

Homegrown by Heroes Shines Light on Service Men and Women in Agriculture

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SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA) is proud to relaunch a program aimed at highlighting our service men and women in 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.

“As a veteran, I understand how hard it is to return to civilian life,” said Jerry Costello II, IDOA Acting Director. “We want to help our service men and women in the agriculture industry in any way possible. Highlighting products grown by our veterans will not only help to grow the agriculture industry but give our service men and women the boost they need to grow their second career.”

“I commend the Department of Agriculture for continuing to give Illinois Veterans the opportunity to distinguish themselves in a competitive marketplace,” said Linda Chapa LaVia, Illinois Department of Veterans’ Affairs Director. “When given the opportunity, Americans unwaveringly support our nations’ heroes. The Homegrown by Heroes program helps veterans thrive and gives the public the chance to show their appreciation for their service.”

“As someone who grew up farming, I know farmers are vital to the prosperity of both our state and nation as are the men and women who volunteer for military service and defend America,” said Maj. Gen. Richard R. Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. “Many of the Illinois National Guard’s Soldiers and Airmen are also farmers. The Homegrown by Heroes program is a way for consumers to know that produce comes from Illinois’ fields and orchards and from a man or woman who was willing to put his or her life on the line in defense of the United States of America.”

Homegrown by Heroes is a free program for Illinois veterans. To be eligible, veterans must provide proof of service, a letter of support from their commanding officer or a designated representative and must 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 Illinois grown and 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 of Illinois (FVC), Illinois National Guard, Illinois Veterans Affairs, and statewide Farmer Veterans Program, training and education also are components of the initiative, which will make informational resources available to veterans desiring to farm in the state. These programs will:

- 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.

Illinois veterans who produce, process or package products in Illinois may also qualify for other business development programs and services. Additional programs and

services include Specialty Crop Grants, trade show assistance, and export assistance. Please contact the IDOA Marketing Department to find out which program or service is right for your business.

For more information on how to become a part of the Illinois Homegrown by Heroes Program visit www.agr.state.il.us/hbh.