

State Treasurer Frerichs Announces Winners Of 2023 Cream Of The Crop Photo Contest

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SPRINGFIELD – Illinois State Treasurer Michael Frerichs today announced the winners of the 2023 *Cream of the Crop Photo Contest*, which provides an opportunity for young photographers to share their vision of agriculture in our state. Students who won first, second or third place in each age category will be awarded Bright Start scholarships.

“Thank you to all the young photographers who shared their talents by participating in this year’s contest. We’re impressed with everyone’s creativity in capturing the beauty of Illinois agriculture,” Frerichs said. “Congratulations to the winners, who will be awarded Bright Start scholarships that they can use for qualified expenses related to their post-secondary education.”

A cake reception will be held at 11 a.m. on Aug. 11 at the Illinois State Fair to celebrate the 11th year of the *Cream of the Crop Photo Contest* and to honor the young photographers who won first, second or third place. The reception will be open to the public and will take place at the Treasurer’s Tent, located on Brian Raney Avenue on the fairgrounds.

The winning photos in each of the age categories will be on display during the Illinois State Fair in the Treasurer’s Tent. They also can be viewed on the State Treasurer’s Office website [here](#). Winning entries and other photo submissions will be featured in Ag Invest marketing material, including the 2023-2024 Ag Invest calendar.

Students participating in this year’s contest were allowed to submit up to two photos, and a panel of judges selected the winning entries. The judges were Mary Morgan, principal asset quality & assurance officer at Compeer Financial; Scott Rhoads, regional president of Carrollton Bank; Gary Mueller, vice president of Havana National Bank; and Riley Duckworth, associate director of Illinois Foundation FFA.

The contest consisted of three age categories — ages 8-10, 11-14 and 15-18. Top winners were awarded Bright Start scholarships, with first-place winners in each age category receiving \$1,000, second-place winners receiving \$500, and third-place winners receiving \$250. Students who won more than once were permitted to receive one scholarship award.

Treasurer Frerichs administers Bright Start, the Illinois direct-sold 529 program that provides families with a tax-advantaged investment vehicle to help save for future education expenses at a university or college, community college, trade school or apprenticeship. For more information about the Treasurer’s Office College Savings programs, visit ILCollegeSavings.com or call 877.432.7444

The *Cream of the Crop Photo Contest* is part of the Illinois State Treasurer’s Ag Invest program, which marks its 40th anniversary this year. Ag Invest is an agriculture-focused impact investment program providing loan opportunities for Illinois farmers and agribusinesses to start, expand or add value to their farm operations. Ag Invest offers affordable financing through two options: the Ag Invest Agriculture Operating Line of Credit and the Long-Term Ag & Value-Added Ag program. The Treasurer’s Office partners with eligible financial institutions in Illinois to provide low-interest loans to

Illinois farmers. The loans provided by the financial institution can be used for the purchase of farm equipment, purchase of land, construction-related expenses, operating lines of credit or other costs related to conventional or sustainable farming.

Since 2015, when Frerichs became treasurer, the Ag Invest program has supported more than 7,000 agriculture borrowers and partnered with more than 45 financial institutions.

8-10 Age Bracket Winners

First Place: Bennett Schumacher, *At Sunset*, Jacksonville, IL (Morgan County)

Second Place: Bennett Schumacher, *Working Hard*, Jacksonville, IL (Morgan County)

Third Place: Leah Johnson, *Rose Lettuce*, Pleasant Plains, IL (Sangamon County)

11-14 Age Bracket Winners

First Place: Carolyn Lee, *American Cattle*, Wellington, IL (Iroquois County)

Second Place: Anna Parr, *Moo*, Mason City, IL (Mason County)

Third Place: Anna Parr, *Mama and Her Babies*, Mason City, IL (Mason County)

15-18 Age Bracket Winners

First Place: Macy McLaughlin, *Evening Elegance*, Mason City, IL (Mason County)

Second Place: Alec Shields, *Beneath the Bluffs*, Carbondale, IL (Jackson County)

Second Place: Sophie Robinson, *Crop Sprayer*, Taylorville, IL (Christian County)

Third Place: Hallie Smith, *Mary the Little Lamb*, Taylorville, IL (Christian County)