LWVIL 2017 Issues Briefing: Sustainable Food and Water
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Legislation
Applicable excerpts from the LWVUS Position on Agriculture:

- "...government should provide financial support for agriculture that includes disaster assistance, crop insurance, need-based loans and incentives to adopt best management practices. Support should be extended to specialty crops, such as fruits, vegetables and nuts, to new production methods, such as organic, hydroponic, and urban practices, and to farms that supply local and regional markets..."
- "Alternative marketing systems such as regional hub markets, farmers’ markets and farmer cooperatives should be promoted."
- "...Research should be funded to support the continuation of diversified and sustainable agricultural systems, such as seed banking and promoting and preserving genetic diversity..."

The League monitored the following laws passed by the 99th General Assembly and signed by the Governor Rauner:

- SB2160: Property Tax - Filter Strips extends the property tax exemption to farmers for filter strips, which assist in reducing nutrient pollution to waterways. Effective 1/1/17
- SB3130: Seed Banking exempts seed libraries (i.e. nonprofits, governmental, cooperative organizations, associations) from the industrial seed laws, for the purpose of facilitating the donation, exchange, preservation, and dissemination of open pollinated, public domain plant varieties by or among its members or members of the public free of charge. Effective 8/16/16
- HB 5898: The Co-Operative Act was amended to provide that a cooperative may be organized for the purpose of the shareholders operating a business, without qualification regarding the type of business. Prior to this amendment, small scale farmers and food processors were not permitted to form a cooperative.
- While reducing ‘food waste’ is not a component of the LWVUS agriculture position, the League’s position on meeting basic human needs addresses the right to food and therefore the following bills are also relevant:
- HB5530: Food Donations specifies that public entities shall not enter into contracts with food providers where the contract terms prohibit donating food to food banks, homeless shelters and food kitchens. Effective 7/15/16
- SB1367: Healthy Local Foods Incentives (Budget Appropriation): Governor Rauner authorized a $500,000 appropriation to fund a non-profit organization to administer a program that provides matching dollars for SNAP clients to purchase additional fruits & vegetables at farmers’ markets. Effective 1/20/17

Upper Mississippi River Region InterLeague Organization (UMRR ILO)
Considerable effort was spent the past year on launching the UMRR ILO. More than 60 Leagues from Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota joined for the express purpose of educating and advocating on the need to reduce nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus) in our waterways that flow into the Mississippi River and are responsible for the Gulf of Mexico Dead Zone. Working in concert with the Lake Michigan Region ILO’s initiative "100 Meetings for 100 Years", UMRR is engaged in watershed literacy activities. Specifically, the Jo Daviess County League, which spearheaded the creation of UMRR, has been working with the Dubuque, IA League and local Rotary chapters in both communities on watershed planning. They have received grants and private donations to facilitate the sealing of abandoned wells throughout the county, to organize conferences, and to bring in the developers of a unique teaching tool ("Watershed Game") to conduct two days of training on its use. More than 20 UMRR League members received facilitator training.

OUTLOOK:

- The Illinois Stewardship Alliance (ISA) is advocating changes to the Cottage Food Law (SB1469/HB2820) which would expand the types of foods that may be prepared in home kitchens and sold at farmers’ markets. It also seeks to address disparities across counties in refrigeration & handwashing station rules at farmers’ markets. Their Illinois Food Freedom bill (HB3063) would permit any registered food producer to sell any harvested or homemade food to an informed end-use consumer for personal home use, without inspection or certification. It also addresses farmers’ market sanitation rules. ISA’s proposed Industrial Hemp Act (SB1294) creates an opportunity for farmers to grow industrial hemp by applying for a 5 year permit from the IL Dept. of Agriculture; it also directs the IDOA to write rules for growing industrial hemp. The last federal Farm Bill granted authority
for farmers to raise industrial hemp provided it is in partnership with a 4-year university or a state department of agriculture. Kentucky currently has 4,500 acres of industrial hemp grown by 135 farmers participating in 15 university-based projects.

• Opponents of large-scale livestock facilities will seek changes to Illinois’ Livestock Management Facilities Act. Several contentious efforts to site swine CAFOs (concentrated animal feeding operations) have faced stiff opposition (the Fulton County Board of Commissioners recently rejected one application) from farmers and non-farmers alike. In 2013-2015, the League was active in a 2+ year Illinois Pollution Control Board rulemaking related to CAFOs, discharge permits, and regulations regarding the application of manure waste.

• Going forward on advocacy, the UMRR ILO has joined forces with the Environmental Law & Policy Center to work on regional nutrient management issues.