LWVIL Issues Briefing 2016: Sustainable Food and Water
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Issues

Though most food and agriculture policy is made at the federal level and thus outside the scope of this update, there are three topics on which the state does have jurisdiction. LWVIL has been tracking these due to member interest. As the revised LWVUS Agriculture position adopted in May 2014 did not take a position on two issues that have been in play in Illinois the past 2+ years (the labeling of foods made with genetically engineered ingredients and the sale of raw milk) LWVIL has not actively engaged on them.

▪ Expansion of Illinois' Cottage Food Law: In 2012 LWVIL supported passage of the initial Cottage Food Law which permits the sale of "non-hazardous" (as defined by the Illinois Department of Public Health) homemade jams & jellies, baked goods, and dried herbs at farmers’ markets. Effective January 1, 2016, the law now permits their sale on the farm where the products feature ingredients grown on the farm, as well as through Community Supported Agriculture arrangements. The law also imposes a labeling requirement and clarifies that non-profit, religious, and charitable bake sales are exempt from state food handling regulation.

▪ The labeling of genetically engineered foods (IL SB 734 sponsored by Sen. David Koehler, Peoria) has previously been considered in two committees (Agriculture, and Energy & Conservation) but has not garnered enough support in either committee to gain passage. The legislation is currently in the Assignments committee while the sponsor seeks a more favorable committee assignment.

▪ The saga of raw milk sales is complicated (See http://www.ilstewards.org/raw-milk-regulations-move-forward-in-illinois/). Raw milk producers, who are now regulated for the first time by the Illinois Department of Public Health, are allowed to sell their milk on the farm only. This is a compromise, given that ban on raw milk sales was the alternative. However, farmers and consumers who don't live near farms are dissatisfied with the reduced access.

Lastly, Illinois Pollution Control Board rulemaking (R2012-023 & 023A) on water discharge permits for, environmental standards applicable to, and inventory of Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs)--which was largely concluded during 2014--was finally completed during the second quarter of 2015.

Actions since March, 2015

▪ Notwithstanding the Agriculture Update study and revised 2014 position, food and agriculture issues are not a legislative or regulatory priority for LWVUS. Given continuing member interest in these topics, LWVIL petitioned LWVUS asking that LWVIL be allowed to join two national coalitions (Alliance for a Stronger FDA and the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition) that engage in advocacy in both the food and agriculture arena. In September 2015, after months of consideration, the LWVUS board decided that LWVIL would not be permitted to join these groups as only LWVUS can advocate on federal issues.

▪ The first annual meeting of the newly created Upper Mississippi River Region (UMRR) Inter-League Organization occurred in October 2015. This ILO (currently 50+ member Leagues from IL, IA, MN, WI) is an outgrowth of Jo Daviess County watershed planning initiatives that began with a 2011 League-organized forum on the siting of a large-scale livestock facility. The ILO current action focus is on watershed literacy, including educating local Leagues on the impact of nutrients (nitrogen from agriculture) & phosphorus (from wastewater treatment plants) entering their waterways.

Anticipated Activity in 2016

▪ Working in conjunction with the Lake Michigan Region ILO, the UMRR ILO will be holding a caucus on water issues and climate change at the 2016 LWVUS convention. In addition, the two ILOs will be working jointly to develop educational materials on water quality issues for use by member Leagues.
The state budget impasse has seriously impacted operation of Illinois' 97 county-based soil & water conservation districts (SWCD). They are on the front line advising farmers on best practices to reduce nutrient pollution & soil loss. As required by USEPA, Illinois has developed a nutrient loss reduction strategy. But loss of SWCD expertise threatens implementation of Illinois' strategy, as does the possible loss of pass-through federal grants administered by an underfunded division within the Illinois Department of Agriculture. This situation will continue to be monitored.