

NLGA State Strategies in Rural Affairs and Agriculture
From Illinois Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton

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Whether you live in a rural area or in an urban area, one thing unites all Illinoisans — food. Food connects us all, across every state and territory, whether it's at the dinner table or at the local market.

As Chair of the Governor's Rural Affairs Council, I have traveled throughout the state and met with farmers and the state's farm groups. Agriculture is our state's No. 1 industry, generating over \$19 billion in commodities, with nearly half exported to other countries. Our food sales create activity that leads the nation, from Cairo to Chicago.

Agricultural Education

It is important that young people have opportunities to have agricultural education and explore the job opportunities in agriculture. How do we make sure our young people are better educated? When we think about education, we have to think about agricultural education and making sure that young people, in all communities and in all states, understand and have access to and exposure to agricultural education. It is crucial to ensure career pipelines are made more diverse, providing opportunity for students underrepresented in the agriculture industry.

I would love to see programs like the Future Farmers of America (FFA) be expanded so we could engage more young people. Urban agriculture offers opportunities for urban residents and young people in urban areas to explore food production and related careers.

A main message for young people, in many ways, is that agriculture is never going to be just being on the farm. That is important and we have to continue to have a new generation of young people interested in farming. But there's also the business side of it, there's marketing, there's communications, there's so many angles where people can be involved in agribusiness. We have to make sure that this is an industry that is open and welcoming, and provides equitable outcomes across the food supply chain.

Highlighting Producers

It's important to highlight a state or territory's farmers, producers, specialty growers, and local business owners by lifting up the products they manufacture. We know that many people depend on the income they make from their small business to support their families, which in turn, helps to keep their local economies running.

Rural post-secondary education

Another issue crucial to the success of Illinois residents and young people in rural communities across the country is access to post-secondary education. I partnered with the Hunt Institute to host a three part webinar series discussing broadband access, building pipelines from high school to community college and university settings, and more. Considering rural students as we build policy is essential for Illinois, and I'm glad I have the opportunity to represent these young people.

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Lt. Governor Stratton's portfolio of work as Lieutenant Governor includes leading the Justice, Equity and Opportunity Initiative, and chairing the Illinois Council on Women and Girls, the Governor's Rural Affairs Council, the Military Economic Development Council, the Rivers of Illinois Coordinating Council, and the Governor's Opioid Overdose Prevention and Recovery Steering Committee. Lieutenant Governor Stratton is an Officer of the National Lieutenant Governors Association (NLGA) and serves as Treasurer.