



Indiana State Department of Agriculture
Emergency Response Report
August 31, 2020

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Introduction

Throughout Indiana's rich history, agriculture has played an important role in the state's economic and cultural identity. Second only to manufacturing, the agriculture industry is vital to the health of Indiana's economy. Indiana is home to more than 55,000 farms cultivating more than 15 million acres. A variety of crop and livestock categories are ranked in the top five nationally, and Indiana actively promotes the use of biofuels, including ethanol and blended biofuels, derived from corn and soybeans. Indiana's natural environment and commitment to supporting industries make it an ideal location for agricultural business opportunities – a state that works for agribusiness.

The Indiana State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) was established as a separate state agency by the Legislature in 2005. Administratively, ISDA reports to the Lt. Governor, who also serves as Indiana's Secretary of Agriculture and Rural Development. ISDA is also a member of the Governor's Cabinet.

The mission of ISDA is to support growth in Indiana agriculture by serving as an advocate at the local, state and federal level; defining and nurturing economic opportunity in the food, fuel and fiber sectors; and enhancing the stewardship of natural resources on agricultural land. To accomplish this mission, ISDA has 5 divisions: Economic Development, FFA, Indiana Grain Buyers, Public Affairs and Soil Conservation. These divisions are guided by the Indiana Agriculture Strategic Plan: <https://www.in.gov/isda/3547.htm>



Question 1: Overview of which operations or services were reduced or suspended during the pandemic including whether the suspension or reduction was required by an executive order.

On March 24th, in accordance with [Executive Order 20-08](#), all ISDA staff shifted to remote work and the central office in Indianapolis closed. Staff were already equipped for remote work with laptops, cell phones, VPN access and hotspots. Division directors updated telework policies for their teams and communicated expectations with staff. All meetings and visits with internal staff and external stakeholders were either postponed or moved to a virtual platform. ISDA staff quickly adapted to this new format and learned how to facilitate and participate in WebEx, Microsoft Teams and Zoom meetings. ISDA hosted weekly calls for the Indiana Agriculture Executives and cohosted weekly calls with BOAH for general members of the agriculture industry. While the agency was not in the public eye as much as a normal year, agency leadership and staff remained visible by hosting these calls and being active on social media.

All public meetings hosted by ISDA were postponed or moved to an electronic format in accordance with [Executive Order 20-04](#). This included meetings of the State Soil Conservation Board, Indiana Grain Indemnity Corporation, Indiana Land Resources Council and Indiana Grown Commission.

Economic Development

[Executive Order 20-08](#) suspended all statewide, national and international travel for the Economic Development division. This drastically reduced the division's outreach and affected business development meetings, international trade shows and trade missions. In-person networking opportunities, educational programs and speaking events were suspended or moved to a virtual platform. While virtual platforms were very useful during the pandemic, they did decrease the opportunity for dialogue, relationship building and opportunity exploration.

The Indiana Grown team had to cancel many events. The annual Indiana Grown Monumental Marketplace was cancelled in June. This impacted over 100 members who were unable to sell and sample their products to approximately 5,500 attendees. Due to the cancellation of the Indiana State Fair, the Indiana Grown store was also cancelled. This impacted over 100 members who were not able to sell products and created a revenue loss of approximately \$60,000 for ISDA.

While Indiana Grown staff worked from home, they were able to field many calls from members asking about where to find resources. Indiana Grown used social media, blog posts and phone calls to make sure members had up to date industry information from ISDH, IEDC, the Governor's office, local universities and the CDC. They also reached out to members who did not have access to internet to share information with them as well. When some members were unable to sell products through their traditional markets, Indiana Grown staff counseled

members on how to move to an online sales format and how best to use social media as a sales tool. Lastly, Indiana Grown worked with food banks, pantries and schools to ensure they were finding food and resources to ensure Hoosier families had access to nutritious and healthy food.

The Livestock Market Reporting program was reduced from its official format since market reporters were no longer able to attend auctions in person. Additionally, the certified livestock program trainings were cancelled and suspended. The hardwoods industry promotion initiative, “Woods on Wheels” was scheduled to rollout at the State Fair but was ultimately pushed back.

Indiana FFA

Indiana FFA transitioned programming to virtual experiences, including the annual Indiana State Convention. Normally, 2,500 Indiana FFA students from around the state would travel to Purdue University for a week of convention activities. This year, there were over 5,500 device clicks for 6 sessions offered virtually. As of now, there have been 15 competitive events cancelled and 6 postponed with the potential for cancelling them. FFA staff have hosted 12 virtual competitive events so far. Indiana FFA usually operates a building full of activities at the Indiana State Fair but due to the fair being cancelled, their building will remain closed until next year.

The National FFA Organization announced that the 2020 National FFA Convention and Expo will be held virtually in October. The organization also extended its contract with Indianapolis as the host city from 2031 to 2033.

Indiana Grain Buyers and Warehouse Licensing Agency

The Indiana Grain Buyers and Warehouse Licensing Agency (IGBWLA) staff primarily worked from home during the stay at home order and did not make any non-essential visits. This delayed their ability to inspect licensees’ facilities and records for compliance, liquidity, and solvency pursuant to IC 26-3-7-3(5) and IC 26-3-7-3(6). The Agency also delayed the inspection of scale certifications and the inspection of grain moisture testing equipment pursuant to IC 26-3-7-5 and IC 1-5-11-8. Many licensee’s closed their offices to visitors and implemented new safety procedures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. When auditors did have to visit a facility, they followed these new procedures. When stage 2 of the Governor’s “Back on Track” plan began, auditors slowly and carefully started to resume normal audits and inspections, while following CDC, ISDH and individual company guidelines.

Public Affairs

The Public Affairs division shifted much of its work during the pandemic. Our Communications division delayed various press releases and social media content that was not related to COVID-19 and instead focused on sharing information and resources related to the public health emergency. This included answering many questions from constituents and legislators and supporting the state’s Joint Information Center (JIC).

The Hoosier Homestead ceremonies in March and August were moved to a meet and greet format and delayed until late July and early August. This impacted approximately 151 recipients and over 1,500 guests who normally attend the ceremonies.

The legislative affairs team assisted agency leadership with communicating industry challenges and concerns to the Lt. Governor and Governor. This included challenges related to transportation, workforce and the food supply. The agency also fielded questions and directed agribusinesses to reliable sources of PPE.

The Indiana Land Resources Council delayed their public meeting and instead focused on counselors gathering land use concerns from their individual constituencies to discuss at a public meeting in August.

On March 23, 2020, the FDA issued a partial stop work order for the FDA's Office of Regulatory Affairs (ORA) State Contracts and Cooperative Agreements indefinitely. This partial stop work order prohibited the use of FDA grant funds for face-to-face outreach and education activities but permitted the use of grant funds for remote activities. The partial stop-work order was lifted on June 5, 2020. This stop work order directly affected the Safe Produce Indiana program which falls under the public affairs team.

Safe Produce Indiana is a collaborative partnership between ISDA, ISDH, and Purdue University Extension. The FDA grant-funded program aims to educate Indiana produce growers about farm food safety best practices and prepare growers to meet the regulatory requirements of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule (21CFR112). The ISDA policy team plays a crucial role in the Safe Produce Indiana program by leading outreach and promotional activities, as well as assisting with educational efforts. ISDA's outreach efforts for Safe Produce IN are entirely funded by grant PAR-16-137 through the FDA. These funds are sub-awarded from the ISDH Food Protection Program.

During the stop work order and the public health emergency, ISDA was unable to attend in-person produce safety trainings, outreach events, or produce safety conferences. ISDA was also unable to visit Indiana produce farms to assist with FSMA implementation, technical assistance and "On Farm Readiness Reviews" until the partial stop work order was lifted. The delayed promotion of these activities is expected to negatively impact participation. Aside from the FDA's partial stop work order, ISDA will be unable to attend some planned summer outreach events, such as county fairs and State Fair, due to cancellations and modifications.

Due to these constraints, ISDA shifted their Safe Produce IN outreach focus to remote forms of program promotion and grower assistance. ISDA's Food Safety Outreach Coordinator shared COVID-19 updates and food safety resources with growers via email, phone, and social media. ISDA also used this time to create promotional and educational materials for growers and consumers for future outreach purposes. After FDA lifted the partial stop work order, ISDA began scheduling farm visits and in-person training sessions.

Soil Conservation

Many ISDA soil conservation field staff work out of Federal USDA Service Centers. These centers closed to the public and field staff shifted to working from home or out of their vehicles.

Each Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is required by IC 14-32-4-6 to hold an annual meeting of all land occupiers in the district during the first quarter of each calendar year. Many districts had already met before the public health emergency, but those that hadn't were given a waiver from this requirement by [Executive Order 20-04](#), which suspended all specific statutory deadlines requiring a governing body to meet. While SWCDs aren't formally under ISDA, the State Soil Conservation Board oversees the SWCDs and ISDA oversees that board.

Question 2: Overview on preparations to address future emergencies and recovery from emergencies based on the state agency's experience with the COVID-19 pandemic.

In preparation for future emergencies, the agency as a whole will be continuing to ensure staff are well equipped and prepared to work remotely if needed. This includes keeping technology updated and staff educated on the agency's telework policy. This also includes training staff on how to use virtual platforms and the best practices for hosting and participating in virtual meetings. Doing so will allow staff to more quickly shift to a virtual format if needed in the future.

Economic Development

The Economic Development division is exploring platforms to host virtual tradeshow and trade missions. Staff have already participated in a virtual Pan-Asia event that served as a great example of how such events may be held in the future.

The market reporting division established a new Market News reporting system. This new system allows for self-reporting even if ISDA's Market Reporter cannot be physically present at a livestock auction in the future.

Economic Development staff are sharing more and more information and education through webinars and are continuing to learn how to leverage this tool in the future. They are also utilizing online surveys to help gather and share new market insights directly with stakeholders rather than speaking face-to-face at meetings or events.

The grants program is formalizing internal policies to increase rapid response capability during an emergency. This will allow ISDA as a grantor to provide flexibility and allow grantees to request flexibility on grant scope, budget or timeframes.

Indiana Grown is crafting an online e-commerce marketplace to support virtual sales opportunities for members. The marketplace has been developed and once approved, will be available for all Indiana Grown members. They are also exploring no-cost ways to continue marketing and communications activities in the event spending is suspended in the future. Finally, Indiana Grown staff are creating and updating more guides and lists to share resources with consumers such as [Indiana Grown's Protein Guide](#).

Indiana FFA

Indiana FFA, along with partners, has been building plans for increased social distancing at events and reduced numbers of participants. Staff have also looked into offering more options of the same programming to continue to serve a certain percentage of the population, just not all at the same time. Additionally some programming for the fall will transition to virtual experiences. For future emergencies, the team will lean on what they were able to accomplish with virtual experiences the past few months. Since FFA is tied so closely to schools – ultimately much of the preparation will be in the realm of virtual individual experiences as the organization and schools will be required to follow state and local mandates for student participation.

Indiana Grain Buyers and Warehouse Licensing Agency

IGBWLA is looking into purchasing two scanners and the full adobe acrobat software in order to digitize their records. The current recordkeeping system is primarily paper based and requires direct access to the filing cabinets in the office. Accessing these files would be difficult, if not impossible during a future emergency. Additionally, the new auditing software, Integrity, does not have the capability to access historical audits. Further software development will need to be completed to enable this feature.

Public Affairs

The Public Affairs division has been preparing for future emergencies by attending media trainings and learning better ways to communicate and share information with the public. As future events are planned, staff are working to ensure CDC guidelines are followed and alternate plans and schedules are prepared. They are developing best practices for hosting virtual public meetings in the event they are needed in the future and communicating with the Public Access Counselor to ensure Open Door Law is followed for all agency public meetings.

Soil Conservation

The soil conservation staff will continue to provide all staff capable of working remotely with access to laptops, hotspots, cell phones etc. Staff continue to work with SWCD's to modernize election procedures and meeting best practices to better adapt to future emergencies.

Question 3: Recommendations, if any, for legislation that may be needed to help ensure the agency is prepared to address future emergencies.

The agency has no recommendations at this time.

Question 4: Recommendations, if any, for legislation to permanently repeal or modify any regulations or laws that were or are partially or fully suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The agency has no recommendations at this time.