Committee Activated to Enhance Membership Initiatives

In the formative days of the Illinois Council on Food and Agricultural Research (C-FAR), an organizing committee worked to establish a C-FAR coalition and increase membership to represent Illinois’ diverse food, agricultural, environmental, and consumer interests. When the organization’s bylaws were adopted by the council in December 1993, they laid the foundation for the establishment of committees to serve the organization. Shortly thereafter, five committees were identified: legislative, finance, research, rules and procedures, and membership. The charge of the membership committee per the bylaws is to: Obtain and retain members. Develop ways to build consensus within C-FAR on specific issues, and coalitions for supporting C-FAR programs.

Although the opportunity for a membership committee has been in place since C-FAR’s founding, membership-related activities have largely been overseen by an appointed board member. For nearly 10 years, Carol Keiser, a long-term member of C-FAR’s board of directors, led the organization’s membership and coalition-building initiatives.

“I truly had one of the most rewarding responsibilities in C-FAR—working with and building a membership that C-FAR founders envisioned. Watching its continued viability is most gratifying, and all members should be very proud of their affiliation,” said Keiser. Following Keiser, Larry Fischer served as membership chair on the board of directors from 2004 to 2006. Jim Charlesworth currently leads the membership initiatives.

Given the size and diversity of today’s C-FAR membership, coupled with the opportunities and responsibilities these members are afforded, the board of directors recently agreed that a membership committee should be activated. Appointed to serve on this new committee are Jim Charlesworth (chair), Colleen Callahan, Faye Dong, Jack Erisman, Larry Fischer, Roger Hubele, and Tom Toohill.

At their first meeting in June, the membership committee members examined the committee’s opportunities and responsibilities, reviewed past and current memberships and related activities, and discussed how to best assist members in making their engagement in C-FAR as meaningful and impactful as possible. “As
Greetings

Keeping the Focus

Organizations founded on a sound and focused mission benefit tremendously—if this focus is maintained. Such is the case with C-FAR. Our organization is fortunate to have been anchored on a strongly focused mission. In essence, our mission comprises two critical elements: (1) securing funding for relevant research and (2) fostering public participation in program guidance.

Keeping such a focus is not always easy. As our lives and the world seemingly become more complex, the lure of straying from even the clearest of missions is often immense. The credit for keeping our focus rests with our membership and its leadership. Our membership’s dedication has enabled highly effective program engagement and results: one needs only to look at the development of our current research priorities, the continual practical research outcomes being generated by C-FAR research, and the continuing success our research colleagues have in leveraging C-FAR funds.

C-FAR embraces a stringent focus on one critical need for Illinois—research to support its food and agricultural sectors. Our coalition of diverse members can certainly agree on the need for sound and adequately funded research programs. They may, however, justifiably disagree and debate policy matters, be it the Farm Bill or related agricultural policy. While these debates have their place, C-FAR’s sole focus on research continues to underpin the strength of our coalition.

I know of other states that have attempted to build a C-FAR-like coalition. Their success in doing so has been limited because they have a sought a very broad and ambivalent mission. C-FAR is fortunate to have been founded otherwise.

And let me be clear...keeping our focus certainly does not mean being stagnant with our programming. Our programs—be it membership- or research-based—are continually being reviewed and updated. You can expect our newly-activated membership committee, and other bodies such as the working groups, research committee, and board of directors, to nurture our progress. They will do so with a keen sense that our focus will not be compromised.

Alan Puzey  
Chairman of the Board
we reviewed C-FAR’s membership history, we were highly impressed, and at the same time, we recognized future opportunities,” said Charlesworth. “Building upon this strong membership will be our committee’s first responsibility. We look forward to addressing a myriad of initiatives for the mutual benefit of every member and the C-FAR organization.”

C-FAR’s membership currently comprises 58 organizational members, 35 affiliate members, and about 130 individual members. Included are representatives from nearly all food and agricultural sectors of Illinois, university administrators and researchers, and other individuals who equally support a viable stakeholder-driven, high-impact food and agricultural research program for Illinois. The unique partnership of public officials, stakeholders, and researchers who work together via C-FAR to advance Illinois’ food and agricultural industry and related sectors is recognized throughout the nation.

“The board of directors joins me in expressing our heartfelt gratitude to each and every C-FAR member,” said Alan Puzey, C-FAR chairman. “While many states have been unable to even bring such a coalition together, our membership grows stronger. We appreciate and look forward to the new membership committee moving us to the next plateau.”

External Program Succeeds through Stakeholder Engagement

C-FAR’s research portfolio includes three unique programs: an external competitive grants program, the strategic research initiative (SRI) program, and the partner universities internal programs at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Illinois State University, and Western Illinois University. Funding for the external program is stipulated via the Food and Agriculture Research Act, the C-FAR appropriation’s enabling legislation. Per the Act, *A minimum of 15% of the funds shall be used to fund an innovative competitive grants program. The program is intended to be organized around desired practical, quantifiable, and achievable objectives in the food and agricultural sector.*

A special characteristic of the external program is its nearly complete oversight by the C-FAR membership. Working group members identify research priorities for Illinois’ food and agricultural sectors, evaluate pre-proposals and identify those for full proposal submission, and review full proposals to determine which initiatives to fund. Scientific experts assist the working groups in their review of proposals. The commitment and dedication demonstrated by working group representatives to this program is unprecedented.

“The engagement of C-FAR’s working groups offers the opportunity for Illinois citizens concerned with the health, wealth, and happiness of their children and grandchildren to identify for funding relevant, cost-effective food and agricultural research that utilizes the currently existing capabilities of Illinois universities. Simply stated, it’s home-grown Illinois pride,” said Byford Wood, natural resources and environment working group chair.

Researchers who receive funding through the external program recognize the significant engagement of Illinois’ food and agricultural stakeholders and have expressed their appreciation for being able to address issues identified as being important to the state.

“C-FAR’s external competitive grants program has allowed working group members and researchers the opportunity to identify research priorities for Illinois food and agricultural industries. These opportunities have helped focus specific research programs on priorities that directly address the needs of Illinois food and agricultural industries and consumers,” said William Banz, professor of animal science, food and nutrition at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. “Without the input and funding provided by C-FAR, many of these talented researchers might have developed research programs and priorities that overlooked these needs within Illinois.”

A sampling of high-impact outcomes resulting from the external program include the following:
Higher-Protein Diets Improving Health of Illinois Citizens

Researchers have demonstrated that eating more high-quality protein appears to enhance the body’s ability to decrease the risk of such diseases and health conditions as high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke, gallbladder disease, osteoarthritis, sleep apnea, respiratory problems, and some cancers.

MarketMaker Website

This innovative website not only is connecting Illinois producers, processors, retailers, consumers, and other food supply chain participants, it also is reaching out across the nation to make these connections in other states.

Milk Products Enhanced to Improve Consumer Health

Increasing the nutritional value of milk products with conjugated linoleic acid and omega-3 fatty acids is allowing Illinois dairy operators to boost their income and offer consumers value-added products to protect against such ailments as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes.

Technologies Developed to Protect Foods

High-frequency sound waves and other innovative food-processing techniques are being developed to kill foodborne pathogens in the hard-to-reach crevices along the surface of many fruits and vegetables.

Dry-Grind Ethanol Production Byproducts Enhanced

Innovative dry-grind corn-processing technology is being used to produce two valuable coproducts: an enhanced food source for livestock (distiller dried grains with solubles containing lower fiber, higher fat, and higher protein) and fiber.

High-Quality Beef Products Available to Consumers

Illinois beef producers are using new feed management and production strategies to gain marketing premiums and offer more lean, high-quality beef to meet consumer demand.

Disease-Free Horseradish Planting Stock Improves Yield and Quality

Protocols have been developed to produce disease-free horseradish cultivars. Growers can now regain lost yields estimated at up to $2,000 or more per acre.

Cuphea: A Potential New Crop for Illinois

Cuphea varieties and production guidelines have been developed for Illinois. Cuphea seed oil contains large amounts of fatty acids, which provide soaps and detergents with their cleaning power. The U.S. soap industry gets half of these fatty acids from imported coconut and palm kernel oils valued at $526 million (2002).

“The foresight of our founders to lay the cornerstone for the external program has proven extremely beneficial across many fronts,” said Nels Kasey, research chair. “Its focus on practical research, coupled with the very meaningful engagement of the C-FAR membership, makes it a win-win situation. It is indeed a responsibility that we, as C-FAR members, take very seriously.”

Butanol: A Vision for an Alternative Biofuel

As the U.S. seeks to become less dependent on foreign oil and to develop clean, renewable energy, it continues to be clear that no one alternative fuel source will be able to meet the nation’s energy demand. In addition to ethanol, biodiesel, and other sources of alternative energy, research has focused on the production of butanol through the fermentation of biomass.

Originally a byproduct of acetone production, butanol experienced a significant increase in demand in the 1920s as an important industrial solvent. The production of butanol by fermentation subsequently declined due to the price of petrochemicals dropping below that of the starch and sugar substrates used in fermentation, combined with...
Butanol: A Vision for an Alternative Biofuel

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the high costs of labor and relatively low yields associated with the intensive batch system. Currently, almost all industrial butanol is produced through a petrochemical process.

In today’s search for alternative fuel sources, a re-emerged interest in butanol derived from agricultural biomass has arisen. Butanol has numerous attractive fuel properties. It packs more energy per pound, burns cleaner, and is less hazardous to handle and less flammable than some other alternative fuel sources. An additional advantage of butanol is that it can be mixed with gasoline in any proportion and used as an automotive fuel without engine modifications.

During the early nineties, Hans Blaschek, a professor of microbiology and present assistant dean of the College of ACES Office of Research at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, developed a superior microbial strain to produce butanol from starch. Although it is a better butanol producer than other strains, it can not accumulate more than 2% butanol in the fermentation medium. Unfortunately, butanol is toxic to the microbes that produce it. Recovery of such a low concentration of butanol by traditional techniques such as distillation has not yet proven to be economical.

Through groundbreaking research funded by C-FAR, great strides have been made in the recovery of butanol from dilute fermentation streams. Nasib Qureshi, a chemical engineer with the USDA National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research, in collaboration with Hans Blaschek and former postdoctoral fellow Thaddeus Ezeji, has devised a method called gas stripping. In this process, gases produced in the fermentation vessel are used to remove butanol from the fermentor on a continuous basis. The aim is to keep butanol levels in the production vessel below 1% so that the microbes survive and continue producing butanol. As a result of this integrated recovery process, the microbes can continue producing butanol without being killed by the toxicity of their own product.

“This new recovery process is a major breakthrough in butanol production. Based on these studies, butanol production from agricultural biomass is much closer to being commercialized,” said Qureshi. “To further economize its production, attempts are being made to produce butanol from agricultural residues such as corn fiber. I’m seeking to reduce the cost of butanol production to $1.40 to $1.50 per gallon.”

“U.S. energy independence is a very high priority for our nation,” said Jerry Hicks, C-FAR research vice chair. “Seizing opportunities of alternative energy production that are economically sound and that utilize our natural resources will be a great benefit for our state and nation. C-FAR is pleased to continue exploring these great possibilities.”

“We are grateful to C-FAR for supporting this initiative. The funds provided by C-FAR have been instrumental in this study,” said Qureshi. Further research on butanol production continues in his USDA laboratory in Peoria with strong collaborative efforts between Blaschek’s laboratory and with a recently formed bioenergy company, Advanced BioFuels, Inc.

YouthWorks: Strengthening the Future of Illinois’ Rural Communities

To secure a strong and viable future, rural communities must develop strategies to attract, nurture, and retain young people who are productive workers and responsible citizens. To stay in the community as adults, young people must believe that a meaningful role and viable employment will exist for them. Through a C-FAR-funded research initiative, researchers are promoting the further development of YouthWorks, a system designed for increasing the number of competent young adults in the Illinois agricultural and entrepreneurial systems, and for enhancing local youths’ commitment and future contributions to their community.

Laurie Kramer, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Professor of Human and Community Development, provides leadership for the YouthWorks initiative. 

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C-FAR Connection. Summer 2007
“YouthWorks aims to build partnerships between local youth and adults, whereby youth actively engage in leadership roles and entrepreneurial ventures and establish a meaningful role for themselves in their community as adults,” said Laurie Kramer, professor of human and community development at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and principal investigator. “In the long-term, YouthWorks is expected to promote economic revitalization of rural communities by preparing youth for jobs, strengthening the work force, and improving youth retention.”

The overarching goal of YouthWorks is to enhance youth development. The program offers youth mentored experiences in public service, leadership, and entrepreneurial ventures that capitalize on their interests and abilities. Specific objectives include:

- Providing youth with leadership roles through which they enhance economic, social, and recreational opportunities for fellow young people in their communities
- Creating a forum in which youth and community leaders mutually engage in improving opportunities for local youth in ways that have positive socio-economic impact on the community
- Involving youth in creating new opportunities for entrepreneurship and civic engagement
- Establishing job shadowing and internship opportunities that allow youth to explore career options and interests
- Developing a cohort of community-based leaders and educators who can facilitate YouthWorks, ultimately training additional program facilitators to support statewide program dissemination

While having just concluded the first year of this three-year initiative, Kramer, associate project director Frannie Siegel, and colleagues have completed many of the initial steps to prepare for the launching of this program. A formal curriculum for YouthWorks has been developed which includes civic engagement opportunities and community-based learning opportunities for youth. Program developers have prepared recruiting and training materials for youth leaders and educators, who will facilitate YouthWorks in their communities, promotional materials to increase community awareness of the program, and evaluation materials that can be administered easily in schools and other community contexts. Efforts are underway to disseminate information about YouthWorks to University of Illinois Extension educators in youth development, family life, and community development.

“We are excited at the prospect of youth gaining knowledge of career possibilities and the goals they must set to achieve their desired careers and become productive citizens invested in the continued progress of their communities,” said Kramer. “Through YouthWorks, we also hope to see increased community cohesion and sense of pride as communities are able to help their teenagers to be successful.”

“Thanks to C-FAR, we are building a solid foundation for YouthWorks through curricular expansion, evaluation, and statewide dissemination. It is exciting to have the opportunity to bring this important tool for youth and community development to many Illinois communities,” said Kramer.

Get to Know a C-FAR Member
Jeanne Harland

If you have been involved in C-FAR for very long, you’ve probably met Jeanne Harland. Jeanne, who represents the Illinois Beef Association to C-FAR, has been actively engaged in C-FAR for about 11 years. Since 2003, she has served as the human nutrition and food safety working group chair.

“C-FAR gives producers the opportunity to help shape the future of research in food and agriculture. That is both a big responsibility and a great benefit to our industry. No one knows better what issues need to be addressed to insure the continued profitability of agriculture than those of us who get up every day and go to work raising livestock and crops in Illinois,” said Harland.
Jeanne and her husband A.J. are beef producers on a small family farm in eastern Knox County. The farm has been in A.J.’s family since 1837 and is designated a Sesquicentennial Farm. They have a commercial cow-calf herd and raise hay, corn, oats, and, occasionally, turnips. “My dad and granddad owned and operated a hatchery and farm supply store,” said Harland. “When I was very young, my first ag experience was punching out the holes of the boxes we shipped baby chicks in. In 1971, I married into a farm family and became a curiosity to them as a female who ‘actually knew where the barn was.’” Along with seven other producers, Jeanne and A.J. formed the branded beef company, Illinois Crown Beef.

Jeanne received her B.A. degree in English from Bradley University and taught English at ROWVA High School for 15 years prior to becoming a full-time producer. In addition to working on the farm, Jeanne currently serves as the legislative chair of Extension Partners, a statewide organization supporting the programs of U of I Extension. Having been a founding member, and serving as president of the organization for several years, she continues to represent Extension Partners at many meetings and events. Prior to the formation of Extension Partners, she served on the Knox County Extension Council.

As a member of the Illinois Beef Association (IBA), Jeanne has served as product promotion chair and continues to be one of their spokespersons. She was president of the Illinois CattleWomen for several years, until the organization merged with IBA. Complementary to her role as chair of C-FAR’s human nutrition and food safety working group, Jeanne served on the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association’s nutrition and health committee and is currently vice-president of the Knox County Board of Health. She is also a member of the Knox Ag Roundtable. Her “Taste of Illinois Beef” column appears in the Illinois Beef magazine and the Galesburg Register Mail.

Among the many recognitions for her contributions to Illinois agriculture are receiving the Innovative Entrepreneur Award to Illinois Crown Beef from the State Treasurer (2003), the Friend of 4-H Award (2004), the Illinois Extension Agricultural Advisors Friend of Agriculture Award (2006), and the Gamma Sigma Delta Award of Merit (2007).

“I have the distinct privilege of working with our members on a daily basis, and Jeanne is a premier example of outstanding stakeholder leadership for C-FAR,” said Kraig Wagenecht, executive administrator. “Her volunteer contributions to Illinois’ food and agricultural sectors are phenomenal. C-FAR is certainly one of the beneficiaries of her professionalism, knowledge of issues, and being a class act as a representative of Illinois agriculture.”

**C-FAR Day at ISU**

Join us for C-FAR Day at Illinois State University! This November, C-FAR members will have the opportunity to visit with ISU researchers at the university’s farm at Lexington and hear firsthand about C-FAR–funded research taking place at the university. C-FAR Day is held each year to allow members and C-FAR–funded researchers to come together to share ideas and engage in discussions regarding C-FAR research. Details will be mailed to members prior to the event.
Connection
Illinois Council on Food and Agricultural Research
1101 W. Peabody Dr.
Urbana, IL 61801

Address Service Requested

calendar
2007–2008

September 12  Board of Directors Meeting (Urbana)
November 7   Board of Directors Meeting (Urbana)
November 15  C-FAR Day at Illinois State University (Lexington)
February 12  Annual Meeting (Northfield Inn, Suites & Conference Center, Springfield)

Please call the C-FAR office or check the calendar on the C-FAR website at www.ilcfar.org for further details.