County Staff Exchange

Program Area: Policy Implementation (PI)
County Farm Bureau: Cook County Farm Bureau
State: IL
Membership Category: 5,001+
Year: 2013
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Program Description: The "County Staff Exchange" enabled 20 participants from the county government to tour farms and farm businesses throughout the county. Tour stops included a nationally recognized horse racetrack, an inmate/urban farm education program, food safety institute and a vegetable farm/farm stand/apiary. The activity illustrated the breadth of farming and farm businesses in the county as well as the impact of farming and farm businesses on the county's economy. This program was designed to address county legislative, communication and economic development staff's need for a hands-on learning experience about farms and farm businesses in a highly urban county.

On the day of the program, participants and volunteers traveled to a nationally recognized racetrack for a tour and meeting with a horse trainer. The trainer discussed the racetrack's and horse racing's connection to farms and farm businesses. At the second stop participants toured and discussed an inmate education program ran in conjunction with the county jail. The program provides a nine-month certificate training course and internship in urban farming. Inmates in the program grow, maintain and learn about vegetable and fish production. The participants also visited a food science institute concentrating on food safety, food defense and nutrition for stakeholders in government, industry and academia. Participants concluded their day at a fourth generation family-owned vegetable farm and farm stand. The Farm Bureau volunteer highlighted the farm's history, crops and commitment to growing a safe crop.

The project allowed individuals guiding county decisions an opportunity to learn about farms, farmers and Farm Bureau policy first-hand from farmers and researchers. This project also allowed Farm Bureau to engage with county staff members who are advising elected officials.