INSTRUCTIONS

Thank you for contributing your responses to the 2020 Food and Farm Voter Guide!

We will distribute the voter guide to farmers and eaters throughout the state, including Alliance members, a dozen partner organizations, and to media outlets.

This questionnaire lays out issues that most affect farmers and eaters in Illinois based on surveys, focus groups and interviews with experts.

Please carefully read the questions and provide your responses online by August 31, 2020.

- Please respond online at ilstewards.org/voterguideresponse
- You may provide two responses to each question: a brief answer of 700 characters (about 100 words) with the option to provide a longer answer with no character limit.
- We will publish your brief answer in print and online versions of the guide. Longer responses will be published online only.
- If the candidate does not respond to the questionnaire or to a specific question, we will print, “Candidate did not respond.”

Submit your responses online at ilstewards.org/voterguideresponse

ABOUT YOU

Candidate Name:
Congressional District:
Education:
Experience:
Website:
Phone:
Email:
Twitter/Instagram/Facebook:
Provide a brief biography, including any connections to food and agriculture:
INCREASING FOOD SECURITY BY STRENGTHENING THE LOCAL FOOD ECONOMY

1. Illinois ranks sixth in value of agricultural production, yet Illinois Department of Agriculture estimated in 2011 that over 90% of the food purchased in Illinois came from out of state. As sources like the St Louis Federal Reserve Harvesting Opportunity and others conclude, local and regional food systems can have a positive economic impact. Support for local farm businesses increases the share of money recirculating in the local economy and helps local farm families access a greater share of the consumer expenditures on food. For more of the food we eat to be sourced locally, we would need more farmers raising diversified crops and livestock, and we need to reinvest in scale-appropriate infrastructure (such as regional mills, food hubs, livestock, and poultry processing) to process and transport farm products.

What, if any, policies will you support to increase food security and build a vibrant local food economy?

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2. Programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and school meal programs help ensure that vulnerable Americans have access to food. The Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP), formerly FINI, provides extra funding for SNAP clients to buy fresh produce from local farmers. The Farm to School Grant Program connects children with fresh foods from local farms. These programs strengthen the local food system by putting money in the pockets of local farmers while alleviating hunger with nutritious health-promoting foods. These programs are also particularly important for communities of color who suffer disproportionate levels of food insecurity. However, many families and individuals in need are faced with considerable barriers to access due to restrictive eligibility requirements and insufficient funding. Farmers also face barriers in being able to accept online SNAP/EBT payments.

What initiatives will you support to increase the consumption of health-promoting foods by SNAP consumers while ensuring the success of local farmers?

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3. The average age of Illinois farmers is 58 and has been increasing over time, while the number of beginning farmers is a fraction of what’s needed to replace retiring farmers. Young and first-time farmers face significant barriers to entry, including access to land, credit, and capital. A majority of this new generation come from non-farm backgrounds, operate smaller, more diversified farms, and are more interested in conservation practices to support soil and water health. However, farmland consolidation makes it challenging for new farmers to compete with established operations to secure land. A compounding factor is how development pressures have been decreasing the amount of available farmland while increasing its price. The farm bill’s ACEP-ALE program has been an effective tool to permanently protect farmland and create affordability, but much more can be done to address this challenge.

What policies will you support to ensure access to land, credit, and capital for the next generation of farmers?

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Kyle Reed is a first generation farmer and in his first growing season as the founder and farmer of Hilltop Community Gardens in Mt. Pulaski. Kyle rents land from an area farmer to raise a wide variety of fruits and vegetables for local markets. He dreams of one day owning his own land and adding perennial fruit and nut trees into the mix.
4. In 1920, Black Americans made up 14% of U.S. farmers with 892 black farmers in Illinois. Due to the exploitation of heirs’ property by white developers and speculators and racial discrimination in lending practices by the USDA (see *Pigford v. Glickman*), today Black Americans make up less than 2% of farmers nationwide with only 59 black farmers in Illinois. Agriculture in the U.S. has a long and cruel history of colonization, slavery, land dispossession, and labor exploitation. Although people of color make up 38% of the population, only 7% of farmers are people of color. People of color not only face barriers to access land, credit, and capital by systemic racism and discrimination but are actively dispossessed of land and wealth in our current system. Furthermore, farmworkers, in particular those in guest worker programs, are subject to poor wages, human rights abuses, and lack adequate access to health insurance or workers’ compensation. Some proposals from advocates include reparations; reforms to the USDA administration; moratoriums on government foreclosures of Black land; debt forgiveness programs; reforms to labor laws and many others.

**What policies will you support to address structural racism in the food system?**

*Submit your response: ilstewards.org/voterguideresponse*

*Children visit an area farm and feed chickens as part of Kids Day on the Farm, an event organized by Slow Food Springfield, Illinois Stewardship Alliance, and the Springfield Boys and Girls Club to provide opportunities to explore farm life and learn about how food is raised.*
5. In addition to access to land and capital, urban farmers face many unique barriers including permits and licensing, secure land tenure, and soil remediation. Historically, urban farms have relied on programs not specifically targeted for urban farming like the Community Food Projects (CFP) or the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). Along with not being designed specifically for urban farming, these programs have faced cuts. Funding for CFP was reduced by about 45% in the 2018 farm bill. Most existing local urban programs provide assistance that is geared more towards gardeners and hobbyists, rather than commercial, career farmers. There was an effort to address the issues of urban agriculture in the 2018 Farm Bill by authorizing $10 million in annual appropriations through FY2023 in grant funding for research, education, and extension, as well as the creation of the “Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Forms of Production” which has yet to be fully implemented.

Considering these challenges, how should we tackle federal planning for urban agriculture and ensure that urban farmers do not fall through the cracks?

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6. The farm and food sectors are experiencing unprecedented corporate consolidation leading to unfair market conditions for family farmers that drive down wages for workers and hurt rural communities. Consolidation throughout the industry, including the agrochemical sector, means that farmers pay more for inputs like seed and fertilizers. The projected median farm income for 2020 is negative $1,449. Farm household income for most farmers comes from off-farm jobs and government subsidies. With low incomes and high operational costs, farmers are amassing debt, and loan delinquencies are rising. Some proposals include placing a moratorium on large agribusiness, instituting supply management programs, updating the Packers and Stockyard Act, and more.

Do you believe accelerating corporate consolidation in the farm input and food processing industry is a problem, and what will you support to ensure a level playing field for farmers?

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7. A major problem affecting our water is nitrogen and phosphorus runoff from fertilizer and animal waste that flow into nearby waters or leach into groundwater causing adverse effects on water quality and health. Sustainable farming practices such as cover cropping, no-till, and conservation buffers have proven benefits in reducing nutrient runoff. These practices improve soil health by keeping more nutrients in the farm system, reducing erosion, and improving water storage ability. With low commodity prices in the past 6 years and high operational costs, farmers are strapped for cash and often cannot afford the extra up-front cost of soil health practices despite its long-term benefits. Programs like the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) help fund investment in these soil health practices but the demand for assistance is often greater than available funding.

How will you address the issue of agricultural runoff and water quality?

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Farmer Bryce Hubbard of Pleasant Hill, Illinois kneels to look at the cover crops on his field. Cover crops are typically planted after harvest to “cover” the field and prevent bare soils. They are a conservation tool used to protect against soil erosion and run-off, build organic matter, and capture carbon.
8. Farmers are at the forefront of the climate crisis. They face increasing threats to their livelihood from drought, severe weather events, and higher than normal temperatures. Sustainable agriculture’s focus on soil health plays a significant role in the climate change solution through carbon capture. Storing carbon in the soil is the cheapest and easiest method of removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere while also improving yields because of improved soil quality. Agricultural research that focuses on improving farm and community resilience to climate change is crucial to informing technical innovation and climate-ready production systems. Although soil health and sustainable farming practices build greater resilience and farm viability, farmers transitioning to such practices face steep barriers and often need technical and financial assistance.

What steps do you propose to assist farmers in becoming part of the solution to climate change?

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9. Farmers are an aging population working in one of the most dangerous industries in the country. To access health insurance, farmers depend on off-farm jobs, taking time away from the farm and hindering efforts to scale up. In rural areas, declining populations lead to hospital consolidations leaving many rural farmers and eaters with few options for quality care and in precarious situations when emergencies arise. Telemedicine has been helpful but broadband access is still out of reach for millions in rural America. Further, researchers have found that without competition between multiple providers, insurance premiums in rural areas are significantly higher than in urban areas. Many healthcare reform proposals include a public healthcare system, a public option, premium subsidies, caps on payments, and reinsurance. Some states have allowed farmer-owned co-op members to purchase group health insurance rates which lower the cost to individuals.

Considering these factors, what do you support to guarantee access and affordability to quality healthcare?

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10. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to wreak havoc on our health while underscoring some of the deepest cracks in our food system. It has highlighted long standing issues in the food system including the systemic inequalities of food access for low-income households and communities of color. It has caused some food and supply shortages in grocery stores where long supply chains struggled early on to stock shelves amidst the increased demand. At the same time, farmers are forced to dump milk and euthanize their farm animals while families struggle to access food because the inflexibility of a centralized food system and a lack of regional food infrastructure prevents fulfilling local demand or selling directly to consumers. Across slaughterhouses and farm fields, food chain workers are deemed essential but insufficient PPE, low-wages, lack of access to health care, and no paid sick leave put them at the highest risk of contracting COVID-19.

What initiatives do you think we need to ensure equitable access to nutritious foods, protection for food chain workers, and a more resilient local food supply during this ongoing - and potential future - crises?

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Students in a Springfield school district bite into apples during the "Great Apple Crunch," a program hosted by the Illinois Farm-to-School network to connect schools to local orchards
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