

Illinois Ag Mag Specialty Crops

An agricultural magazine for kids



Illinois...Where Fresh Is!

Illinois agriculture goes far beyond corn and soybeans. Illinois has good soil and a favorable climate, among other factors, making the state a top grower of several specialty crops as well. Many people don't realize that crops like pumpkins, peaches, apples, grapes, horseradish and melons are grown on Illinois farmland. In fact, more than \$400 million was generated in 2010 from specialty crop sales in Illinois.

The "Illinois...Where Fresh Is!" program helps promote and develop the Illinois specialty crop industry. Why is this program important? When purchasing locally-grown produce, an additional 32 cents per dollar stays in the community. So, next time you visit the grocery store, look for the "Illinois...Where Fresh Is!" logo on your fruits and vegetables, and remember, buy local and buy fresh.



Bees



Pollinators are a critical link in our food system. Abundant and healthy populations of pollinators can impact fruit set as well as fruit quality and size, which in turn, increase production per acre across Illinois farms. Apples, pumpkins, soybeans, squash, melons, and many other crops raised in the region, rely on bees for pollination.

Domestic honeybees pollinate approximately \$10 billion worth of crops in the U.S. each year. Unfortunately, numbers of the native and domesticated bees are declining due to a number of different reasons. It is crucial to take steps to help pollinator populations thrive. Simply adding plants to your landscape that provide food and shelter for pollinators throughout their active seasons can make a difference. By doing so, we support the bees' need for habitat as well as our own needs for food.



An industrious worker bee may visit 2,000 flowers per day!

Prairie Bounty of Illinois



Provided by the Illinois Farm Bureau and the Illinois Specialty Growers Association, Prairie Bounty of Illinois is an online directory of direct-from-the-farm sellers, farmers markets and agritourism businesses. It contains contact information and locations for more than 900 individual growers of fruits, vegetables and herbs throughout Illinois. The directory is constantly updated as growers add their names and markets to the system. Check it out at: <http://www.specialtygrowers.org/prairie-bounty.html>

Wheat



The variety of wheat grown in Illinois is soft red winter. Although it does not have the protein and gluten levels required for yeast breads, it is used in other food products such as flat breads, cereals, cakes, cookies, pretzels, pastries, pancakes, and biscuits, just to name a few. Nearly 83% of the wheat grown in Illinois is from the southern half of the state. Southern Illinois offers a longer growing season and allows wheat to be harvested in time to plant soybeans as a "double-crop."

Wheat is seeded in late September in the north or October in the south. After initial fall growth, wheat is dormant throughout winter. Growth resumes in late winter. About that time, growers apply fertilizers to maximize production. Wheat begins to head about the first week in May. Harvest begins in the middle of June in the south and ends in July in the north.

Look at a nutrition label on a loaf of bread.

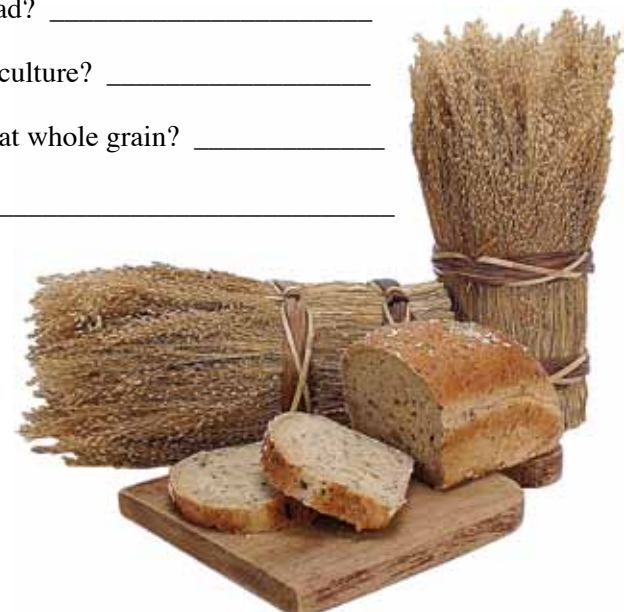
What is the name of the bread you found? _____

How many grams of fiber are in one serving of your bread? _____

What is the first ingredient of your bread? _____

How many ingredients came from agriculture? _____

Why does MyPlate encourage you to eat whole grain? _____



Herb Bracelet: Use masking tape to wrap around your wrist. Wear it with the sticky side up. Then set out various seeds and flowers. Roll the bracelet around so they stick to the bracelet. Enjoy the beautiful fragrant bracelet!



Pumpkins

Illinois grows more pumpkins than any other state in the country. In fact, Illinois grows more than 90% of the pumpkins used for processing. Most of the processing takes place in Morton, Illinois: “The Pumpkin Capital of the World.” Illinois celebrates pumpkins during the months of September and October through a wide variety of activities across the state. Some of these activities include petting zoos, corn mazes, shops and food. Find a pumpkin farm near you by visiting: www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/pumpkins/pumpkinfarms.cfm. Be sure to check out the Pumpkin Ag Mag to learn more!



Peaches

Did you know that peaches are grown in Illinois? Not all fruit will grow well in Illinois because extreme winter weather limits the growing conditions. Be sure to do your homework when planning tree fruit planting. Crops such as peaches, nectarines, and sweet cherries will suffer when grown in northern Illinois but can perform well in the central and southern parts of the state because of the warmer temperature and longer growing season. All tree fruit crops prefer full sunlight, but can grow in partial shade, although it may produce slightly lower quality fruit. Ensure that the soil is well-drained and slightly raised terrain so cool air can drain and avoid frost damage as much as possible.

A large peach has fewer than 70 calories and contains 3 grams of fiber. It's also a good source of vitamins A and C.



Melons

Many argue that the key to growing melons like watermelon, cantaloupe and honeydew is plenty of moisture, sunlight, and heat. Since melons demand two to three months of heat, growth in northern regions becomes challenging, but not impossible. Most commercial melon growers in Illinois are located in the southern half of the state because of the warmer temperature, longer growing season and sandy soil.

When should you plant? Plant after the soil is warm and when all danger of frost is past. Be sure to remove the weeds before vines start to run. This becomes much more difficult to accomplish later without crushing them.

Melons typically ripen over a short period of time. As soon as one ripens, the others won't be far behind. Minimize watering about a week before a melon is fully ripe. Water just enough to keep vines from wilting. This allows the vines to concentrate sugars in the fruit. A ripe melon should slip right off the vine. Store the melons in the refrigerator for up to a week. If you have extra on hand, cut them up and freeze them. Most importantly – Enjoy!

Research melon farms near you!



Onion Sets

Onions are grown commercially in more than 20 states including Illinois. The National Onion Association estimates that less than 1,000 growers produce onions commercially in the U.S. These growers plant around 125,000 acres of onions each year and produce about 6.2 billion pounds a year. Onions can be fresh-cut or processed for retail or food service. Food companies use pre-cut products in prepared food items like soups, sauces, salsa and appetizers like onion rings.

What's so great about onions? Well, they are high in vitamin C, a good source of fiber, only have 45 calories per serving, and add flavor to a wide variety of food. They are sodium, fat, and cholesterol free.

Research and see if you can find an onion farm in Illinois!

American onion consumption has risen from 12.2 pounds per person in 1982 to 20 pounds per person in 2009.

Aww, don't cry! Did you know that the sulfuric compounds in onions are what bring tears to your eyes? To cut down on the tears, chill the onion and cut into the root end last.



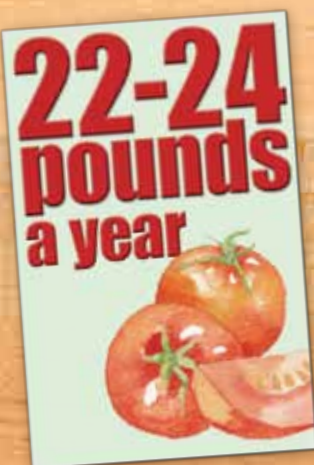
Tomatoes

According to the University of Illinois Extension, the tomato is the most popular garden vegetable in America today! Scientifically, the tomato is known as a fruit because it bears seeds. The fruit is easy to grow, and most families obtain an adequate harvest from just a few plants. The tomato plant is tender and is grown in gardens all over the continental United States. However, Illinois' freezing weather during the spring and fall months limits the outdoor growing season.

Just like apples, there are many different types of tomatoes. In fact, hundreds of varieties are available to grow in the comforts of your own garden.

The different varieties range in size, shape, color, plant type, disease resistance and season of maturity.

According to the USDA, Americans eat between 22-24 pounds of tomatoes per person, per year.



Popcorn

Popcorn has become a staple in theaters, sporting events, amusement parks, and many other gathering places. In fact, popcorn is Illinois' state snack food. There are more than 300 Illinois farms that grow popcorn, making Illinois the third largest grower of the product.

The fluffy snack gained popularity during the Great Depression. Street vendors would pop the crop at fairs, parks, and even restaurants. While other businesses failed in this era, the popcorn business thrived.

So how does popcorn pop? A popcorn kernel contains a small drop of water that suddenly expands when exposed to high heat. The kernel turns inside-out as it explodes. The steam inside the kernel is released and the popcorn is popped. Now it's ready for your favorite toppings!



Horseradish

Horseradish is a root that is harvested in the spring and fall. Its flavor is very distinguishable and a favorite to many. In America, about 24 million pounds of roots are processed each year to yield 6 million gallons of horseradish. Illinois produces 85% of the world's horseradish, mostly near Collinsville, the self-proclaimed "Horseradish Capital of the World." Every first weekend in June, the International Horseradish Festival is held in Collinsville, Illinois.



Sweet Corn

Sweet corn is a warm season vegetable crop with high sugar content. Standard sweet corn contains a sugary gene responsible for the sweetness, as well as the creamy texture of the kernel.

So, besides the sweetness, how is sweet corn different from field corn? Sweet corn is harvested during the "milk stage," when the kernels are fully formed, but not yet mature. The milk stage occurs 20 days after the appearance of the first silk strands, and lasts for less than one week. With the hot weather during the summer months, the sugar in sweet corn decreases and the starch increases, causing the corn to lose flavor, quality and sweetness quickly. This is why sweet corn is checked frequently as harvest approaches, and should be eaten, refrigerated or processed shortly after picking. Field corn, or dent corn, however is a grain. The kernels on this type of corn are allowed to mature and dry before harvest.

Several hundred varieties of sweet corn are available.



Herbs

The most popular herbs are the types used in cooking. Basil, chives, dill, mint, oregano, parsley, rosemary, sage and thyme are a few of the many herbs grown in Illinois. Herbs are used to enhance even the simplest of meals because of their scent and taste.

Herbs require little care and space, making them easy to grow. Herbs also have minimal insect and disease problems and can be grown in moderate fertility levels. Another reason for their popularity is they are great indoor plants, making them easy to grow in pots all year long.

To try growing your own, make sure the location you choose has around 4 to 6 hours of sunlight with moderately moist soil.



DID YOU KNOW?

Dill was a medicinal herb to the ancient Greeks and Romans. They used the herb to treat congestion because of its soothing properties.



Career Corner

Denise Boggio
Boggio's Orchard & Produce
Granville, IL



Tell us about your operation.

Boggio's Orchard and Produce is a family-owned farm and business. We grow around 100 acres of different specialty crops. These include apples, pumpkins, sweet corn, radishes, lettuce, spinach, onions and potatoes.

How can we get a taste of your produce?

Our crops can be purchased fresh through farmers markets or as tasty treats at our bakery. The bakery items include cookies, muffins, pies, breads, donuts and ciders, just to name a few.

What's your favorite part of your job?

My favorite part of farming and the orchard is being able to see the smiles on the faces of all of our visitors – especially when children enjoy our tunnels of fun, petting zoo, pony rides, corn mazes and other activities.

Why is it important to get exposure to farming and agriculture?

Agriculture plays a role in all our lives every day, so I believe it is important to understand and learn about the concepts of farming and where our food comes from. Why not do it in a fun and exciting way, like visiting a fun orchard?!

Check us out at www.boggiosorchardandproduce.com.

Ren Sirles
Rendleman Orchards
Alto Pass, IL



Describe your business or operation.

Rendleman Orchards is located in Alto Pass, Illinois. We are specialty crop growers. We grow crops such as zucchini, yellow squash, cucumbers, apples and peaches. Apples and peaches are our main business.

How did your family get into the business?

We started this orchard in 1873. My great grandfather moved up here from North Carolina after the civil war. He was a farmer in North Carolina and chose the location in Alto Pass because the landscape was very similar to their previous location. The farm raised corn back when it began and gradually got larger to produce the crops we grow today.

How do you market your produce to the public?

We sell to wholesalers, Wal-Mart, Kroger, Super Value, and to local road side markets during the warmer seasons. We also have a local farm market on site. One of our current projects involves attempting to bring our products into the schools in efforts to encourage a healthier diet.

What's the best part of your job?

I've been raised around farming and agriculture all my life. I appreciate being close to nature and Earth. I am proud to be helping to feed the world. I enjoy seeing the crops start as a seed and turn into the end result and knowing that I played a crucial role.

Harry Alten Jr.
Alten Farms
Harvard, IL



What is your experience with agriculture?

Generations of my family have been dedicated to farming. I've served on Illinois Vegetable Grower's Association, Illinois Specialty Grower's Association, Cook County Truck Gardener's Association, Chairman of Farmland Preservation Commission of McHenry County and McHenry County Farm Bureau®, among other agricultural associations.

Tell us about the Alten farm.

The Alten Farm in Harvard, Illinois, grows many specialty crops including onions, sweet corn, cabbage, squash, tomatoes, watermelons, and cantaloupe, to name a few. Although I am now retired, I've been working on the farm since I was about 10 years old.

What was your favorite part growing up on the farm?

I was always fascinated by watching things grow and the science behind most aspects of agriculture and farming. I'm currently enjoying promoting specialty crops in Illinois.

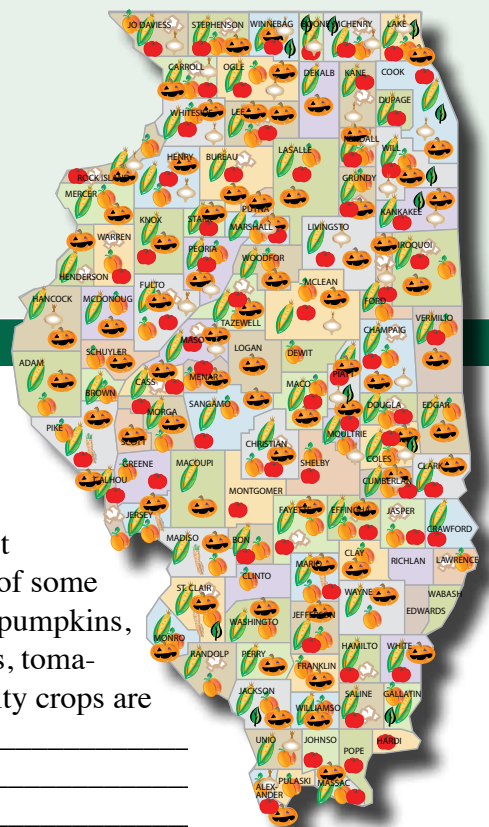
What changes do you see in the industry today?

We are seeing trends of younger populations seeking interest in farming and learning about where food comes from. I think for sustainability reasons, it's refreshing to see young adults seek this education and potentially pursue careers in the agriculture industry.

Pumpkin – In a Pumpkin!

Cut open a small pumpkin and core it out. Add soil and plant some of the seeds into the soil. Add water and place near sunlight.

After sprouting, plant outside your classroom and watch it grow!



All Over the State

Specialty crops are grown throughout Illinois. This map shows a sampling of some crops grown across the state such as pumpkins, sweet corn, peaches, popcorn, onions, tomatoes and herbs. What types of specialty crops are raised near where you live? _____

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Information in this Ag Mag may be linked to the following Common Core and Next Generation Science Standards: Common Core Standards: ELA-Literacy.RI.4.1 | ELA-Literacy.RI.4.2 | ELA-Literacy.4.8 | ELA-Literacy.W.4.2 | ELA-Literacy.W.4.2b | ELA-Literacy.W.4.7 | Mathematics.3.NF | Mathematics.3.MD | Next Generation Science Standards: 3-LS4-2 | 3-LS4-2.b | 3-LS4-3 | 3-LS4-3.c | 4-LS1-1 |

To learn more about Agriculture, visit us at www.agintheclassroom.org, or contact your county Farm Bureau® office or Illinois Agriculture in the Classroom, Illinois Farm Bureau®, 1701 Towanda Avenue, Bloomington, IL 61701.

