

Minutes  
**Governor's Rural Affairs Council Meeting**  
June 2, 2005 (Illinois Department of Agriculture Building)

1. Carolyn Brown Hodge (CBH) opening the meeting at 10:05 a.m. Director Chuck Hartke, IDOA welcomed participants and discussed the impact of the current financially difficult times in state government. He also discussed that Illinois is #1 in Horseradish and pumpkin production and discussed the fact that Illinois has 160 or more Farmer's Markets that offer opportunities for specialty crops, fresh fruits, and other products. A list of the Farmer's Markets, locations, and dates is on the IDOA Web Site. MainStreet communities have been especially active in promoting them. The state fair will have major changes and ticket sales are running ahead of last year. Other activities will be promoted at the state fairgrounds as well.
2. The minutes of the previous meeting (December 9, 2004) were approved (Pluta/Stein)
3. *Rural Water Task Force*. CBH discussed the House Joint Resolution #4 that passed allowing LtG Quinn to appoint members. This was an important issue for the GRAC and USDA-RD.
4. *Food Banks*. The GRAC provided grants to 9 food banks of the Illinois Food Bank Association resulting in an 8 percent increase in output. Several major events on Hunger Awareness Day, World Food Day, Thanksgiving, and Souper Bowl Sunday were supported by these funds. The Food Banks were complimented for their efforts and GRAC wants to increase their capacity..
5. LtG Quinn joined the meeting and stated that GRAC is building a legislative agenda for next session building on past successes and wants to do more to make sure that rural residents have as high a quality of life and opportunities as possible. Everybody should be in and nobody out. Opening statements were followed by self-introductions.
6. *Paul Simon Public Transportation Bill*. Many rural Illinois counties have no general public transportation. HB2222 passed and awaits the Governor's signature. It will provide additional funding for downstate communities. Many rural groups provided support and were thanked. A copy of the bill will be sent to GRAC members and participants. Passage was a high priority of the GRAC this year.
7. *Conservation Initiative*. Marc Miller discussed recent funding of \$10 million for the Conservation Resource Enhancement Program (CREP). Since this is a 4:1 federal match, there will be \$50 million for programs. Illinois is a leader in conservation efforts. \$11 million was provided for Conservation 2000 and \$2 million was restored to the ENR budget.

8. *Energy Net*. Carol Timms described the Energy Net program started 10 years ago so that children in elementary to grade 14 can do more project based learning activities on energy. Students learn to reduce energy costs. Gibson HS had a 2 year project in which students tracked light bulb use and applied for a grant with the Illinois Clean Energy Foundation and received \$31,000 for use in the school.
9. *E-Team*. LtG Quinn works with students in 12 schools on energy conservation and these efforts have reduced the energy bills by 50 percent. Half of the schools are rural and half are others. Applications for this year are currently closed.
10. *E-85, Soy Diesel, and Brownfields*. Director Designate Doug Scott, IEPA, discussed the E-85 fuels and cited the Illinois Green Fleet web site. There are 42 E-85 stations and work is underway to increase the number. Directions to stations are available on the web site as are cost comparisons with other fuels. Gas mileage is less but cost is also less. Other soy products will be posted on the web site soon. The IL Clean Energy Foundation has a grant program to help stations convert pumps, hoses, etc. to Soy Biodiesel and E-85. Aurora was cited as a leader on this issue.
11. *Soy-based Transformers and other equipment*. Greg Palmer of Cooper Power Systems (St. Louis) led a discussion of using soy oils to manufacture high performing electrical equipment. Electric coops and cities use these transformers. Envirotemp FR3 reduces the risk of fires and extends the life of the transformers. One acre generates 60 gallons of soy oil which go into 4 transformers. Auburn, Gondola, and Waterloo Coop use these transformers and electric equipment. More information is available at 1-877-CPS-INFO.
12. The Illinois Soybean Association discussed E-11 Soy Diesel and pushed for no sales tax. More farmers are using E-11 and a push is underway to interest the trucking industry in using it also as well as efforts to create other markets for this product.
13. *Affordable Energy Plan*. John Colgan, Illinois Community Action Association, reported on efforts to help low income residents pay their energy bills. For most residents, utilities are 4-6 percent of income but for poor people it may be 21-31 percent. Current efforts are underway to provide funds in the LIHEAP so that not more than 10 percent of the family income would be required for utilities. Efforts to revise the program are underway and more revenues are needed for the revamped LIHEAP program.
14. *Heart Saver AED*. Josh Levin updated the GRAC on current efforts to expand the Automatic External Defibrillator program. The goal is to make AEDs as common as fire extinguishers and a trust fund to pay 50 percent of the cost of the AEDs to public institutions would help. This will continue as a high priority of the GRAC and additional help from state agencies is needed.

15. *Report from Illinois Rural Health Association.* Sheldon Keyser provided an update on Illinois Rural Health Association activities. IRHA supports the concept of grants to provide AEDs and training to first responders. HJR5 was passed establishing a statewide committee for rural health with funds to support research. The Medical Malpractice bill that passed made some progress. Rural transportation is an important issue and GRAC should be congratulated for its leadership. Reports on the EMS series of forums were distributed. Access to mental health in rural areas is crucial and needs more attention. See the IRHA web site for information on forums. Legislators will be guest hosts for the sessions. Agri-tourism is important to rural Illinois economies and should be promoted. A guidebook was published recently.
16. *National Center for Rural Health Professions.* Michael Hunsaker reported on summer camps for secondary school students held at WIU and NIU to help students learn about and prepare for health and medical professions. The National Center for Rural Health Professions is a pilot program and a proposal has been submitted to make it permanent. The Rockford School of Medicine has cooperative projects with IIRA and other agencies to help prepare and attract medical and health professionals to rural Illinois. A shortage of psychiatric services exists in downstate Illinois, especially children services. In some instance the existing personnel are not able to prescribe the appropriate medicines. More work is needed on this issue and telemedicine offers some promise.
17. *Project ChildSafe.* Erica Ott, OLG, described the ChildSafe program in which the Office of Lt. Governor Pat Quinn distributed more than 55,000 gun locks in Illinois. The OLG wants to partner with additional organizations and agencies to increase the distribution of gun locks and prevent firearm related accidents.
18. *Illinois Health Network.* Mary Ring, Illinois Hospital Association, reported on the Illinois Health Network that allows health care agencies to share medical related information over a secure system. This system is being developed by the Illinois Health and Education Foundation, an affiliate of the Illinois Hospital Association. It offers special advantages to remote rural areas who now can transmit confidential patient information to specialists usually in large cities and can share other relevant business information to improve their overall efficiency in operations.
19. *Wireless Communications in Rural Areas.* Business especially, but rural residents in general, need access to affordable wireless communications but there are spots in rural areas which do not support cell phone use. Tom Walsh, Illinois Valley Cellular, reported on an 8 county project in north central Illinois in which IVC is working with small Telcos. IVC will apply for federal grants to expand the tower capacities so that all customers can have access to the latest technology. This is especially important so that residents in rural areas have 911 access from their cellular phones, for example. This access will also be important in terms of

economic development in rural areas and will provide opportunities for phone access by low income families.

20. *Fiber Project in Northern Illinois.* The GRAC commissioned Ed Feser, UIUC, to make recommendations on broad band access in rural areas, based on his previous work in North Carolina. The General Assembly adopted most of the recommendations made by Governor's Task Force on this topic. The Northern Illinois Technology Triangle, in which cities, universities, and other groups will be linked was discussed. The rewrite of the Telecommunications Act was delayed until 7/07. The Office of Lt. Governor Pat Quinn was to support projects such as these and additional efforts will be discussed at the next GRAC meeting.
21. *Earned Income Tax Credit.* Larry Garner gave a report on efforts to work with rural residents who qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit but have not applied in the past. Several examples of one-day training programs and other events were discussed. These events have been very successful in increasing the amount of tax refunds received by low income residents. More of these events are needed in rural areas.
22. *Changes in the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA).* Harry Pestine, Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, discussed proposed changes in the CRA and how they could affect rural areas. The CRA regulations encourage banks to invest in rural economic development and if the requirements for banks were lowered, it could reduce the incentives of smaller banks not now included in the requirements to be less. A summary of the information collection process regarding these changes was read. Assistance provided by GRAC staff was recognized as was help provided by other agencies. The document is in draft form.
23. *Bureau of Homeland Security Initiative in DCEO.* Matt Summy reported on a new unit within DCEO to help Illinois businesses prepare to participate in the Homeland Security market. The Procurement Technical Assistance Center at the College of DuPage will take the lead on some efforts. Grants will be available for businesses to ramp up for this industry and public forums to describe the role of private businesses will be held. The market is large, nationwide, and the desire is to help Illinois business participate in it. The LtG recommended that attention be paid to rural businesses.
24. *Special Crop Grants.* Kim Janssen, IDOA, reported on grants (\$25,000 and larger) available to ag producers for direct marketing and advertising costs for specialty crops. These grants will be of special importance to rural areas.
25. *Illinois Facilities Fund.* Craig Staley is the new downstate lending offer for IFF. He described the loans available to non-profits at below market rates and with no fees. The IFF makes loans subordinate to banks and can be used for vehicles, energy costs, and other issues. Technical assistance is also available and more information is available on the IFF web site.

26. *Tomorrow's Leaders Training Program.* The Illinois Municipal League, Township Officials of Illinois, and the University of Illinois-Extension Service presented a training program for secondary school students to learn about local governments and to encourage them to participate in the political process. There already has been one success with a CC student who has completed the program successfully ran for office. A committee system is in place to a) market the program; b) raise funds; c) create new products; and d) assist with training.
27. *New Standards for Schools.* Ron Reische reported on higher standards for secondary schools under SB 575. Graduation requirements were increased including math and writing. By 2007, science and language arts requirements will be increased. Small schools can't afford some of these costs but students must also be prepared for the work place or higher education. Additional funding is needed for small schools to meet some of these requirements.
28. *IDOT Enhancement Programs.* Tim Milan, IDOT, briefed participants on funding available for transportation improvements involving economic development and related issues. These programs can include historic preservation, landscaping or biking/pedestrian facilities among other uses. An initial call for applications will be in June 2005 and run until August 1, 2005. More information is available on the IDOT web page but no on-line proposals will be accepted.
29. *Illinois Assn of Small Counties.* Fifteen counties in Illinois have populations of 10,000 or less. These counties face different issues than larger counties and have formed an association to help local administrators network and inform legislators or other public officials about their needs. Mike Bigger, founder of the Illinois Association of Small Counties discussed the organization and its aims. The IIRA has provided training on local management issues to members.
30. *Poverty Summit.* Joe Dunn, Illinois Coalition for Community Service, reported on a series of 7 downstate poverty summits. These discussions will continue in a series of meetings in the future including an Illinois People's Assembly.
31. *Comprehensive Affordable Housing Plan.* Bill Pluta, Illinois Housing Development Authority, briefed participants on a comprehensive affordable Housing Plan that contains low income housing data by county and several other publications.
32. *Experience Leadership Development.* Jana Poliska, Illinois Agricultural Leadership Foundation, reported on activities of the Illinois Agricultural Leadership Program that helps prepare the agricultural leaders of tomorrow. The program has trained many agricultural participants for leadership positions in public agencies and businesses.

33. *Annual GRAC/IIRA Report to Governor and G.A.* Norman Walzer updated participants on the progress of the Annual GRAC/IIRA report. The report will describe recent trends in rural Illinois, present exemplary practices, and set forth a legislative GRAC agenda for the spring session. The report will describe GRAC member agency programs involving the GRAC identified issues. The focus will be outcomes from GRAC and member agency efforts. Data will be requested from member agencies in August and September with an expected completion date in November.
34. *Next GRAC meeting.* The next meeting will be in early December but no specific date or location has been announced.
35. Meeting adjourned at 12:30 p.m.