



Rural Road to Recovery

Priorities and Action Plans of the Indiana State Department of Agriculture

The mission of the Indiana State Department of Agriculture is to support growth in Indiana agriculture by serving as an advocate at the local, state and federal level; defining and nurturing economic opportunity in the food, fuel and fiber sectors; and enhancing the stewardship of natural resources on agricultural land.

Progress Report of Activities – January 2021

Priority 1: Assess and mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on Indiana’s agriculture and food system

Supply Chains:

1. Meat Processing Expansion and Development Grant Program

- a. Awarded almost \$4M to 40 meat processing businesses to offset the impact of COVID-19 on local and small meat-processing agribusinesses in the state, supplemented with \$4M from a local match. The nearly \$8M in funds are helping position these enterprises to meet the consumer demands in both normal and emergency situations.

2. Supply Chain Disruption Issues in the North Central Indiana Region

- a. As a key partner, the Purdue Center for Regional Development has launched a research study in a five-county region in North Central Indiana to determine the supply chain challenges farmers and agribusinesses experienced during the early stages of COVID 19. The effort, which began late 2020 and will continue through much of 2021, will provide valuable insights on potential strategies for minimizing such disruptions in the future.

Resilience to Economic Shocks:

1. Meat Processing Expansion and Development Grant Program

- a. Grants noted in 1.a above were intended to mitigate the economic shocks experienced by smaller-sized meat processing businesses as well, thus providing them the resources for maintaining their operations over a longer-term horizon.

2. Indiana Grown Online Marketplace

- a. ISDA launched the Shop Indiana Grown online marketplace, a platform that is free to qualifying Indiana Grown members, such as farmers, artisans, wineries, value-added food

producers, and more. This online resource is intended to offer these agriculture-related businesses with additional sales outlet for marketing their products to state and national consumers and retailers. <https://shopindianagrown.org/>

3. Indiana Dairy Strategy 2.0:

- a. The Indiana State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) focused on the updating of the Indiana Dairy Strategy launched in 2015. The latest plan was completed in December of 2020, one that undertakes a current examination of new business opportunities, trends and challenges being experienced by the dairy industry. In addition, a series of recommendations designed to enhance the economic viability of the state's dairy industry are captured in the report. The report is available at: <https://www.in.gov/isda/files/Indiana-Dairy-Strategy-2.0.pdf>

4. AgriNovus Study Released on Impact of COVID Pandemic on Indiana Agriculture

- a. A January 2021 study released by AgriNovus finds that aggregate losses from the global pandemic cost Indiana food producers an estimated \$500 million and highlighted a food chain going through disruption and evolution at the same time. The research product, "Resilience through Disruption," offers a comprehensive analysis of Indiana's food supply chain and provides five recommendations to reduce fragility and improve future resilience of the state's food supply chain. This study will be given careful attention by ISDA in the months ahead. The report is available at: <https://agrinovusindiana.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Resilience-through-Disruption-Report.pdf>

5. Building on Regional Agriculture-Related Assets

- a. *The KIRPC Regional Agricultural Strategy:* The Kankakee-Iroquois Regional Planning Commission, in collaboration with the Purdue Center for Regional Development, has received funds from the Economic Development Administration to work to strengthen the agriculture in a six-county region that includes Benton, Jasper, Newton, Pulaski, Starke and White Counties. As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, this region has experienced a significant increase in unemployment claims. The proposed Agricultural Strategy will evaluate the KIRPC Region's industrial base focusing on agricultural production, agribusiness, and food processing with the goal of developing additional agricultural-related jobs within the region. The grant is for \$43,663 (including a small amount of local match). ISDA has been a supporter of this effort and will benefit from the results emerging from this project.
- b. *Rural Economic Development Model (REDM) Initiative:* ISDA has joined with the Indiana Economic Development Association, the Purdue Center for Regional Development, Regional Planning Organizations, local economic development organizations, and others to support the launch of the Indiana Rural Economic Development Model (REDM) project in four regions in the state. The project proposal was submitted for funding to the Economic Development Administration (Chicago Region) and has now moved to the second stage of review. The goal of the initiative is to undertake a systematic assessment of the assets, raw materials and resources that can help each region develop the policies, infrastructure, sites, and support needed to create long-term diversification and improvements in their rural economies. REDM is intended to serve as a blueprint for producing and implementing an economic development strategy that builds on the variety of agricultural assets embedded

in these four regions and beyond. With the combination of federal and local matches, over \$222,000 will be invested in this initiative.

Communicate Supply Chain Resiliency

1. Virtual Event:

- Director Bruce Kettler joined state agricultural leaders from six other Midwestern states to host a virtual event and produce a video that urged adherence to public health guideline as a way to help protect the nation’s essential agricultural workforce and keep food supply chains flowing. See:
https://events.in.gov/event/midwestern_state_agriculture_leaders_follow_public_health_guidelines_to_keep_our_food_supply_chain_strong?utm_campaign=widget&utm_medium=widget&utm_source=State+of+Indiana

2. Articles/Press Releases:

- \$4 million CARES dollars awarded to meat processors [press release](#)
- Tied supply chain into our Poultry Donation [press release](#)
- Director Kettler April op-ed touched on supply chain resiliency [here](#)
- We promoted Rural Road to Recovery through the ag media seen [here](#)
- We also keep our COVID-19 resources page updated frequently [here](#)

3. Social media and newsletters

- Through its social media and newsletters, ISDA amplified partner organizations messages about the supply chain, what shoppers should do and what farmers can do (such as the Indiana Farm Bureau, Indiana Small Business Development Centers, Indiana Economic Development Corp.).
- Through social media and newsletters, ISDA encouraged people in the supply chain sector to learn more about Food Export Midwest and exporting opportunities.
- ISDA supported Gleaners Food Bank on their mobile pantry transports by featuring them on our agency’s social media channels.
- ISDA promoted CFAP assistance to farmers from USDA through our social media channels and newsletter – [press release](#)

Priority 2: Increase access and deployment of broadband services needed to support on-farm & farm household activities

Broadband Footprint:

- 1. Broadband Access Map:** ISDA is working with the Office of Broadband Opportunity and the Purdue Center for Regional Development to identify areas of high value crops and livestock operations and determining the availability and quality of broadband services present in these key places. Producing such a map will help identify important agricultural areas of the state that are unserved and underserved and where broadband investments (both infrastructure and adoption) should be targeted.

2. **Online Remote Work Certification:** Off-farm income is an important component of the fiscal health of farm family operations. In light of the expansion of remote workers, a trend that is expected to continue in a post-COVID environment, ISDA is collaborating with the Purdue Center for Regional Development and Purdue Extension to sponsor the Remote Work Certificate Course targeted to Indiana farm households. This online course consists of nine modules that are covered over a month-long period. The course allows participants to work directly with coaches and other participants. Once participants have completed the course, they are added to an online community with other remote work professionals, giving them access to job opportunities and advice for how to best succeed in a remote work environment. Up to 20 farm households will be recruited to be part of this certification program, with the \$249 fee being paid from Rural Road to Recovery funds awarded to the PCRD.
3. **Broadband Access: Agricultural Community:** ISDA's Legislative Affairs staff has worked closely with lawmakers on Broadband legislation leading up, as well as during, the 2021 Indiana Legislative session

Priority 3: Expand access to information and programs that support the personal health and financial stability of farmers and agribusiness owners/operators

One-Stop Center:

1. **Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP):** CFAP is a USDA program that was launched to assist farmers, ranchers, and consumers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. ISDA shared information on this important program with farmers, agribusinesses and other agriculture-related groups through its social media channels.
2. **Webinar on Funding Resources:** "COVID-19 Funding Options for U.S. Rural and Agricultural Businesses;" June 18, 2020

Information & Education:

1. **Be Well Indiana Website:** This valuable site was developed by the Indiana Division of Mental Health and Addiction. ISDA Director Bruce Kettler is working with this division to add information of relevance and value to the agricultural community in Indiana.
2. **Meetings and Virtual Webinars:** ISDA has hosted or worked in partnership with a number of organizations to inform and keep farmers and agribusinesses in the loop on important issues, opportunities and activities. They include:
 - a. Meetings:
 - Indiana Meet Packers Central Region Meeting, October 16, 2020
 - Indiana Meat Packers & Processors Association with ISDA and IEDC, July 31, 2020
 - c. Webinars:
 - "Agribusiness: How to Leverage and Manage SBA COVID-19 Funding." May 29, 2020.
 - "United States, Canada and Mexico Agreement: What You Need to Know." June 25, 2020
 - "What is Food Export - Midwest?" December 1, 2020.

Priority 4: Strengthen the pipeline of individuals seeking careers in agriculture

New Entrants into Farming:

- 1. Beginning Farmer Online Workshops:** ISDA will be working with Purdue Extension to conduct a beginning farmer program in the fall of 2021. ISDA/Purdue Extension will work to recruit 20 interested individuals who are looking to start a farm, but are uncertain how to do so or where to get help. The workshop includes seven sessions which are intended to help participants address the realities of starting a farm, determine their farming assets, developing realistic goals, and producing feasible plans for realizing their goals. The \$49 cost for each participant would be paid as a scholarship from the Rural Road to Recovery funds awarded to the PCRD.
- 2. IN Grow Homegrown Heroes Partnership:** ISDA continues to support this important program, one that offers local producers who have served in the military the opportunity to incorporate “Homegrown by Heroes” Indiana Grown signage and label on its agriculture-related products.