New AAS Degree in Agronomy

IVCC’s agriculture program continued to expand in 2018 with the addition of the Associate in Applied Science (AAS) in Agronomy. The two-year program option is designed for students planning to enter the workforce after earning the degree. The curriculum was approved by the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) and the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) in the spring and made available to students this fall. It provides students’ knowledge of field crop science, soil fertility and fertilizers, soil science, crop pest management and crop production and management. A key part of the program is an internship with a local agri-business. With the degree, students are qualified for immediate employment.

Interest in Agriculture Study Grows

Not only does IVCC ag continue to grow, the study of agriculture is expanding at district high schools. For example, the number of certified ag students in 13 high schools with ag programs that are located partially or completely in the IVCC district numbered 1,318 students in 2017-18, an increase of 15 percent over the previous year. High school students participating in FFA chapters during the same period numbered 1,025, an increase of 8 percent. These figures do not include Marquette Academy which started an ag program and FFA chapter this year. Statewide, the number of high school ag students (33,050) and FFA members (18,453) is at record highs.

Strong Ag Employment Opportunities

One of the likely reasons for increased interest in agriculture is the robust employment picture. According to the USDA and National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), the most recent Ag Census (2012) shows 7,323 ag related jobs in just Bureau, LaSalle and Putnam counties. That means 10 percent or 1-in-10 jobs in the Illinois Valley is ag-related. Nationally, the U.S. Department of Labor estimates that between 2015 and 2020, almost 58,000 new ag jobs will be created annually. Yet, at the same time, U.S. colleges and universities will produce only 35,000 graduates each year with B.S. degrees in agriculture.

Sharp Increase in Ag Scholarships

Perhaps the most cost-effective way to earn a college education, either a two-year or four-year degree, is by attending a community college. Students seeking four-year degrees save tens of thousands of dollars by spending the first two years at a community college. IVCC provides an outstanding college education with a tuition rate well below the state average for community colleges.

Nevertheless, many students will need financial assistance to move forward with their college educations. Fortunately, students benefit from the generosity of donors who have stepped forward to provide ag scholarships. There are 14 ag scholarships and the total dollar amount has grown from $3,250 in fall 2016 to an amazing $44,000 today. In all, about $300,000 in IVCC scholarships are awarded annually. For information, contact Donna Swiskoski in the IVCC Foundation Office at (815) 224-0551 or donna_swiskoski@ivcc.edu.
Ag Instructors Added
Ag program growth necessitated an increase in the number of instructors. IVCC ag instructors are:

**Willard Mott** – full-time instructor and program coordinator; B.S. in Agricultural and Environmental Communications and Education from the University of Illinois; Certificate in Agronomy from Iowa State University; M.S. in Agronomy from Iowa State University; former ag instructor and FFA Advisor at Bureau Valley High School.

**Doug Stockley** – part-time instructor; A.S. in Agriculture from IVCC (1975); B.S. in Agriculture Education from Western Illinois University; M.S. in Agriculture Education and Mechanization from Southern Illinois University; post graduate work at the University of Illinois; former IVCC Agriculture and Computer Professor; former ag instructor and FFA Advisor at Warren of Monmouth High School; LaSalle County farmer.

**Alissa Frederick** – part-time instructor; A.A.S. in Equestrian Science from Black Hawk College; A.A.S. in Horse Technology from Black Hawk College; A.S. Agriculture Transfer from Black Hawk College; B.S. in Agriculture Business and Farm Industry Management from Illinois State University; assistant manager of the Seatonville Elevator Company.

**Dan Legner** – part-time instructor; B.S. in Agricultural Economics from the University of Illinois; M.S. in Agricultural Finance from the University of Illinois; currently senior appraiser at Compeer Financial, Princeton; former VP for agriculture lending at Amcore Bank.

**Brian Kerestes** – part-time instructor; B.S. in Agronomy: Agronomic Business and Marketing from Purdue University; head of operations at Kerestes Farms, Streator.

**Gagan Sidhu** – part-time instructor; B.S. in Microbiology and Anthropology from the University of Manitoba; M.S. in Plant Science from the University of Manitoba.

Anyone interested in becoming a part-time instructor should contact Mott at (815) 224-0413 or Willard_Mott@ivcc.edu.

New Spring Courses
The expansion of IVCC’s ag teaching staff is driven by the growth of the program which includes many new courses. This spring, new courses include:

- Soil Fertility and Fertilizers
- Agricultural Internship
- Agricultural Internship Seminar

An agricultural internship during the fourth and final semester of the two-year AAS degree in both Agricultural Business Management and Agronomy is a crucial part of the curriculum. These two-year programs are designed for students who want to be ag students for two years before seeking employment. Internships provide real-world work experience and the potential to develop relationships leading to full-time employment.

With the new courses, IVCC now has 17 ag classes, up from just two when the program relaunched in fall 2016.
Research Partnership with University of Illinois Extension/College of ACES Expands

From the beginning of the ag program restart, the University of Illinois Extension has been an invaluable partner. Its support allowed IVCC ag to quickly move forward on many fronts. The expanding IVCC Ag/University of Illinois Soil and Crop research program is a prime example. Using a portion of IVCC’s 153 acres of farmland, the 2018 research program focused on the impact of various soybean seed planting populations on soybean yields. Also planted was a demonstration plot featuring soybean varieties with a wide array of maturations, varieties usually planted from Alabama to Minnesota. A corn rootworm study was also completed.

A late summer research field day conducted by Extension staff Russ Higgins and Daryle Wragge focused on research results, insect populations and the spread of corn leaf tar spot. Considerable credit for the success of the program is owed to the cooperation and support of Luke Holly of Granville who holds the contract to farm IVCC’s property.

Precision Agriculture Flourishing Thanks to Major Donation

Due to the generosity of Ralph Scriba, IVCC ag students are learning how to use technology to maximize crop yields. A LaSalle County farm boy and 1951 LPO Junior College graduate who grew up near Troy Grove, Mr. Scriba made a $50,000 donation to IVCC agriculture during the past year. Half of the donation was endowed to support ag scholarships while the remaining $25,000 purchased precision ag equipment. Willard Mott, ag program coordinator, said the equipment will allow students to have hands-on opportunities to learn how precision agriculture “allows for more accurate and controlled crop production.” New precision ag equipment includes:

- Rugged mobile computer tablet for use outdoors.
- Classroom simulation software allowing students to set-up a precision ag display monitor, collect data and then interpret it.
- Phantom 3 drone to take aerial photos of fields during various growth stages to evaluate crop health and ground conditions.
- Polaris Ranger UTV to collect soil samples, use GPS to map fields and collect other data.
- An assisted-steering system mounted on the Ranger to simulate the experience of using auto or guided steering technology currently used on tractors and other farm equipment.
**IVCC Ag Supports Local FFA**

Recognizing the strong educational value of FFA, IVCC uses its ag facilities to host FFA Career Development Events (CDE’s). In November, the FFA Section 5 Ag Sales and Grain Fair CDE was held at IVCC as were the FFA Section 7 Agronomy and Dairy Foods CDE’s in December. IVCC students assisted with the Section 7 FFA Land Use contest at the Seneca High School FFA Land Lab in October.

**Ag Activities**

- Spring and Fall Ag Open Houses include state university ag reps
- IVCC Ag Night at January basketball game
- Hosting Illinois State FFA District 1 Agriculture Business Management CDE in May
- Community Bank Ag Conference in Mendota in January
- Bureau County Salute to Ag Breakfast in March
- Soils workshop for students during STEAAM Conference in March

**IVCC Ag Hosts LaSalle County Farm Bureau**

Led by President David Isermann and Manager Kayla Kiefer, the LaSalle County Farm Bureau Board of Directors visited IVCC’s ag program in late summer. Highlights included an Extension-provided crop research update and a precision agriculture presentation by members of IVCC’s Ag Club. Board members had the opportunity to see and learn about the outstanding ag facilities including the 153-acre farm, soils and crops wet lab, smart technology classroom, ag mechanics lab and greenhouse. IVCC hopes to host the Board of Directors of the Bureau County and Marshall-Putnam Farm Bureaus soon.

**New in 2019**

In addition to offering new ag classes, one of a number of exciting planned upgrades is the development of an Ag Land Lab. A major resource enjoyed by IVCC is the 153-acre farm adjacent to campus. IVCC plans to take full advantage of this resource by utilizing a portion of it this spring to provide agronomy students the “hands-on” opportunity to actually cultivate the soil and plant a crop. This will allow students to put their classroom knowledge, including the use of precision agriculture, to very productive use. IVCC ag appreciates the support of Luke Holly who farms the college acreage.

**Learn More about IVCC Agriculture**

- The ag webpage: [www.ivcc.edu/agriculture](http://www.ivcc.edu/agriculture)
- Apply to IVCC ag: [http://www.ivcc.edu/admissions](http://www.ivcc.edu/admissions)
- Meet our ag instructor: Willard_Mott@ivcc.edu or (815) 224-0413
- Schedule a class shadow opportunity: Quintin_Overocker@ivcc.edu or (815) 224-0437