



NEWS

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HOMEGROWN BY HEROES PROGRAM ASSISTS VETERANS IN AGRICULTURE

SPRINGFIELD, IL – As we honor our state’s military veterans this Veterans Day, the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA) invites veterans and current active duty servicemembers to take part in the Homegrown By Heroes program. This program is ideal for veterans who are interested in a second career in our state’s number one industry, agriculture.

The Homegrown By Heroes program allows Illinois farmers, ranchers, fishermen, and producers who have served or are still serving in any branch of the U.S. military to use a special logo on the agricultural products they sell to the public. This special designation sets these farmers apart in the market, allowing these heroes' products to be visible to consumers while giving them the chance to tell their story. Forty-two members are now enrolled in the Homegrown By Heroes program, up from 28 in 2017.

"There are great job opportunities in Illinois agriculture. If someone dreams of being a farmer, rancher, or producer, we want to help fulfill those dreams," says Agriculture Director Raymond Poe. "Several statewide organizations work together to provide a unique opportunity that assists veterans interested in pursuing a second career in agriculture."

"Many of the original Minutemen put aside their plows and picked up their muskets to defend our freedom and, still today, many of Illinois' Citizen-Soldiers are also farmers," said Maj. Gen. Richard J. Hayes, the Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard. "This program is a way for citizens to recognize the service of men and women who have defended this nation and who also work the fields and orchards to feed families in Illinois and throughout the country."

"We thank the Illinois Department of Agriculture for continuing the Homegrown by Heroes Program for our Illinois Veterans. Programs like this continue to assist our farmers, ranchers, fishermen and value-added producers who served or are serving our country," said Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs Director Stephen Curda, Ph.D.

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The Homegrown By Heroes program is free for our veterans. Participants must renew their certification annually at no cost. To be eligible for the program, the veteran must provide proof of service, a letter of support from their commanding officer or a designated representative, and maintain 50 percent or greater ownership in the business/operation.

For those who qualify, the Homegrown By Heroes Illinois Product logo can be used to identify and market their Illinois-grown and Illinois-made products on packaging, signage, websites, and social media, or wherever their items are being sold.

Thanks to the Department's partnership with various agencies and organizations – such as the Illinois Farm Bureau, Farmer Veteran Coalition (FVC), Illinois National Guard, Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, and Illinois Farmer Veterans Alliance – training and education also are components of the initiative, which make informational resources available to veterans desiring to farm in the state. These programs:

- develop mentorships between experienced farmers and veterans
- identify community land access that benefits beginning farmers and saves municipalities' maintenance costs
- locate farmers' market opportunities and partnerships
- assist veterans in developing value-added products
- foster relationships with retailers and food service organizations

How to Apply:

- o **Step 1:** Register with the Farmer Veteran Coalition (FVC)
Apply for FVC Membership:
<http://www.farmvetco.org>
Register with FVC Homegrown By Heroes:
<http://www.farmvetco.org/homegrown-by-heroes/>
- o **Step 2:** Register with the Illinois Department of Agriculture
Complete the [Homegrown By Heroes Products Logo Application](#)
Veterans can provide their certificate or certification letter from Farmer Veteran Coalition to the IDOA as verification that they have been certified as a veteran to use the HBH label.

Check out the [Homegrown By Heroes program](#) website for more information.

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