom Jean will oversee and provide support to Country Financial agents to help them market, sell and service the company's products. He will develop agency business goals including sales targets, deliver product-related trainings, implement company policies and procedures, and serve as liaison between the agents, home office (located in Bloomington, Illinois) and other field operations.

Jean has 30 years of experience in the financial industry and the past 18 in financial services.

After graduating from Carthage College (Kenosha, Wisconsin) with a degree in business administration, Jean worked for 12 years on the trading floors of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange and the



Tom Jean

Chicago Board of Trade.

In 2004 Jean began his career in financial services as an agent with Farmers Insurance.

Soon after, he joined Country Financial and

from 2007-2018 he held several roles with Country, including marketing and business consultant, financial representative and senior agency training instructor.

From 2018 until April 2022, Jean served as a sales director with Mutual of Omaha Advisors, where he recruited, trained and developed financial advisers.

In April 2022, Jean returned to Country Financial as a senior financial specialist working with Country Financial clients throughout Northern Illinois.

Jean currently holds FINRA Series 6, 63 and 65 licenses along with his Life/Health & Property/Casualty licenses.

On the personal side, Jean has been a lifelong resident of the north and northwest suburbs. He has been married to his wife, Dawn, for 25 years. Together they have three children: Trent, 24; Tim, 22; and Trevor, 19. He and his family currently reside in Libertyville. In his free time Jean enjoys exercising, listening to podcasts, golf, travel and watching about any sporting event.

Fall has been active season for AITC

October was a busy month! AITC staff visited with 1,600 students and their 110 teachers with our Pumpkin Patch Pie Presentation. Students learned about the pumpkin life cycle; how farmers grow them; and all the interesting varieties there are to grow. Students enjoyed tasting pumpkin (some for the first time!) as they assisted in the preparation of a delicious pumpkin treat with their classmates. All students were given Pumpkin Ag Mags, including the Pumpkin Patch Pie recipe, to share with their families.

Super Soybeans in November. Third-grade students at Leggee Elementary School in Huntley learned about soybeans: what they are, how they grow, and



what we use them for. Students tasted roasted soybeans.

Katie Vanderstappen, Ag in the Classroom Coordinator, is scheduling Conifer Presentations for the month of December. Participants will learn about growing conifers on a tree farm and their life cycle, and students will have the opportunity to identify different conifers by studying their branches and pinecones.

Looking further ahead: We are hosting Ag Expo at the McHenry County Fairgrounds in April after a hiatus! We look forward to presenting a variety of agricultural topics to McHenry County third- and fourth-graders.

Draw Down event planned for March 9

We are planning an evening of fun, food and fellowship that will benefit our foundation.

Please hold the evening of Saturday, March 9, 2024, on your calendar as we put all the details together. Funds raised from the event will support scholarships, an internship and our Ag in the Classroom program. Sponsorship opportunities start as low as \$250; contact Dan Volkers at 815-338-1520 or email him at mcfbmgtr@att.net for all the sponsorship opportunities.

McHenry County Farm Bureau Foundation is a 501 C 3 charitable organization.

