Illinois Stewardship Alliance cultivates a local food and farm system that is economically viable, socially just and environmentally sustainable.
LOCAL FOOD MATTERS

It is my honor to serve as President of the Illinois Stewardship Alliance Board of Directors. I have big shoes to fill as our past president, Andy Heck, just wrapped up six years serving on the Board. This report reflects our success under Andy’s leadership.

I have always had a love and interest in local food and farming since I was a little girl growing up in northeastern Connecticut. Early on, I recognized the importance of knowing your food was locally sourced and realized its importance to the local economy. My love and interest in local food and farming grew when I moved to Illinois and began working with the Illinois Stewardship Alliance.

I knew that the food we bought in our local grocery stores wasn’t locally sourced, but didn’t fully appreciate the impact of those food decisions until I read the Buy Fresh Buy Local Central Illinois Directory. I realized that often the food we buy in stores is picked way before it is ripe, that it can take up to a week to travel 1500 miles before it arrives on the grocery store shelf. I’ve learned from the Alliance that if my family and others in Illinois spent just $10 of our weekly grocery budget toward locally sourced products, $47 million would be invested in our state’s economy. After learning of these facts and others, I decided to take action and become even more involved with the organization.

You will often find me, along with my family, shopping at our local farmers market. It is a highlight of our week. We buy beautiful bouquets of locally grown flowers, fresh veggies and fruits, and meats. We enjoy talking, laughing and getting to know our farmers... that certainly beats buying food from someone that we don’t know 1500 miles away.

Agriculture is one of our state’s most important resource. We are so grateful you have chosen to be part of the Alliance to protect that resource in a way that is economically viable, socially just and environmentally sustainable. Your passion brings us all together and gives us the energy and support to achieve our mission.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and staff, thank you to our members, partners and generous funders. Your support made every story of impact in this 2018 Annual Report possible.

ERICA BEEMAN, BOARD PRESIDENT

OUR VISION:
We envision a system where soils are treated as a precious resource, local food producers earn a fair, living wage, local food education is integrated into all levels of education, infrastructure is rebuilt to accommodate local food systems and good food is available for all.
YEAR IN REVIEW

3
Three State Policy Wins in 2018 affecting thousands of Illinois farmers, food entrepreneurs, and eaters!
- Home-Canned Tomatoes Act
- Industrial Hemp Farming Act
- Healthy Local Food Incentives Fund

Yearly Lobby Day
- Trained 40+ food advocates at our annual Local Food Lobby Day
- 12 Dishing on the Farm Bill Letter-Writing Campaigns and 170 hand-written letters to Congress
- Won $50 million in permanent annual funding for local food marketing programs in the Farm Bill that will grow the local food industry

30 farmers became River Citizens, pledging to protect the Mississippi River

29 farmers joined the Soil Health Champions group, leading the way for soil health advocacy from within the farming community

1000 downloads of the Cottage Food Guide, launching food businesses across the state

90 eaters took the Eat Local Challenge, pledging to purchase and prepare local food during the month of September

4,000 Buy Fresh Buy Local Central Illinois Directories Distributed across Central Illinois. Another 500 downloaded online.

85,000+ shoppers benefited from increased access to local food and 85+ farmers benefited from increased sales at the Old Capitol Farmers Market, Springfield Holiday Markets, and Springfield Winter Markets

5 Legislative Farm Tours hosted, familiarizing legislators with the issues facing farmers

Directly impacted by our local food programs, conservation programs, and policy wins in 2018.

100,000+
ALLIANCE MEMBERS HELP MAKE LOCAL FOOD A NATIONAL PRIORITY

Local food is a now a national farm policy priority—and Alliance members helped make it happen.

Hundreds of members educated themselves and each other, attended listening sessions, made phone calls, and organized letter-writing parties to advocate for local food programs in the 2018 Farm Bill. Almost two years of organizing came to fruition at the tail end of 2018. Congress passed a Farm Bill that, for the first time ever, includes permanent baseline funding at $50 million annually for the Local Agriculture Marketing Program.

This sends a powerful message that local food is a national agriculture priority.

Initiatives that reach “baseline” funding become a permanent part of the Farm Bill rather than needing to be renewed every five years when the Farm Bill expires. With permanent baseline funding, local food farmers, farmers markets, and businesses can feel confident that their work matters, the nation supports their efforts, and we want to see more of it.

Advocates across the country are celebrating this monumental win, but perhaps none are as excited as Alliance members, who can trace the win to their boots-on-the-ground efforts.

In August, the Alliance turned out 25 members to a House Ag Committee Listening Session on the farm bill in Decatur. 12 of 25 were selected to speak on the record, including Sarah Simeziane of The Land Connection, who spoke eloquently about how a federal program, the Farmers Market Promotion Program, is helping her farmers market reach hundreds of low income folks in the Champaign community and keeping food dollars in the pockets of family farmers. She and the other Alliance representatives urged the Illinois committee members present to support local food programs and conservation in the farm bill.

Without the Alliance’s presence, local food and organic agriculture would not have been mentioned.

The Alliance designed a “Dishing on the Farm Bill” toolkit with all the tools and material for Alliance members to organize and host their own letter-writing event. Pam and Bernie Hand, organic farmers in Filmore, were the first to jump at the chance. They organized a Dishing event at Forsee Winery, bringing together their neighbors and other area farmers - both conventional and organic - to write personal stories to their members of Congress about how local farms and regenerative farming practices impact the health, environment, and economy of rural communities like theirs. The letters urged support local food in the Farm Bill. Members hosted over a dozen “Dishing” parties in Springfield, Fillmore, Carbondale, Chicago, Batavia, Ottawa, Libertyville, Charleston, Champaign, and Decatur and generated hundreds of handwritten letters to representatives on the House Agriculture Committee.

In March, the Alliance hosted a Farmer Roundtable with Congressman Davis and 12 farmer members. In April, Rep. Davis toured Engrained Brewery & Restaurant and heard from owners and brewer Brent and Melissa Schwoerer about their belief in sourcing from local farms to benefit the community and how sourcing local and organic ingredients has helped them combat health issues within their own growing family of three boys.

Grassroots efforts paired with regular communication with staffers in Washington, D.C. with help from the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, including Wes King, former Alliance directory now at NSAC. Our work paid off. When Congressman Davis delivered his opening statement about the Farm Bill to the Conference Committee in late 2018, he said that he valued the local food investments included in the Senate version of the farm bill. It’s noteworthy for a House member to express support for a version of the bill pushed by the other party. His work in the Conference Committee helped ensure that local food programs would get support.

Thanks to Alliance members’ work in tandem with the NSAC members across the country, local food will receive $50 million in funding every year to grow farmers markets; drive demand for local food; re-build local food infrastructure like processing, milling, malting, and packing; and support local food farmers and stakeholders in their efforts to build vibrant, just, and resilient local food systems across the state and make good food available for all.
LAUNCHING HOME-BASED FOOD BUSINESSES ACROSS THE STATE

When Adrian Lopez and Jackie DeCleene began making fresh vegan meals to feed their growing family, they never dreamed that they’d be able to turn their part-time passion into a full-time business until they downloaded the Alliance’s Cottage Food Guide.

Jackie and Adrian began prepping meals for the week to make it quick and easy to feed their three daughters healthy food while balancing their busy lives. They try to stick to a whole food plant-based diet with grains, nuts, fruits and veggies. For their family, it was a long journey to give up processed foods, added sugars, dairy and meat. Jackie says tasting the rainbow and eating an assortment of food as close to out of the ground as they can has been the best thing for their health, energy and family.

When friends and family started asking when they would sell their meals, Jackie thought, “we might really be able to do something here.” Jackie began researching her options and stumbled upon the Alliance’s newly created Cottage Food Guide.

The Cottage Food Guide includes the latest updates from the Food Freedom Act and the Home-Canned Tomato Act, two new laws that Alliance members helped pass to expand cottage food law, both of which went into effect in 2018.

The Guide was just what Jackie and Adrian were looking for. From their home kitchen, they launched Healthy AF, a whole food plant-based meal prep company giving people their free time back by making healthy, nutritious, locally sourced meals easy, affordable and delicious.

Jackie DeCleene and Adrian Lopez used the Cottage Food Guide to help get their vegan meal prep business Healthy AF Nutrition off the ground in Dekalb County this year. They have been so successful that they’ve now moved into a commercial kitchen space.

The business is a family affair. Chef Adrian creates masterpiece recipes from scratch. Jackie works with local farmers to source ingredients. Their girls, aged 11, 9 and 6, help pack labels and create spice packets. They prepare meals two days a week and deliver or coordinate pickups at their local farmers market.

She always looks for the closest source -- they get black beans for their veggie wraps from Breslin Farms, Swiss chard for their Swiss Chard and Chickpea Salad from Tin Shed Farms, and kohlrabi from Mighty Greens and apples from Jaeger’s Farm for Kohlrabi Salad.

"Illinois has such amazingly rich land," Jackie says, "it's a shame we buy food shipped from across the country only to have it go bad quicker than ever."

The business took off like wildfire.

Health AF has now grown into a commercial kitchen in Sycamore and demand continues to climb for their vegan meals. Customers love the convenience of a pre-made healthy meal, and Jackie and Adrian love sharing their passion for wholesome, locally grown food with their community.

To date, the Cottage Food Guide has been downloaded more than 1200 times by unique individuals, launching hundreds of home-based food businesses like Jackie’s - businesses that support families, local farms, build up the local economy, and make wholesome food available to their communities.
After years of educating lawmakers, building a coalition, and a few fits and starts, the Alliance, together with the Illinois Farmers Union, finally passed the Industrial Hemp Farming Act to allow Illinois farmers a chance at the booming market for hemp products.

Chad Wallace envisions a future where family farms across Illinois add hemp to their crop rotation and work cooperatively to process and sell it. The profits could keep farms like his family’s diverse 138 acre farm, Oak Tree Organics west of Springfield, operating into the next generation.

Growing up, Chad’s dad and grandpa farmed 2,000 acres of conventional grain with cattle, chicken, sheep and hogs. But when his grandpa passed away and his dad decided it was a good time to retire, the farm shrunk.

Chad had a choice: take on a huge amount of debt to go big or stay small. Chad did what all small farmers do to survive – diversify and steward the land you have. Their little family farm has done well and has a loyal customer base, but he has the next generation to think about. His three kids--now 29, 25 and 13--grew up helping on the farm. If there’s a chance they can return to carry on the family tradition, it has to generate substantially more income.

The once in a lifetime opportunity came this spring when, because of support, emails, letters and phone calls from Alliance members and stakeholders, Illinois legislators voted overwhelmingly to pass a bill to allow farmers to grow industrial hemp.

Chad was as giddy when he stood just a few feet from the Governor as he signed the hemp farming law at the Du Quoin State Fair in August as he was for the piglets.

It was the culmination of years of hard work, educating communities and lawmakers, organizing at the grassroots and building alliances to pass a bill to allow farmers to grow hemp.

Raising industrial hemp on Chad’s small farm could provide security that the next generation will carry on the farm.

He hopes to work with nearby growers to purchase processing equipment that would help them keep more of the profits in the hands of family farmers and keep them all on the land. He and other farmers across the state are ready to plant seeds in the ground this May.

The race is on for the Illinois Department of Ag to develop rules and a registration process so that farmers can get permits in time for spring planting.

Chad is anxious to get started, but until then, he’s making other moves as well. This year, after he saw firsthand how getting involved—and talking with legislators like state Rep. Tim Butler about the issues as he buys his favorite bacon ends at the market—can make real change, he decided he wanted to be part of it. In January, he joined three other farmers on the Alliance Board of Directors.

Industrial hemp was a big win for Illinois and for building local food systems. It has the power to transform the landscape, bring in millions in economic development, and help thousands of family farms like Chad’s continue to serve their communities for generations to come. While industrial hemp was a huge win, the other victory was much more subtle-- it was giving Chad a voice and the tools he needed to become a champion for the causes he cares about. It’s farmers like Chad that will drive change in the food system, and behind them every step of the way is the Alliance.
BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF SOIL HEALTH FARMERS AND DRIVING CHANGE FROM WITHIN

“If an egg is broken by an outside force, life ends. If broken by an inside force, life begins. Great things always begin from the inside.” - Jim Kwik

Farmers in the Alliance’s Soil Health Champions group organized an event to garner media attention to protect the Conservation Stewardship Program in the 2018 Farm Bill.

In 2018, the Alliance began organizing change from within the commodity crop production. It started with conversations. Alliance staffer Liz Rupel, hit the road to visit dozens of farmers and soil health experts. The goal was to listen to their stories and invite them to work together to drive soil health.

The soil health champion farmers had various reasons for “breaking from the herd” and incorporating conservation practices onto their farm - practices that are often seen as controversial or radical among their farming neighbors. Many say they want to see a greater focus on the long-term health of soil and water so that the next generation can continue their legacy.

Despite the amazing work these farmers were doing to regenerate soils, they still faced barriers. Some felt outcast from the community. Time after time farmers told Liz, “We don’t go to the coffee shop anymore.” They also described a disconnect between farmers and landowners when it comes to communicating and implementing conservation practices. These discoveries left Liz and the farmers wondering, “What can we do about this? How can we make soil health the norm in Illinois?”

The Alliance brought the soil health champion farmers together for an initial meeting to continue the conversation. Over the next few weeks, the group began working together more and more, slowly evolving and growing. In the space of a few months they identified potential policy solutions, were crafting advocacy campaign strategies and bringing more farmers to the table. By the end of one year they had taken action in many ways to raise the profile of soil health.

In 2019, the Soil Health group is championing the “Fall Cover for Spring Savings” program. This program replicates a similar one in Iowa that provides a $5 per acre reward on crop insurance for adopting cover crops. The goal is to test whether a small crop insurance reward would incentivize more use of the practice across Illinois.

Soil Health Champion Farmer Leader Actions

1. Helped preserve the Conservation Stewardship Program in the Farm Bill by getting more than 75 farmers to sign a letter to Congressman Rodney Davis.

2. Wrote op-eds and spoke to the media about conservation and soil health.

3. Developed a policy campaign to get more conservation practices on the 75,000 acres of public land that are rented for agricultural purposes.

4. Shared their stories at four Alliance Annual Meetings

5. Hosted farm tours designed to educate legislators and Soil Water Conservation District staff

6. Participated on a panel on water quality at the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators

This program has the potential to ‘cover’ Illinois agriculture fields and house a year round root system.

Perhaps the greatest accomplishment of the Soil Health Champions is not just in the actions they’ve taken, but in the community they are building. The Soil Health Champions group is one of the few spaces where like-minded farmers can come together and share their struggles and stories. Connecting has given them the opportunity to feel valued and respected among their peers.

Together now, the Soil Health Champions are shifting the culture of farming from within.
This year, the Alliance launched an initiative to bring together partners across the state to work together for the first time to launch our Buy Fresh Buy Local Central Illinois directory and campaign statewide.

Far from just being a directory to find local food producers, the Buy Fresh Buy Local project will feature a marketing campaign to drive shoppers to the directory and a data collection plan to monitor the local food industry. The purpose of the Statewide Buy Fresh Buy Local project is three-fold:

1. To drive demand for local food by uniting farmers and local food venues across the state under a unified brand and message.

2. To collect statewide data on the impact of local food on the Illinois economy, environment, and public health, resulting in the creation of the first statewide local food impact report.

3. To directly communicate with farmers and eaters across the state, building a powerful audience that understands and cares about local food and can drive change.

Over the course of the year, the Alliance researched local food marketing campaign projects and organized meetings with experienced marketing and publishing experts within the Midwest, drafted a budget and developed a plan, hosted three focus groups with our existing Buy Fresh Buy Local membership to help inform that plan, met with potential partner organizations across the state, and formed a steering committee. This coming year will consist of recruiting farms and local food businesses into the directory, securing sponsors, and developing a data collection plan and marketing campaign plan before the launch of the statewide directory in January of 2020.

The launch of a statewide directory and marketing campaign will help consumers find local foods, farmers, retailers, and restaurants more easily, will drive demand for local food, and will provide additional opportunity to connect farmers to restaurants and retailers across the state that care about sourcing locally.

The Alliance printed an updated Buy Fresh Buy Local Central Illinois directory featuring an index that is searchable by product, farming practice, or sales avenue, making it easier than ever for shoppers to connect to local farms. Over 4,000 copies were distributed across Central Illinois.
For Jessica Lance, the Old Capitol Farmers Market is a lifeline. Her five-year-old twins, Gavin and Gabe, were born prematurely. They experienced traumatic brain injuries and were diagnosed with cerebral palsy.

Feeding her boys nutritious food is one of the best things she can do to help them combat the worst effects of the condition. But it's tough on a limited income. After the mortgage, transportation to daily doctor appointments, prescriptions, and overnight hospitalizations, there's not much left for fruit and vegetables for four kids.

At our farmers market in Springfield, though, her SNAP benefits double the family's food budget. We're proud to offer a dollar-for-dollar match up to $25 a week for customers using Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits at the Old Capitol Farmers Market, helping more families like Jessica's.

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With the SNAP match, Jessica can bring home two pints of fresh strawberries from Reliant Farm for the price of one. Twice as many tomatoes from R&R Farm. Double the greens from Oak Tree Farm.

Last summer, the Alliance raised $10,000 to double the purchasing power of hundreds of families. Over 80% of the SNAP match went to women – most were moms like Jessica.

Unfortunately, not every farmers market can afford the technology or staff needed to operate a SNAP program. Many farmers markets aren’t equipped to even accept SNAP cards, much less offer a matching program. Less than a quarter of Illinois’ 350 farmers markets offer a SNAP match.

Thanks to the Healthy Local Food Incentives Fund though, that all could change. In the spring of 2018, Alliance members worked with state Representative Tim Butler and Senator Don Harmon to pass legislation to create a $500,000 fund that would give every farmers market an opportunity to provide a SNAP match like the one that serves Jessica in Springfield.

If the Healthy Local Food Incentives is fully funded, Illinois could qualify for a federal match to double our investment to $1,000,000.

Imagine the difference it would make in communities across Illinois if low-income residents could afford fresh fruits and vegetables and Illinois farmers could count on their cut of $1 million more in produce sales to SNAP customers at farmers markets.

Although Alliance members passed the Healthy Food Incentives Fund legislation in 2018, there’s still more work to be done. In Spring of 2019 we’ll be back at the legislature fighting for appropriations in the budget to fully fund the program and make it real. Families like Jessica’s deserve access to fresh, wholesome food, and Illinois Stewardship Alliance is leading the way to make it happen.
Thanks to the new Local Food Business Opportunities Act that went into effect on June 1st of this year, you can now find Maggie Leigh Ray of Winding Creek Farm at the farmers markets in Decatur and Monticello.

Maggie and her husband Todd own a 4 acre plot of land in Macon county, just outside of Argenta. For the last three years they’ve been raising free range chickens, lambs, and goats for themselves and family members. When a foot injury a little over a year ago prevented Maggie from furthering her career as an ER technician, she decided to take their part-time passion—a budding hobby farm—and turn it into her full-time venture. This past winter, they began making plans to take their products to local farmers markets for the first time.

The Local Food Business Opportunities Act, championed by Illinois Stewardship Alliance in 2017, helped make that dream a reality.

The Local Food Business Opportunities Act streamlines statewide regulations for refrigeration and hand-washing stations at farmers markets. In a nutshell, the law prevents local health departments from requiring expensive mechanical refrigeration, which is cost-prohibitive for small farms and which are not supported by scientific evidence to be any more safe than non-mechanical refrigeration. The new law states that as long as meat and egg products are held at 41 degrees, health departments cannot mandate the type of refrigeration used and cannot charge a fee for using refrigeration.

This was a lifesaver for Maggie and Todd.

They had explored licensing with the health department over the winter and knew that their local health department was one of the counties that requires a commercial grade freezer to vend at farmers markets. That type of freezer, in the size that Maggie needed to hold her inventory, would run well over $1000. In addition, in order to haul the freezer to market, Maggie would also need to buy a trailer, which would run over $1500. As beginning farmers, these were hefty up-front costs and risky investments. They would be new vendors at the farmers market this year, they would need to build a customer base and learn what products sell and what do not. Income was not guaranteed. They weren’t sure they could afford these up front costs and still turn a profit.

That’s why when Maggie learned about the Local Food Business Opportunities Act at an event hosted by Illinois Stewardship Alliance, she gave a little shout of joy. The law would save them thousands of dollars, which they would use to invest in their farm instead—purchasing more livestock and equipment to increase their inventory for the Spring.

“**The Illinois Stewardship Alliance is one of the only reasons we are able to sell at farmers market this coming season. There are so many people who don’t know that they can buy food locally—that they can actually get their chickens from a real farm and not a grocery store. The Stewardship Alliance is helping break down those walls and connecting people back to their food.**”

Look for Maggie selling free-range chicken, eggs, and lamb at the Monticello Farmers Market and Richland Community College Farmers Market this Spring or reach out to Winding Creek Farm to buy direct.
Our work would not be possible without the generous support of foundations, organizations, and individuals like you who care about building a more just and sustainable local food system. Thank you.

INCOME: $468,297

- 70% Foundation
- 4% Membership
- 2% Individual contributions
- 17% Program Income
- 7% Events & Other

EXPENSES: $449,062

- 55% Conservation Program
- 12% Operations
- 2% Fundraising
- 7% Policy Organizing
- 24% Local Food Program

FOUNDATION SUPPORT
- Walton Family Foundation
- Lumpkin Family Foundation
- McKnight Foundation
- New Vision Foundation
- J.R. Albert Foundation
- Harvey Miller Fund
- Michael Fields Agricultural Institute
- Farm Aid
- Mississippi River Network
- Clif Bar Family Foundation
- Junior League of Springfield
- Patagonia Chicago
- Experimental Station
- Natural Resource Defense Council

ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERS
- Common Ground Food Cooperative
- Confluence Business Advisors, LLC
- Central Illinois Corvettes, Inc
- Twyford BBQ & Catering
- Compeer Financial
- Nature's Farm Camp
- Advocates for Urban Agriculture
- Angelic Organics Learning Center
- Dekalb County Community Gardens
- Illinois Farmers Market Association
- Diverse Metamorphosis
- Audubon Council of Illinois
- Chaine Des Rotisseurs
- Goldmine Farms Inc.
- B. Creative Graphic Design
- Maldaner's Restaurant & Catering
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Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant  
Old Capitol Farmers Market Manager

JOIN US

We depend on your support to continue our work to build a more sustainable, vibrant and just local food system. Donate, renew membership or volunteer at www.ilstewards.org

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JOIN US

Our member Natalie Kenny-Marquez joined us at the Capitol this year to advocate on behalf of farmers markets. Join us for Local Food Lobby Day on April 10, 2019.

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Sugar Grove Family Farms

Ben Hankins  
Bunn Beef

Chad Wallace  
Oak Tree Organic Farm

Members of Illinois Stewardship Alliance board, staff, and host committee celebrate together at the Annual Harvest Celebration. Save the date for September 29th, 2019.

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