

Expanding farm and food opportunities

By WENDY MARTIN
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A mix of food growers and food consumers attended a Farm Forum in Manito on Friday, organized by the Greater Peoria Economic Development Committee. Most of the 40 or so attendees had an idea of what wanted to see happen in their heart of hearts, and many were able to discover how a path to that goal might start.

David Dierker of Havana said he liked the idea of growing a crop where his profit would not be dictated by the Chicago Board of Trade.

Marty Travis of Spence Farms in Fairbury got Dierker's and others' attention talking how with the right crops they can make

more and plant less.

"If you can make \$10,000 per acre, you don't need to farm 20,000 acres," Travis said.

Dave Bishop of Atlanta, wants to see a "farmer hub" created this year, which caught the attention of Cindy Arnett of Lewistown who said she was thinking about doing something different with her farm-land.

"This is an excellent place for making connections," she said. "I look at all of the entities in this room and there is a lot of strength."

Farmers Hub

A local farmers hub was exactly what Manito farmer Mark Meyer wanted to see.

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MARK MEYER, Manito

stay on the farm and do what they are good at. We otherwise have to spend so much time marketing, and we get stretched so thin," Meyer said.

Mike Deppert of Green Valley agreed. He grows peas and green beans commercially for DelMonte, and pumpkins to be processed by Libby in Morton, as well as growing seed corn, wheat, rye and alfalfa.

He also has livestock and has a small 'freezer beef' business.

"We need to be networking with like-minded growers and create a hub like Mark said, so we can grow the produce and the animals and let someone else get it into consumer hands," Deppert said.

Travis led one of half a dozen discussion groups, outlining how his "farmer's hub" - Down at the Farms LLC - keeps 60 different farms busy, selling what they grow to restaurants and grocery stores for much more

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About the Democrat's Farm Tab

We are pleased to present to our readers the 2019 Farm Focus tab.

This section is provided to all subscribers in Mason and Fulton counties, reaching nearly 7,000 homes.

Like all of our special sections, we make every effort to provide locally written stories about people our readers know and places

they've been to.

While we generated many of the stories ourselves, we are grateful for the assistance of many contributors from the Farm Bureau, University of Illinois Extension, Soil and Water Conservation Service, and more.

We hope you enjoy this special section



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