

Building a Resilient Economy in the Lower Illinois River Valley - Considerations for Farm Profitability, the Workforce, and Rural Recovery

Prepared by THG Advisors in Cooperation with John Wood Community College
for the Illinois Green Economy Network

May 18, 2020



Opening Remarks

Pat McGinnis

Executive Director,

Lower Illinois River Valley-Rural Prosperity Initiative;

Senior Advisor, Water Resources Development,

Policy & Practice, THG Advisors



Welcoming Remarks

Michael Elbe
President,
John Wood Community College





Report Purpose and Organization

Primary report sections:

- Regional Profile
- Agricultural Innovation and Technology
- Market, Workforce, and Rural Resiliency
- Rural Policy at the State and Federal Level
- Conclusions, Recommendations, and Road Mapping Considerations
- Appendix
 - Synthesis of Subject Matter Expert/Stakeholder Interviews
 - LIRV County Overviews and Workforce Datasets
 - Report Source Materials

Section I. Regional Profile



Lower Illinois River Valley Regional Map



The Illinois River supports navigation, recreation, agriculture, and water supply.

LIRV Demographics						
County	Population	Urban	Rural	%Rural	Farms	Households
Brown	6,556	4,088	2,849	41.07	419	2,099
Calhoun	5,089	0	5,089	100	474	2,085
Cass	12,260	6,530	7,112	52.13	429	5,270
Greene	13,044	4,048	9,838	70.85	733	5,570
Jersey	21,847	9,063	13,922	60.57	519	22,985
Macoupin	45,313	19,816	27,949	58.51	1,169	19,381
Morgan	33,976	22,669	12,878	36.23	693	14,104
Pike	15,611	4,550	11,880	72.31	956	6,639
Scott	5,355	0	5,355	100	300	2,214
Total	158,335	70,764	87,571	71.2	5,692	80,347

LIRV Demographics

- LIRV Setting
- Agricultural Economics and Production
- Challenges and Opportunities: Change Drivers and Ag-Specific Influencers

Section II. Agricultural Innovation & Technology

- Precision Agriculture: Emerging Technologies and Advancements in Science
- Best Management Practices and Conservation Resource Applications
- Highlighted Agricultural Research: Case Study Summary Sheets



Plant and soil sensors can detect and record water and moisture data from the field.



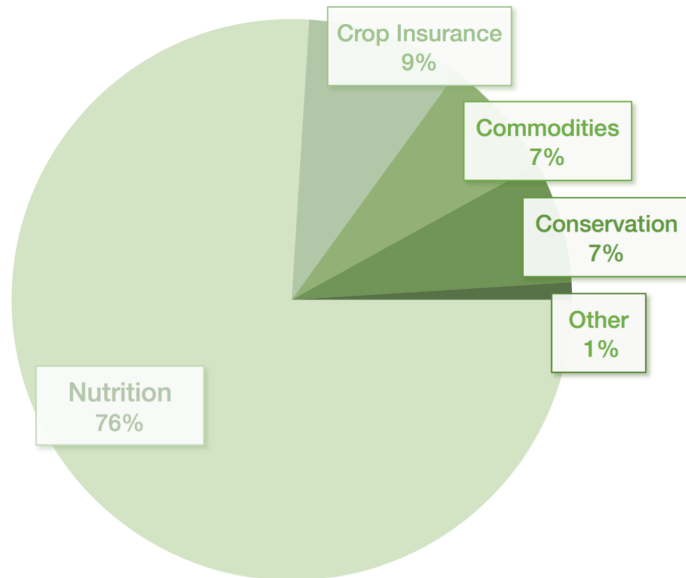
Today's agricultural drones can be customized and equipped with additional cameras and tools.

Section III. Market, Workforce, and Rural Resiliency

- **Market Environment**
 - Existing Economic Conditions
 - Economic Trendlines in the LIRV
 - LIRV County Economic Outputs
 - Current and Trending National Agricultural Employment
 - Current and Trending State Agricultural Employment
 - Agricultural Employment in the LIRV
- **Integrated Ag-Related Jobs into a Resilient Rural Workforce**
 - Farmer-Producer Profiles
 - Predictors of Success
 - Targets for Improvement
 - Education and Capacity-Building
 - Rural Resiliency

Section IV: Rural Policy at the State and Federal Level

Projected Outlays Under the 2018 Farm Act, 2019-2023



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service calculations based on Congressional Budget Office estimates.



Section V: Conclusions, Recommendations, and Road Mapping

- Interview of Subject Matter Experts
- Conclusions
- Recommendations: Road Mapping
for Rural Recovery



Section V (cont.): Key Emerging Themes



Key Themes for Activation Strategies

- Agricultural Innovation, Food Security, and Resource Conservation
- Strengthening the Rural Brand for Talent Retention, Return, and Relocation
- Rural Capacity-Building, Problem-Solving, and a Call for Transformational Leadership

Call to Action, Road Mapping, and Advancing Key Activation Projects

White House Task Force for Agriculture and Rural Prosperity (Launched April 2017)

- Achieving E-Connectivity for Rural America
- Improving Rural Quality of Life
- Supporting the Rural Workforce
- Harnessing Technological Innovation
- Developing the Rural Economy



Call to Action #1: E-Connectivity for the Lower IL River Valley

Activation Projects:

- Establishment of a Regional Broadband Council
- Advancement of an Accelerated Broadband Deployment Strategy
- Opportunity for Development and Implementation of Regional School-Based Telehealth Pilot(s)
- Pursuit of Grant Opportunities for Telehealth Support Equipment and Technician Training for Area Rural Hospitals and Clinics
- Conceptualization of Digital Proficiency "Geek Squads" to Support Farm Operators

Call to Action #2: Improving Our Rural Quality of Life



Activation Projects:

- Reinvestment in Town Centers - County Seat Revitalization Pilot
- Building Cooperation and Synergy between Rural Communities and the Three Largest Regional Population Hubs: Quincy, Jacksonville, and Alton, IL
- Conceptualize Rural Health Wellness Transformation Activators
- Build a Regional Outdoor Recreation and Active Living Brand
- Celebrate Local Foods and Festivals
- Develop and Communicate the Case for Relocation; Targeting Young Families, Retirees, Talent, and Displaced Workers

Call to Action #3: Supporting a Rural Workforce

Activation Projects:

- Growing the Rural Digital Economy
- Automation and Robotics Technician Training and Certification
- Small Business Acumen Training Tools and Support Center
- Community Assessment Rapid Engagement (CARE) Small Community-Based Workforce Training and Placement Pilot(s)



Call to Action #4: Harnessing Technological Innovation



Activation Projects:

- Increasing Awareness of Career Opportunities in the Rural Digital Economy
- Building Farm Operator Digital Proficiency for Digital Optimization in Precision Agriculture
- Examine Expanded Opportunities to Ramp Up Adoption Rate of Agricultural Best Management Practices among Producer/ Landowners
- Develop Concept for Regional Agricultural and Rural Innovation Center

Call to Action #5: Developing the Rural Economy



Activation Projects:

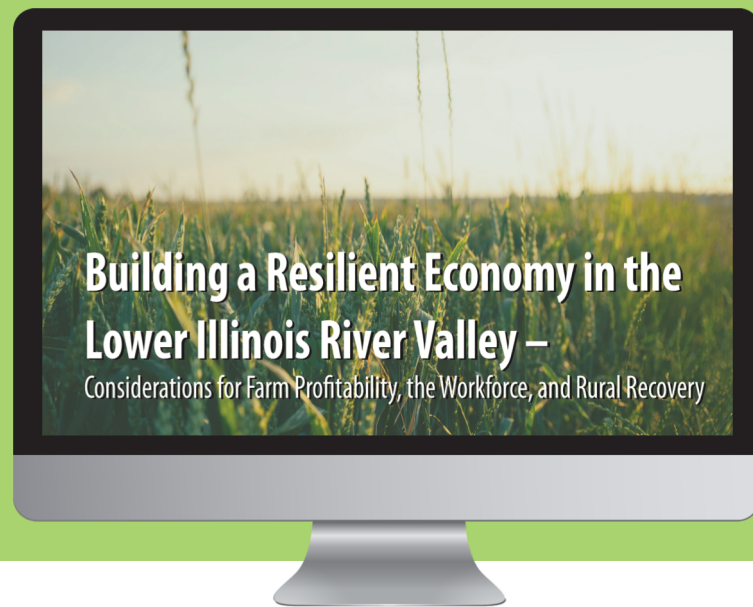
- Advance Key Regional Transportation Projects
- Conceptualize a Regional Rural Economic Development Support Center
- Explore Development of Ecosystem Service Market Opportunities

Report Wrap Up



Opportunity to Provide
Feedback and Engage

Report and Webinar Recording
Publicly Available in June 2020



Panelist Introductions and Presentations



Bill Bodine

Director of Business
& Regulatory Affairs,
Governmental Affairs
& Commodities Division,
Illinois Farm Bureau



Erica B. Thieman, Ph.D.

Principal Consultant,
Career and Technical Education
& Innovation Department,
Illinois State Board of Education



Pat Pinkston

Former Vice President,
Information Solutions,
John Deere

Our First Panelist: Bill Bodine

Agriculture is an enormous strength for the region.
Building on that strength requires:

- Education at all levels
- Supportive infrastructure
- Continued innovation



Bill Bodine

Director of Business & Regulatory Affairs,
Governmental Affairs & Commodities Division,
Illinois Farm Bureau

Our Second Panelist: Erica Thieman

- Revitalizing Rural Communities through Access and Equity in Education & Training
 - Context
 - ❑ Distance from education/training institutions
 - ❑ Access to technology
 - ❑ Lack of community-centered cultural and educational opportunities
 - ❑ Critical mass & awareness of opportunities
 - Opportunities
 - ❑ Area career centers/community-based programming
 - ❑ Small business/entrepreneur incubators and training programs
 - ❑ Perkins V: Local industry & business partnership with K-12 systems
 - Workplace learning
 - Employability skills
 - CTE teacher vacancies
 - Advisory committees



Erica B. Thieman, Ph.D.
Principal Consultant,
Career and Technical Education
& Innovation Department,
Illinois State Board of Education

Our Third Panelist: Pat Pinkston

Community Development

- Change the conversation about rural communities
- Make communities great places to visit, live, and work
- Provide resources to facilitate planning and implementation
- Build local leadership capacity
- Support infrastructure updates and renewal
- Broadband is a required utility
- Ensure access to healthcare and wellness options
- Provide early childhood development and daycare
- Create programs for work skills training



Pat Pinkston

Former Vice President,
Information Solutions,
John Deere

Question 1

How do you envision our community colleges contributing to collective effort to address key rural challenges?



Moderated Panel Discussion

Capacity-Building and
Rural Problem-Solving



Moderated Panel Discussion

Harnessing Rural Strengths: Stewarding Our Natural Capital

Question 2

What do you see as our most immediate and promising opportunities diversify how we utilize the incredible natural capital in Rural Illinois and this Lower IL River Valley Region to support our rural communities and our State?



Moderated Panel Discussion

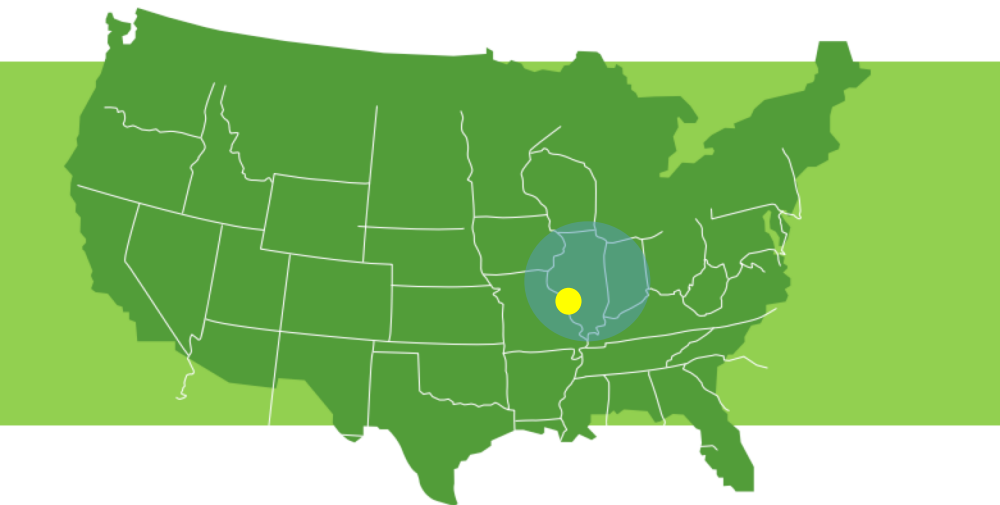
Population Retention and
Relocation Strategies

Question 3

Where and how do we begin to effectively promote rural areas, reveal the case for rural lifestyles, and build an environment where a trained and skilled workforce can find placement, purpose, and quality of life?

A person is shown in a garden setting, using a handheld white and blue soil pH meter to test the soil. The meter's screen displays the number '8.1'. Next to them, a smartphone is held, displaying a bar chart with blue and green bars, likely representing soil data. The background is filled with green leafy plants growing in dark soil.

Audience Q&A



Thank you!

- The report and webinar recording will be posted to John Wood Community College's website: www.jwcc.edu.
- Please send Questions and Feedback to Dave Hetzler, John Wood Community College: dhetzler@jwcc.edu.