

Dates:



November 23-25
IL Assn. of County Officials (IACO) Fall Conf.

November 23-30
Local candidates' filing of nomination petitions

December 5-8
IAA Annual Meeting

December 14
Deadline to file petition for referenda [Primary]

January 6-8
IL Specialty Crops, Agritourism & Organic Conference

January 21-22
IL Assn. of Drainage Districts Conference

March 15
General Primary Election

Township Assessors

To be or not to be, that is the question

By Brenda Matherly

In Illinois, The property tax is the largest single tax, making it the primary source of revenue for units of local government. In other words, anyone who attends public school, drives on local roads or streets, has police or fire protection services, or uses the local library receives those services as a result of the property taxes that, in large part, are funding them.

With so many of the services we rely on being funded by property taxes, it's no surprise Illinois Farm Bureau's Resolutions Committee (a policy development committee for the organization) had a lengthy discussion at its November meeting involving the ability to assess prop-

erty for the purpose of taxation at the township level.

During their discussion, the Resolutions Committee members heard concerns over a shortage of qualified individuals willing and able to serve as township assessor.

When I say qualified, I mean someone who meets the State's required certification standards to serve in that office.

This concern of shortages and vacancies in the townships sparked a lengthy debate by committee members. It focused on proposed policy language from the counties that would support legislation allowing county voters to eliminate the office of township assessor countywide.

(See **2B** on page 3)

Did you know...

North Dakota's per capita rate of local governments tops the nation. That state has 383.8 units for every 100,000 people.

Illinois has 54.1.



Assessors

Their role in the overall property tax system

By Brenda Matherly

The general duties of the township or multi-township assessor is to assess (value) most of the real property within their jurisdiction. If they are a township assessor, that jurisdiction falls within the boundaries of a single township. If they are a multi-township assessor, their juris-

isdiction falls within the boundaries of all the townships they are contracted to serve. In recent years—with the difficulty in finding qualified assessors—it has become common for two or more townships to join together to form multi-township assessment districts.

(See **Role** on page 3)

Levees to be surveyed along Upper Mississippi

Corps collecting data for NLD information

In a letter dated October 19, the Rock Island District U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) put levee sponsors on notice that the USACE will be conducting surveys of the main stem levees along the Mississippi River. Beginning at Muscatine, IA, they will cover the river through river mile 265 below Lock & Dam 24.

The survey is part of an effort to maintain the USACE National Levee Data Base (NLD) information.

According to the letter, "Survey points will be taken along the center line of the levee with cross sections taken at sites where cross sections were previously taken for the NLD. The survey information will be available to levee owners as soon as it is processed and loaded into the NLD."

Local representatives of the levee districts are allowed but not required to accompany the USACE officials while they survey the district's levees.

This process began in October, so some districts have already been surveyed. It is expected to continue through March of next year. Final NLD data availability back to levee owners is targeted for July of 2016.

[LINK](#)

Measuring success

What indicators suggest that your local affairs committee is functioning successfully?

By Kevin Rund

The question came up the other day asking what one should look for to know whether your county Farm Bureau's local affairs committee is "successful." That raised a range of observations from those in the room, with each providing insights into the meaning of success.

My own observations were a couple I've developed over my decades of working with local issues and county Farm Bureaus[®]. They're pretty simple, really—and easy to recognize.



POLICY

First, I look for the committee—or more appropriately, the county Farm Bureau—to have some version of its own, up-to-date, **local policy book**. Whatever your policies, the fact that your county has had the foresight and taken time to consider, research and debate these kinds of local questions tells me that the committee is aware of and engaged in local issues and can provide some stability on questions of policy.

The book doesn't need to be extensive. Goodness knows, the Illinois Farm Bureau's 105-page policy collection covers the waterfront on most issues, including some local.

And counties can turn to those state policies as their own. But those state policies defer most local issues to local voters & decision makers.

So often, local issues are inextricably linked to local geography, economies, demographics, farming practices and the like—combinations of things that can't be replicated anywhere else. So where does your county stand on farmland preservation versus the need for local economic expansion? Does your county prefer government-provided services (e.g.: garbage collection) versus a private provider? What do you say when asked by a school board member whether you support consolidation? Do you feel the county's highway funding is adequate, or are roads so bad that you'd be willing to pay a little more in property taxes for better county highways?

OPINION

Secondly—and an even better gauge—is whether **local government officials seek you out** for your opinion. If so, it shows that they put stock in your views, something that can't happen unless you've already demonstrated that you're engaged in the issues, you offer well-reasoned positions (often based on established policies), and that you are a reliable source of accurate information.

Building this second measure takes time, reliability and participation. If your committee has these things going for it, it's already far more successful than the vast majority of watchdog groups or associations.

*(See **Success** on page 4)*

Role

(Continued from page 1)

The township or multi-township assessors provide support to the County Supervisor of Assessments, also known as the Chief County Assessing Officer (CCAO). The CCAO is responsible for the assessment of real property in the county, but also has other duties including:

- Calculating and applying the equalization factors
- Notifying taxpayers of changes in their assessments
- Acting as Clerk to the Board of Review
- Revising township and multi-township assessors' work if necessary
- Valuing the farm property in the county

2B

(Continued from page 1)

However, the committee did not want to circumvent local input on this issue. Therefore, their support was limited to legislation that would eliminate the office of township assessor by a countywide referendum only if approved by a majority of voters in the county and a majority of voters in a majority of townships.

I suspect this debate is only the tip of the iceberg. Whether it's a shortage of individuals to serve in local government, a restriction of dollars to provide services or a more efficient way to meet public needs, the discussion of effective government, at all levels, is a hot topic.

[LINK](#)

What the assessors do not do-- at any level -- is to calculate taxes, determine tax rates or collect taxes. While the assessment process is tied very closely to the taxes you pay, it is not the assessor who determines budgets, levies or rates. Those come from each of the taxing districts serving you. The assessors' only concern is to place a value on

ernment, the CCAO has all the assessment responsibilities.

The other 83 counties utilize some form of township or multi-township assessors to assist in the assessment process. According to the Illinois Department of Revenue, in 2014 there were more than 900 of these elected assessors, most of whom

serve part-time, especially in the southern counties and lower-populated townships across the state.

Today, more and more townships are finding it difficult to find someone willing to hold the office of

At this year's IAA® Annual Meeting, our delegate body will have a chance to continue the discussion and include, not include or modify the proposed policy to support legislation allowing counties to eliminate the office of township assessor — with local voter approval. Stay tuned!

the real property in their jurisdiction. It's that assessed value that is then applied to the aggregate tax rate in your area.

Not all counties in Illinois have a township assessor, or any form of township government. For example:

- Cook and St. Clair are both township counties, but in each case, the county assessor has primary assessment responsibility.
- In the 17 commission counties, which have no township level gov-

township or multi-township assessor. The cost and time commitment necessary to obtain the certification is often as much or more than the salary offered for the position.

As many counties and townships around the state have found, there is no easy solution for the growing number of vacancies.

[LINK](#)

State Board of Elections — March Primary Calendar County elections are on the horizon

November 30 — Last day for candidates of established political parties to file original nomination papers (must contain original sheets signed by voters and circulators)

December 14 — Last day for filing petitions (must contain original sheets signed by voters and circulators) for referenda for the submission of questions of public policy (local). Objections to petitions for local referenda are filed with the same officer in which the original petitions were filed.

December 28 — Last day for local governing boards to adopt a resolution or ordinance to allow binding public questions to appear on the ballot.

Specialty Crops Annual Conf.

Anticipating 650 attendees at January 6-8 event in Springfield

By: Diane Handley

The annual Illinois Specialty Crops, Agritourism, and Organic Conference will be held in Springfield, Illinois on January 6-8, 2016. The conference is geared toward farmers and agribusiness professionals of fruits, vegetables, herbs, those who have agritourism businesses, as well as those who grow conventionally as well as organically.

On Wednesday, January 6, the conference will open with four pre-conference, all-day workshops on (1) Pumpkins and Ornamental Vegetables; (2) Small Fruits; (3) Social Media Boot Camp; and (4) Legal Issues for Small Farmers.

The Thursday and Friday programming will showcase six concurrent breakout sessions including fruits, vegetables, herbs, agritourism/

marketing, organics, and emerging issues.

There will be 60+ vendors showcasing products from vegetable seed, containers and packaging, jams and jellies, bakery items, crop protection products, and much more.

This annual event attracts an average of 650 attendees and is the premier conference in the state for the specialty crop industry.

An agenda and registration form can be found on the ISGA web site, <http://www.specialtygrowers.org/iscaoc-conference.html>.

Any questions can be directed toward Diane Handley, dhandley@ifb.org.

LINK



Attendees at the 2015 Illinois Specialty Crops, Agritourism, and Organic Conference enjoyed meeting with a variety of vendors. Everything from sampling value added and specialty products to learning about the latest in production practices and technologies were a part of the event.

Success

(Continued from page 2)

Though I didn't mention these next two items the other day, they can easily be added to the list.

SHOW UP

Third, **you show up**. If committee members show up at local government meetings and functions—as so few people do—government officials take notice. Over time, that can lead to trust, then to inclusion.

And if committee members show up for committee meetings, then you have either entertaining/interesting meetings or dedicated committee members - or both.

Everyone knows that if you don't show up, you don't play.

DIVERSITY

Finally, as my colleague just pointed out, **diversity** is another key. Next time you have a local affairs committee meeting, look around at your fellow committee members and guests. Do they look pretty much like you? Are there any women? Anyone under 30? Any non-farmers? Any urbanites? Might the committee benefit from the perspectives or expertise of an engineer, banker, lawyer, teacher, or a nurse? What about a soccer mom?

I'm not for a moment suggesting that non-members determine the policy positions of your county Farm Bureau. But if you understand what the rest of the world knows and how they think about the local issues you are facing, your policy positions and local programs will be stronger.

So, what do you say; how do you measure success?

LINK