

Earth Day: How do farmers protect our precious natural resources?

By Katie Zelechowski
Illinois Farm Bureau

If you've ever budgeted your finances, you know there are a lot of factors to consider when balancing your income and expenses. Over time, many of those factors will change and you'll need to recalculate and reorganize your priorities based on what's available.

Southwest Illinois farmer Richard Guebert Jr. says farmers manage the needs of their soil, crops and animals in similar ways. The decisions they make regarding the use of their land, water and other natural resources directly affect the food, fuel and fiber they produce.

Guebert serves as president of Illinois Farm Bureau, the largest farming organization in the state. With Earth Day approaching, he shared information about how environmental stewardship influences Illinois farmers' decisions.

How do farmers manage natural resources on the farm?

Guebert: We are blessed to have some of the most fertile soils right here in Illinois. Thanks to the high productivity of our land, farmers can raise a lot of



Submitted photo

Southwest Illinois farmer Richard Guebert Jr. checks the soil in his field for moisture content. Farmers evaluate the condition of their soil throughout the year to understand what nutrients, fertilizers and other applications are needed for plants to grow.

different crops and animals on their farms. But keeping the soil healthy can be difficult, especially since most of what's grown on the farm is influenced by the weather.

Just like other farmers in the state, managing the

health of my soil and crops while protecting the integrity of those resources for the future are top priorities for me.

Before planting each spring, I work with a crop specialist to assess the soil

nutrients on my farm. Based on soil samples collected from different areas of each field, the crop specialist prescribes specific amounts of nutrients I should apply to each field based on what's needed for crops to grow.

That information is plugged into the technology on my tractor and nutrients are precisely applied to each part of the field.

This precision cuts down on cost for the farmer and is better for the environment. From the variety of seeds planted to types of nutrients and fertilizers applied, farmers make decisions like these every day to maximize their production while protecting our natural resources.

What does your farm look like and how does it compare to a typical Illinois farm?

Guebert: I raise corn, soybeans, and wheat on my farm in Randolph County. Some of our land has been farmed by my family for generations. In many ways, my farm is similar to others in Illinois because a majority of farms are family owned and operated and because corn and soybeans are the most popular crops in our state.

Illinois farmers also raise a wide variety of livestock including pork, beef, dairy and poultry. We grow a lot of different specialty crops, like horseradish, pumpkins and Christmas trees.

How does agriculture impact Illinois?

Guebert: In Illinois, nearly a half-million jobs are supported by agriculture and related industries. We have tremendous assets in Illinois such as rich soils, river and rail transportation, many food manufacturing companies located in the Chicago metropolitan area.

Another way agriculture impacts our state is through biofuel production. The corn used to produce ethanol and the soybeans used for biodiesel are a more carbon-friendly alternative to gasoline and diesel fuel. The biofuels industry as a whole also adds jobs to our state and promotes a healthy economy.

Earth Day is on April 22 this year. How will Illinois farmers celebrate?

Guebert: From the food you purchase at the grocery store or local farmers market, to the fuel you fill your car with and clothes on your back, agriculture is all around you. As the heart of agriculture production, Illinois farmers will celebrate Earth Day like they always do - by managing our natural resources to produce the products American families need most.

Douglas County Health Department spotlights volunteer Tammy Bennett

By Colleen Lehmann
DCHD public health liaison

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a true crisis from any measurable standpoint. But in the midst of grappling with this global calamity, acts of kindness, caring, and compassion have emerged as well.

Douglas County has been the fortunate recipient of such benevolence, including in the form of numerous volunteers willing to step in and step up, helping whenever help is needed. DCHD would like to shine a light on these unsung heroes periodically, beginning with Tammy Bennett.

Tammy is environmental manager and emergency response team coordinator at Cabot Corporation. She and her husband, Brad, live in Tuscola with sons Matthew, Thomas, and Andrew.

What efforts have you been involved with/founded since the start of the pandemic?

Douglas County COVID Task Force member, Douglas County LPEC co-vice chair, Cabot Tuscola COVID team, Coordinator of Douglas County Mask Makers, Coordinator of volunteers to assist seniors with vaccine registration, and parent of Thomas and Andrew who made face shields, ear straps, and nose clips.

What was your mindset behind starting or volunteering with these efforts?

Volunteering has been an important part of my life growing up in Tuscola. I remember the winter blizzards in the 1970's and helping with my grandma and mom at the community building when we had stranded motorists. That passion remains with me today and extends to

my family now.

When COVID hit, it was easy to say - what can we do to help?

I remember discussing PPE shortages with Joe Victor, and after some research my son Andrew was able to design and 3D print an N95 prototype with the help of his older brother Matthew. Shortly after, we discovered how to make face shields and that ramped into full production. I was very proud of how the boys worked together making these shields and providing them to local fire departments in the country as well as nursing homes and eventually, the schools.

Our county was blessed with many agencies, municipalities, schools, nursing homes, industry and county partners who came together very early in the response and formed a task force to monitor and respond to COVID. As needs were raised, we worked together as a team and with our partners and community citizens to find solutions throughout the entire pandemic.

Approximately how many items have been made/distributed?

Cloth masks - 3,500+, headbands - 50+, Mask tabs - 600+ (over 1,600 volunteer hours March-July 2020), 3D printed face shields - 400+, 3D printed ear straps - 200+, and 3D printed nose clips - 200+.

These items were donated to many different groups, which included: DCEMA, DCHD, local nursing homes, local schools (Villa Grove, Arcola, Tuscola, Arthur), county fire departments, assisted living facilities, nurses, local dentists, local businesses/medical facilities, daycares, individuals, etc. We are forever grateful for



Submitted Photo

Douglas County Health Department volunteers Tammy Bennett, Chana Ray, and Brooke Ray at the DCHD vaccine clinic held in Tuscola on April 17.

the support of our volunteers, citizens and businesses that supported these efforts with their time, financial donations and donations of materials and supplies.

What has been the most gratifying thing about being involved with these efforts?

Living in a small rural country, there is a mindset of working together as a village to help others. When cloth masks were needed, an amazing group of 40 volunteers stepped up and donated materials, time, and talents to make masks, crochet tabs, and headbands. These volunteers worked for two months solid making over 2,000 masks for students/teachers and masks for musical instruments so that local school bands could perform! We even had the amazing residents of Jarman Center help us out as well.

When we all needed supplies for the face shields or cloth masks, residents of the county answered the call with donations of materials or money to offset the costs for materials. We also had the support of Staples and Cabot which provided materials to help in several county efforts.

On a personal note -- seeing my sons find creative solutions to help others was a proud moment for our family. They worked together and learned skills most don't learn until high school or college that will carry them for a lifetime. They were blessed with many caring and giving individuals who donated to their cause. This spring they were able to make donations to five local groups in our county.

This spring, volunteers answered the call again when requested to assist seniors

with COVID vaccine registration. A group of 15 volunteers have been working with local residents needing assistance to schedule their vaccine first and second-dose appointments through the Douglas County Health Department. To date, this group has assisted over 200 individuals, and each time a vaccine spot is secured we know that we are making a difference in protecting them and their loved ones.

What has been the most challenging about being involved with these efforts?

I never dreamed we would live in a time of global pandemic that has impacted so many families, businesses, education and the economy. My heart breaks for the loss of loved ones, the loss of our daily routines, and the restrictions we had to endure to help slow the spread. Our

nurses, doctors, health care providers, first responders, teachers, and staff all sacrificed so much to help save lives and educate our precious loved ones.

My biggest concern is for the long-term impacts as they relate to mental health and education for our kids, as we have not seen the full impact. I hope they get the help they need to work through these issues and I pray that people will always find ways to Be The Helper.

In addition to her COVID-related activities, Tammy is a member of Douglas County Ground and Search and Rescue, Medical Reserved Corps, and is a volunteer assistant soccer coach. Spending time with kids, family and friends, kayaking, and fishing round out her list of favorite pastimes.



Family Practice Physician Kimberly Whitaker, MD, and the medical team at SBL Tuscola Clinic, are people you can count on for medical expertise and compassionate care.



Welcoming new patients to our practice.

Sarah Bush Lincoln Tuscola Clinic
1100 Tuscola Blvd.
217-253-2020

www.sarahbush.org



Thank you Rural King!

Cross County Mall is alive and well thanks to you