

COUNTY FAIRS & LEGISLATORS URGE GOVERNOR TO RELEASE FAIR FUNDING

Springfield — Illinois legislators and county fair officials gathered at the Statehouse to showcase the positive economic benefit county fairs bring to the state and urge the Governor to release \$1.4 million in funding that was appropriated as part of the FY18, which passed last year.

The Illinois Association of Agricultural Fairs highlighted the results of a University of Illinois Extension Department of Community and Economic Development study, which revealed that county fairs bring \$170 million annually to the state's economy and support 1000 non-fair related jobs.

“Local county fairs provide both measurable economic benefits and immeasurable community benefits to Central and Southern Illinois communities. I urge the governor and his administration to do the right thing and release this funding, which will help downstate communities that have struggled in the recent past,” said State Senator Dave Koehler (D-Peoria).

“County fairs are distinguished from other events in state statute because of their agricultural component. Researchers divided the state into three geographic regions and, within each zone, all county fairs were sorted according to their estimated attendance. A cross section of fairs were also studied, taking geographic location into account. The selection process produced a sample and data set that would best represent all fairs across the state. The economic study results show \$170 million is spent in the state annually as a result of our county fairs, with \$90 million being spent *within* the actual fairgrounds and the other \$80 million in ancillary sales in local communities,” explained IAAF Government Affairs Director Margaret Vaughn

Vaughn explained further that the money spent *within* the fairgrounds, including gate fees, event tickets, food, carnival passes and entertainment is only one of seven categories studied to determine the economic impact of the fair. The other six ancillary categories focused on money spent in the local economies *outside* of the fairgrounds and included outside purchases of food (restaurants, diners, etc.), transportation (fuel, rental cars, convenience stores), retail (grocery, merchandise, hardware), lodging (hotels, campgrounds) and commercial services (laundry, mechanics, healthcare).

“What is important about these numbers is that it shows that county fairs are economic engines in our state, especially in rural areas, many of which are economically disadvantaged and have limited employment opportunities,” said Marvin Perzee of the Iroquois County Fair.

“County fairs are an economic stimulus across the state, especially in rural areas. I encourage the governor to recognize the important role they play in our communities and release the funding immediately,” urged State Senator Heather Steans (D-Chicago).

“County fairs provide a venue for competitions, which raise the bar for the development of agricultural products within the state. Youth programs of 4-H and FFA are imperative to insuring future generations continued dedication to farming,” explained State Rep. Steve Reick (R-Woodstock).

“From a socioeconomic as well as agribusiness perspective, I think it is important to point out that county fairs are the backbone of our agricultural communities in the State of Illinois. The money the State has appropriated to them is an investment in our agricultural economy and needs to be released,” said Sen Jil Tracy (R-Quincy).

The full study can be found on the IL Association of Agricultural Fairs website at https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/cfc958_995532498dcd475398b606ca3f9eee83.pdf

Pictured left to right Rep. Mike Halpin (D-Rock Island), Rep. Steve Reick (R-Woodstock), Sandy Moore (Jersey County Fair), Marv Perzee (Iroquois County Fair) Rita Williams (Mercer County Fair), IL Assn of Ag Fairs Governor Affairs Director Margaret Vaughn, Rep. Tom Bennett (R-Gibson City), Tom Moore (Jersey County Fair), Ken Tyrell (Sandwich Fair).

ABOUT THE ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION of AGRICULTURAL FAIRS (IAAF). IAAF is a non-profit corporation formed in 1910. It serves 103 Illinois County Fairs and Expositions. Its purpose is to provide guidelines, inform, and monitor and /or initiate legislation that promotes and assist Illinois County Fairs. Illinois law has recognized this importance in statute since the 1920's. The association is volunteer based and is dedicated to the promotion of agriculture, development of youth, and as a showplace of American agriculture's traditions and future agricultural innovations.

ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS EXTENSION's DEPARTMENT of COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: U of I Extension's Department of Community & Economic Development (CED) offers educational programs with the purpose of increasing the abilities of decision-makers to improve the vitality and quality of life in rural and urban areas throughout Illinois. CED empowers local officials, entrepreneurs, educators, economic development directors, and other community leaders with the knowledge, skills and resources to evaluate and make effective decisions concerning community planning, governance, economic development, management and leadership.

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