

FARMERS HELP KEEP KEY ROADS SNOW FREE

By Mike Orso

The harsh 2025-26 winter so far has rigorously tested the effectiveness of a McHenry County program with farmers designed to prevent snow drifting, the need for seemingly endless plowing, salting and excessive wear and tear of county roads.

The Living Snow Fence Program, started five years ago by the McHenry County Division of Transportation (MCDOT), mostly utilizes what many area farmers currently grow to create natural barriers for moving snow.

"We're basically working with the farmers in McHenry County using their agricultural crop as the living snow fence," said Bob Hensel, MCDOT's maintenance supervisor. "We implemented it just because of the open areas that we have within McHenry County. We get a lot of blowing and drifting snow."



Participating farmers leave multiple rows of corn in strips or other natural barriers that they have planted and grown parallel to several county roads. The strips of standing corn, planted

the previous spring, help manage snow by trapping it, reducing the need for repeated road treatment and continuous snow removal.

Continued on page 3...

AGRICULTURAL INTERNSHIP AVAILABLE

McHenry County Farm Bureau is excited to again offer an agriculture related summer internship.

The internship will provide experiences in program planning, Ag in the Classroom, media, governmental affairs, and public relations. The selected individual will receive valuable work experience, funds to further their education, and the opportunity to receive college credit.

The selected individual would be required to work an average of 20-30 hours per week. This includes a few night meetings and attendance

at activities. The actual schedule will be flexible to suit the intern's availability and needs of McHenry County Farm Bureau.

The internship is open to any McHenry County resident who will be a sophomore, junior or senior at a college or university this fall. Preference is given to applicants enrolled in an agriculture related field.

We are taking applications at this time and hope to fill the position by the end of March. To apply, simply email your cover letter and resume to Dan Volkers at mcfbmgr@att.net.

APPLY NOW FOR SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

McHenry County Farm Bureau Agricultural Education Foundation is offering scholarship opportunities.

THE JOHN W. HOFFMAN MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP - \$1,500

John Hoffman was a long-time member of the Northeastern Illinois Twin Cylinder Club (NEITCC) and served on its board of directors. He was an integral member of the Club, a 41-year employee of Alliance Contractors, Inc., a tractor restoration expert, and a member of the agricultural community.

NEITCC previously decided that a scholarship benefiting someone from the next generation of farmers or tradesmen was a fitting tribute to a man who volunteered constantly and was always willing and able to help. It would be John's hope that a scholarship in his memory would go to someone with the same love of farming and/or the trades that he had.

McHenry County Farm Bureau Foundation serves as the fiscal agent and scholarship administrator for this scholarship opportunity for high school seniors.

MCFB FOUNDATION AGRICULTURE SCHOLARSHIP - \$1,500

The scholarship is available for high school seniors pursuing continuing education in agriculture or agriculture-related fields.

Both scholarship opportunities are offered to members or dependents of members, and to non-members who are residing within McHenry County, who wish to pursue higher education in an agricultural or trade related field. Additional scholarships may be awarded if funds are available, and we have multiple applicants at the time of judging.

An online application is available through our website at mchenrycfb.org. Scholarship applications need to be received by March 2, 2026.

If you have any questions regarding these scholarships, please call our office at 815-338-1520 or email mcfbmgr@att.net.

AG EXPO VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

The Ag Expo has been held every other year since 1988 (with a hiatus during COVID pandemic). In total it has reached 43,500 students.

Past participants were rotated through a variety of different stations, listening to different aspects of agriculture in 6-minute sessions. The booths included beef, bees, goats, food safety, dairy, fiber arts, monarchs, poultry, equine, soybeans, corn, specialty crops, swine, sheep, soil and water conservation, machinery/equipment safety, 4-H, Ag. careers and Christmas trees.

Our last expo had 1,300 grade school students take part. Roughly 200 volunteers helped with the event, serving as group leaders, presenters, providing animals or materials, and setting up and tearing down.

This year's event is scheduled for April 7 - 9 at the McHenry County Fairgrounds in Woodstock. Group leaders, presenters, and timekeepers are needed for this event. Call our office at 815-338-1520 or email mcfbaitc@att.net if you are interested in helping with this great event.



FARMERS HELP Continued from page 1...

"I've lived and traveled on Kishwaukee Valley Road my whole life and it blows something terrible all the time," said Woodstock farmer Chris McKee, one of the first county farmers to voluntarily participate in the MCDOT Living Snow Fence Program. "I don't think I've ever gotten stuck, but close. That whole road drifts from one end to the other."

Over the years of repeatedly dealing with blowing and drifting snow, MCDOT has identified, on a road-by-road basis, where blowing and drifting snow makes it hazardous for motorists.

"We sat down and made a map up and just highlighted the sections of roads that we thought an artificial or a living snow fence would provide a better protection of roadway to make it easier to travel," said MCDOT's Hensel. "I

would say on average, Greenwood Road is probably top 3 in blowing and drifting snow. Way down in the southwest corner, Harmony Road gets quite a bit. Then, right in the middle, Kishwaukee Valley Road."

After brainstorming ideas to keep these and some other county roads free of snow drifts, MCDOT decided to implement the Living Snow Fence Program.

"As we started looking at it back in 2019 we also took a look at the cost," said Ernest Varga, MCDOT design engineer, who notes that the county still does install conventional snow fences in some areas. "The concept was, if we could get continual areas with a living snow fence, we don't have to put in that manpower, we don't have to maintain that material, we don't have to be racing the clock. It has proved to be very helpful."

Cities, towns, villages, townships, the county and the state of Illinois have different jurisdictions when it comes to road maintenance responsibilities. As far as roads under county control, officials believe snow fences that utilize standing corn and even hay bales and silage (livestock feed) bags have proven to be effective to slow and reduce drifting snow. McHenry County will pay farmers \$2,000 per acre at the end of each year's contract for maintaining a living snow fence.

"You can see the difference not only throughout a snowstorm but after a snowstorm on how well that standing crop collects the snowfall and does not allow it on the road," said Hensel. "By doing that, it saves us time, money, wear and tear on equipment and just overall lowers our cost on winter operations."



From left to right are Hans Varga, MCDOT Public Information Officer, Bob Hensel MCDOT Maintenance Supervisor, and Ernest Varga, MCDOT Design Engineer.

EDIBLE PRODUCTS AVAILABLE AT THE FARM BUREAU OFFICE:

Honey (3 lbs.).....	\$15.00
Pork Barbeque Spice (12 oz.)	\$12.00
Pork Burgers (1 lbs.)	\$6.00
Bratwurst (1 lb.)	\$6.00
Italian Sausage Links (1 lb.)	\$6.00
Breakfast Sausage (1 lb.)	\$5.00
Italian Sausage (1 lb.)	\$5.00

Items are produced locally.

Curbside pick-up is available 815-338-1520.

Farm Bureau Office is located at
1102 McConnell Rd, Woodstock.

OFFICE HOURS

Monday - Friday 8:00 am to 4:30 pm
(Office is closed 12:00-1:00 pm)



SAVE THE DATE

MARCH 7, 2026

We have an evening of fun, food, and fellowship planned that will benefit our foundation. The event will be held the evening of Saturday, March 7, at the Harvard Moose. Funds raised from the event will support scholarships, an internship, and our Ag in the Classroom program.

Visit mchenrycfb.org/draw-down for additional details. Contact Dan Volkers at 815-338-1520 or email him at mcfbmgr@att.net for ticket availability.



McHenry County Farm Bureau Foundation is a 501 C 3 charitable organization.

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT FARM EQUIPMENT ON THE ROAD



Watch your speed! Farm equipment cannot travel more than 25 mph.

SMV Sign warns you that the equipment will travel at slower speeds.

Only pass when it is safe for you and the farmer. Following at 20 mph for 6 minutes = waiting at 2 stoplights.

Farmers need to make wide turns with their equipment. This means they may need both lanes of the road at intersections, give them room to do so.

