

Illinois Specialty Growers Association Annual Report for 2016

Background Information

The Illinois Specialty Growers Association (ISGA) was formed in 1989 to serve as an umbrella organization for four affiliated associations:

- Illinois State Horticulture Society
- Illinois Herb Association
- Illinois Vegetable Growers Association
- Illinois Irrigation Association

The purpose of ISGA is to provide:

- Dues administration for the affiliated associations
- Legislative and regulatory oversight
- Newsletters (3 publications annually)
- Social Media Updates (Website and Facebook)
- Coordination of the annual Illinois Specialty Crops, Agritourism, and Organic Conference
- Assistance in coordinating and promoting affiliated associations' summer field days
- Promote the Specialty Crop sector in Illinois by hosting a tent at the Illinois State Fair

There are four classes of membership: Producer, Associate, Agri-Industry, and Student. To be eligible for a producer membership, you must be actively engaged in buying or selling crops and derive your income from such activities. Associate members are those with an interest in the promotion and development of the industry. Agri-industry members are companies manufacturing equipment, supplies, or other related products for the specialty crop industry. Student members include students at the high school, undergraduate, and graduate level.

A flexible dues structure is in place which allows each affiliated association to set their own dues with \$40 of their total dues kept by ISGA to cover operating expenses. The affiliated association dues are as follows:

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| • Illinois State Horticulture Society | \$70 |
| • Illinois Herb Association | \$50 |
| • Illinois Vegetable Growers Association | \$50 |
| • Illinois Irrigation Association | \$45 |

ISGA's membership is as follows:

	2015	2016
• Illinois State Horticulture Society	73	71
• Illinois Herb Association	49	44
• Illinois Vegetable Growers Association	155	155
• Illinois Irrigation Association	26	24
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TOTAL	303	294

Management Report for 2016

- ISGA welcomed a new manager in 2016. Diane Handley was able to fulfill her lifelong dream of retiring to a warm climate. She did precisely that in June, and I hit the ground running and haven't stopped since. Diane's detail and notes have helped me immensely, but Charlene has really kept things on-track for us. Without her – ***there would be no conference.***
- ISGA monitored national legislative issues, such as the Farm Bill, Immigration Reform, Affordable Care Act, and Food Safety Modernization Act and informed members of pertinent information via the ISGA newsletter, website, or e-mail blasts to membership.
- ISGA, through our relationship with Illinois Farm Bureau, has been at the forefront of the Labor debate during the past several in Congress.
- Monitored state legislative issues such as minimum wage, ag overtime exemption laws, farmers' markets guidelines, and farm truck regulations. Staff also assisted with promotion of the "Meet the Buyers" and "Know Your Farmer" events which encourage relationships between farmers and restaurants, grocery stores, and wholesaler industries.
- Diane worked to help found the National Agritourism Professionals Association (NAPA). NAPA's goal is to train professionals on rules and regulations farmers need to know in order to start up an agritourism business. Areas of interest include venue and food safety, insurance, highway signage, zoning, liability and other various rules and regulations farmers need to know in advance of starting a business or to expand an existing business.
- ISGA staff is a member of the Governor-appointed Farmers' Market Task Force that compiled Technical Information Bulletin #30 regarding Sanitation Guidelines for Farmers' Markets and a subsequent handbook to guide vendors, market managers, and consumers on farmer market safety.
- Participated in the farmers' market promotion at the Illinois State Fair. The Association sold sweet corn, cantaloupe, watermelon, peaches, apple cider slush, popcorn, and ice cream. The Fair had several weather-related challenges and power outages that lowered attendance at this year's Fair. This event is not only a fundraiser for the Association but also promotes the freshness and outstanding quality of Illinois produce. Governor Rauner stopped by the tent several times to fill up on apple cider slushies!
- ISGA participated in the Illinois Products Expo by providing samples of apple cider and popcorn to consumers and promoting awareness of the specialty crop industry.
- ISGA participated in the Illinois Ag Legislative Day in Springfield which provides an opportunity to network with ag leaders throughout the state and meet with legislators regarding any current legislation and industry concerns. ISGA always provides a sample Illinois product for the commodity baskets given to the legislators.
- Collaborated with University of Illinois Extension in hosting the annual conference and trade show. Since ISGA started providing the agritourism and organic industries sessions at this

annual conference, the conference was renamed the Illinois Specialty Crops, Agritourism, and Organic Conference and Trade Show. This year, we showcase nearly 100 speakers, and a full Exhibit Hall over the three days of the conference.

- The Annual ISGA Award of Excellence for 2016 was awarded to Dr. Rick Weinzierl, a now-retired entomologist from the University of Illinois. He continues to assist ISGA by being our program chairperson for this conference, and holding several educational events this spring.
- Started the Chris Doll Scholarship Fund which, in 2015, was awarded to two eligible horticulture majors at the University of Illinois. Donations to the fund, raised through ISGA, will be donated to the U of I Foundation for what is hoped will be an annual award to deserving students. This year, the Doll Fund was able to award scholarships to two UIUC ACES students.
- Applied for and received Specialty Crop Block Grants to assist with subsidizing the expenses of the 2017 and 2018 Illinois Specialty Crops, Agritourism, and Organic Conferences. Grant amounts received were more than \$30,000 for each conference.
- Created a Specialty Crop Fact Sheet which includes interesting statistics on fruits and vegetable production, with a focus on some of our more popular commodities such as pumpkins, horseradish, apples, grapes, and popcorn.
- Helped develop a new *Specialty Crop Ag Mag*. This will be given to tens of thousands of Illinois school children and help them learn about specialty agriculture in our state.
- ISGA regularly provides specialty crop news to RFD radio. This service of the Illinois Farm Bureau reaches hundreds of thousands of listeners across Illinois through its network of radio station affiliates.
- The *Prairie Bounty of Illinois*, is available on the ISGA web site as a user-friendly, searchable tool to locate producers of specialty crops, community farmer's markets, and producers of agritourism businesses.
- Information is provided on the website, specialtygrowers.org, which contains updated material about ISGA, affiliated association news, conference information, calendar of events, industry news and issues. For the first time, we offered online registration and payment to conference attendees.
- Published a newsletter called the *Specialty Grower News*. Each affiliated association has an opportunity to communicate with their members via the four pages allotted to each association. In recent years, we have developed a "Member Feature" segment which allows affiliated association's farm businesses to be profiled.
- ISGA has a very active Facebook presence, and I try to post something every week. Our posts are shared and viewed by more than 700 persons each week!