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Illinois Wesleyan Celebrates Connection to Farms at First-Ever Agricultural Heritage Dinner

July 14, 2011

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Illinois Wesleyan University dedicated an evening to honoring those who work the land at the first-ever Agricultural Heritage Dinner on Wednesday in the Young Main Lounge. Officials recognized the operators of more than 6,000 acres of University-owned farmland across 33 farms in Illinois.

“Without the farmland, Illinois Wesleyan would not be the University that it is today,” said President Richard F. Wilson, who noted farm holdings generate around \$40 million of the University’s \$200 million endowment. “The income from the farms goes directly into our scholarship program and support of the faculty,” as well as building construction and maintenance, said Wilson. “There is no better investment than the rich farmland of this area.”



President Richard F. Wilson welcomes farm operators at the first-ever Agricultural Heritage Dinner.

More than 140 guests were in attendance at the dinner, including operators of IWU farms throughout the state. “If people ask me what I do, President Wilson said to tell them, ‘I put students through college,’” said Rick Heaton, operator of the Dorothy Hoadley Farm in Stark County, just north of Peoria. “I’d never thought of it that way before.”

The first gift of farmland to Illinois Wesleyan came in 1873 from Hiram Buck, who offered the University 640 acres. The Buck Farm, located in Douglas County, began the University’s agricultural endowment. “That farm has helped countless students to receive an Illinois Wesleyan education,” said Board of Trustee Chairman George Vinyard. “Ours is a long and rich history with the farms in Illinois that goes back to our earliest days. We are continually impressed by the agricultural heritage that we are celebrating here tonight.”



Michael Doherty, senior economist at the Illinois Farm Bureau

The University’s reputation for maintaining donated land, as opposed to selling it for an immediate profit, is important to the legacy of agriculture in Illinois, according to Steve Brown, chair of the Trustee Farm Committee. “This agricultural heritage is sacred to all of us,” said Brown, who is a farmer and also the father of two Illinois Wesleyan graduates.

“The University has always shown great respect for the wishes of those who left land to them,” said Jeff Dixon, who works the Ethel K. Hoerner Farm, in Livingston County, west of Pontiac, with his son Jake. “I think that if Ms. Hoerner was alive, she would want to see the farm around for future years.”

Another attendee, Jim Ondeck, said he cannot imagine a better owner than IWU for the Lorraine Kraft Farm in McLean County near Normal, which he has worked since the 1960s. “Ms. Kraft was a schoolteacher for years, dedicated to educating children,” said Ondeck. “Now her farm is still helping to educate children. What could be better than that?”

The dinner also featured keynote speaker Michael Doherty, senior economist from the Illinois Farm Bureau, who shared the trends in agriculture over the last few decades.

Doherty said even with vast changes, “agriculture is a small community. No matter where you go, whether it is Illinois or Washington, D.C., you are bound to run across someone you know.”

Doherty noted family farms are declining across the U.S. – a fact which makes Illinois Wesleyan’s efforts all the more important, said Marvin Gorden, who worked the Rhodes C. Allen Farm in Macon County for 30 years before Darrell Hall took over as operator. “I was well-pleased when the University took over the farm,” said Gorden. “I figured that way the farm would continue to be a family operation.”

The Farms of Illinois Wesleyan University

Rhodes C. Allen Farm, Macon County
Farm Operator: Darrell Hall

J. Vincent Beggs Farms, Hallsville, DeWitt County; Wapella, DeWitt County; Beason, Logan County; McLean, McLean County
Farm Operator: Jim Brown

Hiram Buck Farms, Douglas County
Farm Operator: Riddell Burris Farms

Cleary Farm, Christian County
Farm Operator: Darrell Garret

Emily Rupert Cole Farm, Iroquois County
Farm Operator: Duane Stichnoth

Denn Farm, Shelby County
Farm Operators: Bud and Leon Vonderheide

Glenn Dodds Farm, McLean County
Farm Operator: Cecil Fogle Jr.

Charles Eisenmenger Farm, Douglas County
Farm Operator: Riddell Burris Farms

Herbert L. Ellsworth Farm, McLean County
Farm Operator: Steve Westfall

Oleta Julius Fillenwarth Farm, McLean County
Farm Operator: John Leonard

Fleming Farm, Vermillion County
Farm Operator: Dean Eisenmann

Arthur and Clara Fort Farm, Marshall County
Farm Operators: William and Cheryl Meisner

Arthur and Clara Fort Farm, Woodford County
Farm Operators: Cheryl, Scott and Bradley Block

Anna Gulick Farm, Ford County
Farm Operators: Fred and David Maul

James and Mary Henson Farm, Champaign County
Farm Operator: Riddell Burris Farms

Dorothy Hoadley Farm, Stark County,
Farm Operator: Rick Heaton

Ethel K. Hoerner Farm, Livingston County
Farm Operators: Jeff and Dale Dixon

E. Melba Kirkpatrick Farm, McLean County
Farm Operator: Jiles & Sons, Inc.

Lorraine Kraft Farm, McLean County
Farm Operator: Jim Ondeck

Daisy McFee Farm, McLean County
Farm Operator: Bob Kieser

Sadie E. McPherson Farm, Sangamon County
Farm Operator: Jacob Hermes

Frances Mears Farm, McLean County
Farm Operator: Larry Murphy

Rueberta Grady Raney Farm, DeWitt County
Farm Operator: Bob Turney

Frances Rhymer Farm, DeKalb County
Farm Operator: Jerry Drake

Trumpe Farm, Clay County
Farm Operator: Lash Farming, Inc.

I. W. Voigt Farm, Kankakee County
Farm Operator: Charles Yohnka

Margaret K. Wakeley Farm, Iroquois County
Farm Operator: Larry Thorndyke

Williams Farm, Douglas County
Farm Operator: Plainview Farm

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