To: Illinois State Board of Education and the Illinois Pathways Interagency Committee

The Illinois FFA Foundation and Illinois Leadership Council for Agricultural Education (ILCAE) submit this as our statement of interest in the establishment and implementation of a STEM Learning Exchange for the Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources (AFNR) cluster area. We have assessed statewide public-private partner readiness to support this AFNR Learning Exchange and will outline it with letters of support and this RFI. The AFNR STEM Learning Exchange will be established by the Illinois FFA Foundation and ILCAE. The Illinois FFA Foundation will act as the fiscal agent. ILCAE will operate in an advisory capacity and Facilitating Coordination in Agricultural Education (FCAE) will function as the primary contact and implementation entity.

In 1984, a grassroots movement from the Illinois agriculture industry recognized that Agriculture is central to the welfare and economic stability of the state. Good economic viability requires a continued source of trained and qualified individuals for employment in agriculture. That movement resulted in creation of the Illinois Leadership Council for Agricultural Education (ILCAE). Originally, ILCAE was composed of over 125 leaders from agricultural industries, community organizations, and educational institutions and now includes 32 voting members who meet throughout the year. ILCAE is involved in legislative activities, testifying at public meetings and developing new partnerships in Illinois Agricultural Education. The council has an elected officer team.

In 1986, the Illinois General Assembly legislated that a comprehensive program for agricultural education be created and maintained by the public school system for all school districts. As a result, the Illinois Committee for Agricultural Education (ICAE) was formed, a thirteen member Governor appointed committee. In 1987, the first agricultural education line item within the Illinois State Board of Education budget was approved at $48,500. When the line item was increased to $1,000,000 in 1989, the Facilitating Coordination in Agricultural Education Project (FCAE) was developed by the Illinois State Board of Education to assist in the coordination of improvement and expansion efforts in agricultural education. The current line item funding level is at $1,800,000 for 2011-2012.

The Illinois Foundation FFA was incorporated on May 29, 1947 and is a not-for-profit, 501-c-3 organization to the full extent of the law governed by a Board of Trustees that develops policy, sets priorities, approves the budget and oversees the management of the Foundation. The Board of Trustees is composed of agricultural business/industry representatives, agricultural education instructors, FFA Alumni representatives, the State FFA President and State FFA Advisor, a representative from Information Technology and Communication Services (ITCS), a university agricultural education staff representative, and the FFA Executive Secretary. All members of the Board are volunteers who serve without salary. The Illinois Foundation FFA provides financial support for the total FFA program in Illinois. The financial support provided by the Foundation helps the Illinois Association FFA make a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education. Programs and activities sponsored by the Foundation include: Major State FFA Officer Travel Expenses and Training, Section FFA President’s Expenses, State FFA Officer Leadership Meetings, National FFA Convention Delegate Expenses, National FFA Officer Candidate Travel Expenses, Leadership Training Workshops, FFA Leadership Camp, FFA Leadership Camp Scholarships, STAR Conferences for 25 Section officer teams, Illinois PAS Incentive, Administrative Expenses (operation of the Illinois FFA Center), Illinois FFA Awards and Plaques for individual members and school chapters, State FFA Convention, Beginning Advisors Workshop, Illinois FFA Magazine, and Scholarships and Grants.
The Foundation administers several scholarships and grants as follows that benefit Illinois FFA members and chapters: Sam Taylor Memorial Scholarship, Sam Taylor Agricultural Education Scholarship, J.E. Hill Scholarship, Henry County Agriculture Scholarship, GROWMARK Scholarship, Hiram & Anne Robbins Sibley Scholarship, Alliance Pipeline Scholarship, International Experience Scholarship, Alliance Pipeline Safety and Community Development Grants, Methamphetamine Awareness & Prevention Grant.

Facilitating Coordination in Agricultural Education (FCAE) addresses the aims and purposes of Public ACT 84-1452 involving the implementation of identified goals for improving education in and about agriculture in Illinois. Currently, six professional staff coordinate program development services essential to the implementation of a comprehensive statewide plan for the improvement of agricultural education at all levels, pre-kindergarten through adult. Their objectives include, but are not limited to:

- Work to improve education in and about agriculture, pre-K through adult.
- Provide technical assistance through field-based curriculum design and development.
- Identify, plan, develop and conduct professional development activities to improve agriculture education, pre-K through adult.
- Assist in the coordination/articulation of curriculum development activities in and about agriculture, pre-K through adult.

The primary contact person for the AFNR STEM Learning Exchange will be Jay Runner who has been employed as the FCAE State Coordinator since July 1, 1999.

Jay Runner, FCAE State Coordinator, 200 South Fredrick, Rantoul, Illinois 61866
jrunner@agriculturaleducation.org
217.893.0091

Partner organizations and entities which the AFNR STEM Learning Exchange may include, but are not exclusive to the following: Illinois Association Vocational Agricultural Teachers (IAVAT), University of Illinois, Western Illinois University, Southern Illinois University, Illinois State University, Illinois Association Community College Agricultural instructors (IACCAI), Postsecondary Agricultural Students (PAS), Illinois Association FFA, Illinois Agriculture In The Classroom (IAITC), Center for Agricultural and Environmental Resources and Training (CAERT), Roberts Design, Illinois FFA Alumni, Illinois FFA Foundation, AgCareers.com, CommonM@n, Illinois High Schools, Illinois Principals Association, Illinois Association School Boards, Illinois Farm Bureau, Illinois Department of Agriculture, Illinois Agricultural Association, Illinois Community College Board, Protype Printing, Premier Printing, Parkland College, and WatersEdge Consulting.

Existing partnerships in Illinois agricultural education will be leveraged to implement and accomplish the nine core functions for this STEM Learning Exchange project. As explained above, the Illinois Leadership Council for Agricultural Education (ILCAE) is a voluntary, grass roots agricultural organization focused on the expansion and improvement of agricultural education programs at all levels. ILCAE is primarily an advocacy group that established the Illinois Committee for Agricultural Education (ICAE) and the Agricultural Education Line Item in the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) budget. The Illinois Foundation FFA is a foundation established to receive and disperse funds to support quality Agricultural Education/FFA programs in Illinois. Facilitating Coordination in Agricultural Education (FCAE) was established to improve education in and about agriculture pre-K through adult. FCAE is responsible for developing and implementing professional development initiatives, curriculum materials, technical assistance, and activities that advance the P-20 pipeline of students into the economic engine of Illinois agriculture.
Illinois Agricultural Education will utilize the strengths of these partnerships in collaboration with the rest of the “Illinois Agricultural Education Family” to implement the goals of the AFNR STEM Learning Exchange through addressing the nine core functions.

- **E-Learning**: FCAE will build upon their existing partnership with the Center for Agricultural and Environmental Resources and Training (CAERT) in providing e-learning curriculum resources including online lesson plans, e-units and assessments. Currently agriculture teachers have online access to over 1,000 lesson plans in 9 curricular areas, 51 reading & comprehension resources, and an online assessment program that allows teachers to conduct their student’s learning in a paperless classroom.

- **Physical Resources**: ILCAE will continue their efforts in growing the Ag Ed Line item to support expansion of classroom and laboratory space, equipment and related resources funded by the incentive Funding Grants to local agricultural programs. These additional dollars are used in local programs to purchase and renovate existing structures to expand facilities and resources for classrooms.

- **Student Organizations**: The Illinois FFA Association and Post-secondary Agricultural Students (PAS) will expand opportunities for more agricultural students to be involved in their organization’s activities, including conferences, internships and professional networking experiences, competitions and community projects that build leadership and interpersonal skills.

- **Work-Based Learning**: Through the efforts of the FFA Alumni Organization and the Growing Agricultural Science Teachers (GAST) grants, we will focus on increasing internships and other work-based learning opportunities that connect students with adult mentors. Illinois Agricultural Education will build partnerships with agricultural industry to sponsor challenges for students to work in collaborative teams addressing real-world problems online and in local communities.

- **Real-World Challenges**: Recently, the Illinois Farm Bureau and the Illinois FFA Association have teamed up in offering an opportunity for students to develop videos that promote the agricultural industry. This is an example of how we plan to continue and expand our efforts in this area.

- **Teacher Professional Development**: FCAE, IAVAT, IACCAI and IAITC will continue to provide professional development opportunities for teachers and school administrators integrated and aligned across education K -16. Professional development exposes educators and school administrators to current agriculture industry trends and improved pedagogy for better classroom teaching.

- **Career Awareness**: Illinois Ag in the Classroom, FCAE, University of Illinois Extension 4-H programs, Illinois Agri-Women, CAERT, individual county Farm Bureaus and the IAA Foundation provide programming and financial support for career awareness. Current activities include classroom curriculum, learning-by-doing projects, experiential tours of local businesses, career information websites and guest speakers.

- **Transition to Post-Secondary**: IAVAT, IACCAI, University of Illinois, Illinois State, Western Illinois university and Southern Illinois University will continue their collaborative efforts to provide resources to assist students and schools in implementing personalized education plans and transitions to post-secondary academic and training programs, including establishing course articulation and dual credit opportunities.

- **Data & Assessments**: ILCAE and FCAE will serve as the entities to review and report on performance of STEM programs of study through the aggregated student data and assessments generated annually.

We look forward to working with ISBE and the Illinois Pathways Interagency Committee (IPIC) in supporting activities of the AFNR STEM Learning Exchange and the implementation of STEM Program of Study.
March 6, 2012

Dear AFNR STEM Learning Exchange RFI Grant Review Committee,

On behalf of the Agricultural Education Program, located in the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES) at the University of Illinois, I am very supportive of the “Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources – STEM Learning Exchange” RFI grant application to improve coordination of public and private investment in supporting the development of a workforce that can be competitive in tomorrow’s economy. Through the strong leadership of the Illinois Leadership Council for Agricultural Education (ILCAE) this collaborative effort brings together the major leadership of the agricultural industry and educational institutions (pre-K through adult) to promote and assist students through the AFNR STEM Learning Exchange. The University of Illinois, the College of ACES, and the Agricultural Education Program are strong proponents of STEM programs in the area of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources.

Should the project be funded, University of Illinois Agricultural Education Program can offer the following support:

- Serve on the planning committee
- Coordinate professional development activities for teachers and schools administrators integrated and aligned across P-16 associated with the AFNR
- Collaborate with other teacher training institutions to explore opportunities to train current Agricultural Education Pre-service Teachers
- Promote the grant activities through our newsletters, website, press releases, mailings, etc.
- Provide career resources to help students learn about job opportunities and career paths
- Provide tools and resources to assist students and schools with implementing personalized education plans and transitions to post-secondary academic and training programs, including establishing course articulation and dual credit opportunities that are consistent with the Illinois community college board’s rules and the Illinois Dual Credit Quality Act.
I hope you will give thoughtful consideration to this collaborative approach to increasing the interest and participation by students in the AFNR Stem Learning Exchange through the ILCAE proposal. The Agricultural Education Program at the University of Illinois strongly supports this proposal. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (217) 244-6909 or at clark6@illinois.edu.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Richard W. Clark, Ph.D.
Associate Director, Agricultural Education Program
Clinical Associate Professor

cc  Dr. Laurie Kramer
    Dr. Walter Hurley
Attn: Review Committee

Re: AFNR STEM Learning Exchange RFI Grant

The Illinois Association FFA is extremely supportive of the “Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources - STEM Learning Exchange” RFI grant application to improve the coordination of public and private investment in supporting the development of a workforce that can be competitive in tomorrow’s economy.

We are convinced that our support of the AFNR Learning Exchange, will provide opportunities for student learners at local schools, postsecondary institutions and other programs to explore their academic and career interests in the STEM fields including Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources. These learning exchanges will help our Illinois’ agricultural education teachers to broaden their experiences and build connections with industry partners so they might better understand the future careers opportunities for their students. Our Illinois teachers are up to the task and our students are excited about the future!

Should the project be funded, Illinois Association FFA will offer the following support:

- Provide staff to serve on the planning committee.
- Promote the grant activities through our newsletters, website www.illinoisffa.org, press releases, mailings, etc.
- Provide career resources to help students learn about job opportunities and career paths.
- Sponsor challenges and project management resources for students to work in collaborative teams addressing real-world interdisciplinary problems.
- Support student organizations and their major activities, including conferences, entrepreneurial experiences, competitions, and community projects that build leadership, communication and interpersonal skills.

Thank you for this opportunity to make a positive difference in student’s lives. We look forward to working on this important project.

Sincerely,

James Craft
Executive Secretary
March 9, 2012

Dear AFNR STEM Learning Exchange RFI Grant Review Committee,

As an associate professor of Agricultural Education & Communications at Southern Illinois University – Carbondale (SIUC), I would like to support the “Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources – STEM Learning Exchange” RFI grant application to improve coordination of public and private investment in supporting the development of a workforce that can be competitive in tomorrow’s economy. Through our support of the AFNR Learning Exchange, we will assist in providing opportunities for local schools, postsecondary institutions and programs to enable learners to explore their academic and career interests in the STEM fields including Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources.

Should the AFNR Learning Exchange project be funded, the Agricultural Education unit at SIU will offer the following support:

- Serve on the planning committee.
- Coordinate professional development activities for teachers and schools administrators integrated and aligned across P-16 associated with the AFNR.
- Collaborate with other teacher training institutions to explore opportunities to train current Agricultural Education Pre-service Teachers.
- Promote the grant activities through our newsletters, website, press releases, & mailings.
- Provide career resources to help students learn about job opportunities and career paths.
- Provide tools and resources to assist students and schools with implementing personalized education plans and transitions to post-secondary academic and training programs, including establishing course articulation.

Thank you for this opportunity to make a difference in student’s lives. We look forward to working on this important project.

Sincerely,

Seburn L. Pense
Associate Professor
Agricultural Education & Communications
March 15, 2012

Dear AFNR STEM Learning Exchange RFI Grant Review Committee,

I am an Associate Professor of Agricultural Education at Illinois State University and serve as coordinator for our Agricultural Education Program. I would like to offer my full support for the “Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources – STEM Learning Exchange” RFI grant application to improve coordination of public and private investment in supporting the development of a workforce that can be competitive in tomorrow’s economy. As a teacher training institution, we play a significant role in preparing future teachers in their role of helping students explore their academic interests and career options in the STEM fields, including Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources. We have a long tradition of preparing students for careers in agriculture, and constantly strive to help our teachers be better prepared to help guide their students toward their future careers. We welcome the opportunity to be part of the team that takes our current good works to the next level.

Should the project be funded, the Illinois State Agricultural Education program will offer the following support:

- Serve on the planning committee.
- Provide and collaborate on professional development activities for teachers and schools administrators integrated and aligned across P-16 associated with the AFNR.
- Collaborate with FCAE, other teacher training institutions, community colleges, high schools and ag literacy efforts, to ensure that we have well prepared teachers and educators.
- Incorporate the principles of the Learning Exchanges into classes, and encourage teacher candidates to utilize the resources during their professional preparation.
- Help develop e-learning curriculum resources and assessments.
- Promote the grant activities through our newsletters, website, press releases, mailings, etc.
- Provide career resources to help students learn about job opportunities and career paths.
- Provide tools and resources to assist students and schools with implementing personalized education plans and transitions to post-secondary academic and training programs, including establishing course articulation and dual credit opportunities that are consistent with the Illinois Community College Board’s rules and the Illinois Dual Credit Quality Act.

Thank you for the opportunity to help move Illinois education into the next generation.

Sincerely,

Richard Steffen, PhD.
Associate Professor of Agricultural Education
Coordinator for Agricultural Education Program
Coordinator for Agricultural Communications and Leadership Program
March 14, 2012

TO: Review Committee

FR: Frank M. Dry, Associate Executive Secretary

RE: AFNR STEM Learning Exchange RFI Grant

The Illinois Foundation FFA supports the “Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources – STEM Learning Exchange” RFI grant application to improve the coordination of public and private investment in developing a workforce that is competitive in our future economy.

Our support will help provide opportunities for local schools, postsecondary institutions and other programs to enable learners to explore their academic and career interests in STEM fields including Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources. Learning exchanges will help Illinois agricultural education instructors broaden their experiences and better understand the opportunities for future careers their students might be engaged in.

Should the project be funded, the Illinois Foundation FFA will support the initiative by:
- Providing staff to serve on the planning committee.
- Serve as the fiscal agent.
- Promote the grant activities.
- Assist the Illinois Association FFA with their support and promotion of grant activities.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a positive difference in students’ lives by developing their potential for career success as well as assisting agricultural instructors in preparing students for the workforce.
Dear AFNR STEM Learning Exchange RFI Grant Review Committee,

As the Education Director for the Illinois Agriculture in the Classroom program, I am very supportive of the "Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources – STEM Learning Exchange" RFI grant application to improve coordination of public and private investment in supporting the development of a workforce that can be competitive in tomorrow’s economy. The Illinois Agriculture in the Classroom Program is housed at the Illinois Farm Bureau, we receive our funding through the generous donations of Illinois Commodity Groups and those interested in Agriculture. Annually our local coordinator impact more than 500,000 Pre-K to 12 students with direct presentations on agriculture. Our local efforts are a joint effort between local contributors, the Illinois County Farm Bureau, University of Illinois Extension and the County Soil and Water Conservation District. Through our support of the AFNR Learning Exchange, we are assisting in providing opportunities for local schools, postsecondary institutions and programs to enable learners to explore their academic and career interests in the STEM fields including Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources. Teachers in Illinois need to broaden their experiences to better understand the opportunities for future careers future for their students. Our Illinois teachers are up to the task!

Should the project be funded, the Illinois Agriculture in the Classroom program will offer the following support:

- Serve on the planning committee
- Coordinate professional development activities for teachers and schools administrators integrated and aligned across P-16 associated with the AFNR
- Collaborate with teacher training institutions to explore opportunities to train current Agricultural Education Pre-service Teachers in addition to the 1600 (+) non Agricultural Education Student Teacher we currently reach annually
- Promote the grant activities through our newsletters, website, press releases, mailings, etc.
- Provide links to e-learning curriculum resources and assessments through our www.agintheclassroom.org website
- Provide career resources to help students learn about job opportunities and career paths

Thank you for this opportunity to make a difference in student’s lives. We look forward to working on this important project.

Sincerely,

Kevin Daugherty
Education Director
March 15, 2012

Dear AFNR STEM Learning Exchange RFI Grant Review Committee,

As co-chairmen of the Illinois Leadership Committee for Agricultural Education (ILCAE), we fully support of the "Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources – STEM Learning Exchange" RFI grant application to improve coordination of public and private investment in supporting the development of a workforce that can be competitive in tomorrow's economy. Our support of the AFNR Learning Exchange will assist in providing opportunities for local schools, postsecondary institutions and programs to enable learners to explore their academic and career interests in the STEM fields including Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources. Illinois teachers need continued opportunities to broaden their experiences to enhance their understanding of future agricultural career opportunities for their students.

Should the project be funded, ILCAE will offer the following support:

- Serve on the planning committee
- Review and report on the performance of the STEM AFNR program of study through student data and assessments, including pipeline benchmarks established by IPIC and work with school partners to improve student performance

Thank you for this opportunity to make a difference in student's lives. We look forward to working on this important project.

Sincerely,

Mike Massie
ILCAE Co-chairman

William Johnson
ILCAE Co-chairman
March 15, 2012

TO:    AFNR STEM Learning Exchange RFI Grant Review Committee
FR:    Parker Bane, President, Illinois Association Vocational Agriculture Teachers

As the president of the Illinois Association of Vocational Agricultural Teachers (IAVAT), I am very supportive of the “Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources – STEM Learning Exchange” RFI grant application to improve coordination of public and private investment in supporting the development of a workforce that can be competitive in tomorrow’s economy. Through our support of the AFNR Learning Exchange, we are assisting in providing opportunities for local schools, postsecondary institutions and programs to enable learners to explore their academic and career interests in the STEM fields including Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources. Teachers in Illinois need to broaden their experiences to better understand the opportunities for future careers future for their students. Our Illinois teachers are up to the task!

As I have had many discussions with business leaders, state and national policy makers, and elected officials, I can unequivocally say that the theme of encouraging greater collaboration between the public and private sectors is a priority solution to improve our education system and grow our economy. Additionally, our business leaders commonly express to me genuine concern for their future ability to employ a workforce that is not only skilled in disciplines such as biology and chemistry, but also understands the Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resource Industry. I believe that this project aligns perfectly with these priorities, and as a classroom teacher, am excited about the direction that it can take our profession.

Should the project be funded, IAVAT will offer the following support:

- Serve on the planning committee
- Coordinate professional development activities for teachers and schools administrators integrated and aligned across P-16 associated with the AFNR
- Collaborate with teacher training institutions to explore opportunities to train current Agricultural Education Pre-service Teachers
- Promote the grant activities through our newsletters, website, press releases, mailings, etc.
- Provide career resources to help students learn about job opportunities and career paths
- Provide tools and resources to assist students and schools with implementing personalized education plans and transitions to post-secondary academic and training programs, including establishing course articulation and dual credit opportunities that

Thank you for this opportunity to make a difference in student’s lives. We look forward to working on this important project.

Sincerely,

Parker Bane
IAVAT President
March 15, 2012

Dear AFNR STEM Learning Exchange RFI Grant Review Committee,

As the state coordinator of Facilitating Coordination in Agricultural Education (FCAE), I am very supportive of the "Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources – STEM Learning Exchange" RFI grant. The application to improve coordination of public and private investment in supporting the development of a workforce that can be competitive in tomorrow's economy. Through our support of the AFNR Learning Exchange, we are assisting in providing opportunities for local schools, postsecondary institutions and programs to enable learners to explore their academic and career interests in the STEM fields including Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources. Teachers in Illinois need to broaden their experiences to better understand the opportunities for future careers for their students. Our Illinois teachers are up to the task!

Should the project be funded, FCAE will offer the following support:
- Serve on the planning committee and project facilitator
- Coordinate professional development activities for teachers and schools administrators integrated and aligned across P-16 associated with the AFNR
- Collaborate with teacher training institutions to explore opportunities to train current Agricultural Education Pre-service Teachers
- Promote the grant activities through our newsletters, website, press releases, mailings, etc.
- Provide e-learning curriculum resources and assessments through our [www.agriculturaleducation.org](http://www.agriculturaleducation.org) website and MyCAERT online delivery system
- Provide career resources to help students learn about job opportunities and career paths
- Review and report on the performance of the STEM AFNR program of study through student data and assessments, including pipeline benchmarks established by IPIC and work with school partners to improve student performance

Thank you for this opportunity to make a difference in student's lives. We look forward to working on this important project.

Sincerely,

Jay Runner
FCAE State Coordinator
March 15, 2012

Dear AFNR STEM Learning Exchange RFI Grant Review Committee:

As President of Center for Agricultural and Environmental Research & Training, Inc. (CAERT), I fully support the “Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources – STEM Learning Exchange” RFI grant application to improve coordination of public and private investment in supporting the development of a workforce that is competitive in tomorrow’s economy. Our support of the AFNR Learning exchange will include the development of curriculum tools and delivery systems that help educators and learners explore both the industry’s potential and their academic and career interests in the STEM fields which include Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources.

Should the project be funded, CAERT will offer the following support:

- Coordinate professional development activities for teachers and schools administrators integrated and aligned across P-16 associated with the AFNR
- Collaborate with teacher training institutions to explore opportunities to train current Agricultural Education Pre-service Teachers
- Provide e-learning curriculum resources and assessments through our MyCAERT online delivery system
- Provide career resources to help students learn about job opportunities and career paths

Thank you for the opportunity to lend our support to this important endeavor. We look forward to being an active partner.

Sincerely,

Daniel J. Fentony
President