



## Peoria County Farm Bureau

Est. 1912

The Peoria County Farm Bureau – the second group in Illinois to adopt the name “farm bureau” -- was organized on September 2, 1912 at the Peoria County Pomona Grange’s Labor Day Picnic in Alta. Its headquarters was located at the Association of Commerce building on Jefferson Street in Peoria. The purpose of the group was to be the “connecting link between the University of Illinois College of Agriculture and practical farming of the county.” Members cited two goals at the meeting: increase land fertility and crop production by implementing scientific methods being explored at the College of Agriculture. The founding members solicited 3,500 local farmers and landowners for the \$1.00 membership fee, and also sought contributions from local businesses and railroad officials to support the organization. One notable business – Sears, Roebuck & Co. of Chicago – established a matching grant program to help the organization get its start. The organization had to raise \$2,000 in six counties for Sears to match the amount. Just three hours before the offer was set to expire, John Hayes, Secretary of the Farm Bureau, raised the required amount and, with a check from Sears, Roebuck & Co., the Farm Bureau’s constitution was adopted and telegraphed to Chicago.

Early in its history, the Farm Bureau actually limited its membership to 450, as they were concerned with meeting the service needs of a larger group; however, that bylaw was repealed the following year, in 1917, when the Peoria County Farm Bureau was incorporated. The focus of the Farm Bureau in the early years included oat smut control, liming land for alfalfa, and seed corn improvement. Members also benefited from the cooperative purchasing of clover and grass seeds. When the country entered WWI, the Farm Bureau did their part by increasing the production of vital crops, and assisted the Liberty Bond Drives and the Red Cross.

Members also donated 4,000 bushels of corn to Europe following the war. A changing economy in the post-war era led to the development of cooperative programs for marketing grain, livestock, and milk, as well as for the purchase of items including petroleum and insurance.

In 1954, the growing organization moved into its headquarters on University Street, a site purchased from Bradley University in 1952. As noted in its mission statement, the goal of the Illinois Farm Bureau is to “improve the economic well-being of agriculture and enrich the quality of farm family life.”

Today, 23 farmers serve on the Peoria County Farm Bureau board of directors representing 19 townships. The Farm Bureau has numerous committees, including public relations, local affairs, legislative, Ag-In-The-Classroom, marketing, membership, viewpoints, and sports. More seasoned members can join the “Prime Timers” group, while younger members might be inclined to join the “Young Farmers” group – the latter of which is responsible for the “Stay Alert” signs posted along rural roads in the county. The Peoria County Farm Bureau serves over 11,000 members, including nearly 1,600 “farmer” members whose roots are deeply planted in the Peoria County region.