



Introducing the Gardner Agriculture Policy Program

Jonathan Coppess, Gary Schnitkey, Nick Paulson, and Kathy Baylis

Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics
University of Illinois

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Beginning January 2017, the Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics (ACE) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in conjunction with the *farmdoc* project will operate the Gardner Agriculture Policy Program from funds generously provided by the Leonard and Lila Gardner/Illinois Farm Bureau Family of Companies endowment. This article discusses the components of the program and provides historical background.

The Gardner Agriculture Policy Program will coordinate and prioritize efforts that focus on policies for the upcoming farm bill, conservation management policies and policies related to international trade and global agriculture. The effort will be led by the authors of this article, all of whom are ACE faculty and members of the *farmdoc* project team. A key component of the program will be a series of original analytical articles for *farmdoc daily* that focus on agriculture policies. The articles in this series will involve research efforts related to those policies and their development. All articles will be a part of the "Gardner Policy Series" (GPS) on *farmdoc daily* and will be labeled as such. They will also be collected on the Gardner Agricultural Policy Program page of the *farmdoc* website, which is currently under construction. Finally, the articles will also be compiled annually and presented in an annual program report.

In addition to the Gardner Policy Series, the program will also conduct an annual Gardner Agriculture Policy Lecture and Roundtable on the University of Illinois campus. An invited agriculture policy expert will provide a keynote lecture and policy experts from land grant universities, as well as others interested in and working on agriculture policy, will be invited for a roundtable discussion. The date and further details for the inaugural 2017 event will be forthcoming.

Finally, the Gardner Agriculture Policy Program will contribute to the development of web-based analytical, decision support and educational tools for use by farmers, agri-businesses and policymakers. These tools will build upon existing expertise, experience and efforts by the authors and the *farmdoc* project team, including the FAST tools and the farm bill toolbox effort for the 2014 Farm Bill farm program decisions. Efforts are currently underway and more information will become available. All tools developed will be accessible on the Gardner Agriculture Policy Program webpage.

"I'm excited to see the Gardner Agriculture Policy Program underway" commented Rich Guebert, Jr., President of the Illinois Farm Bureau. "Farm policy, conservation and international trade are all vitally important to farmers. I believe the Gardner Policy Series and other components of the program will be a great resource for farmers."

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The Gardner Agriculture Policy Program is dedicated to the memory of Leonard “Len” Gardner (1934-2010). Len was a leading voice on agricultural policy, politics and related issues for Illinois farmers, including for the 36 years that he worked for the Illinois Farm Bureau. Len and his wife Lila (1932-2017) were proud graduates of the University of Illinois (where they met) and maintained a strong devotion to the University. That dedication and devotion led them to donate a substantial portion of their net worth in the form of the family farmstead to endow a chair of agriculture policy in conjunction with the Illinois Farm Bureau Family of Companies. Dr. Robert Thompson was the Chair from 2004 until his retirement in 2010.

Len Gardner was born and raised on the family farm near Heyworth, Illinois in McLean County. Lila was born and raised in Bethany, Illinois; she passed away on January 3rd of this year. They both graduated from the University of Illinois in 1954 and were married that August. With her degree in education from Illinois, she taught elementary students in Urbana and Bloomington. Len initially pursued a doctorate but left to raise his family and begin his career with Illinois Farm Bureau in 1956. His first job was in the library on Ohio Street in Chicago. Being raised on a farm created a passion for farming, but serious allergies prevented him from returning to it. Instead of farming, Len became interested in farm policy and politics while working in that library on Ohio Street; he poured his passions and energy into it for the rest of his life. Over the years, he helped with policy development on behalf of Illinois farmers through the Illinois Farm Bureau and was an influential voice in Illinois agriculture who was also well-known on Capitol Hill.

Len understood that it was important to get farmers involved with the process and to make sure their input was considered. Each year, he took a group of farmers to Washington DC so that they could meet with elected officials. He knew that this was the most effective way for farmers to comprehend how things worked while at the same time making certain that they could provide their input. He also dedicated himself to making certain that Illinois farmers understood the policies that came out of Washington DC and how they were developed. He also worked extensively on educating farmers and wanted to make sure policies worked for them. Len travelled all over the State of Illinois to attend county Farm Bureau meetings. He had a knack for presenting complex policy and political matters to farmers. He was a great speaker but also a great listener who gathered input from the farmers in attendance.

Len was also dedicated to his family and regardless of his interests in policy or the pressures of his job, family always came first. Len and Lila’s daughter, Dr. Kathy Thomforde, recalled that no matter where the county Farm Bureau meeting was, Len always drove home even if late at night. She fondly remembered as a young girl being “his little phantom at the top of the stairs after he had been trekking all over the state for meetings,” half asleep and waiting for his return. She added that family vacations also tended to be scheduled to coincide with the American Farm Bureau Federation’s annual meetings. Len’s commitment to his family took priority over his passion for farm policy; it was likely the main reason he remained in Illinois and did not seek a path—either elected or appointed—to Washington, DC. But he also made certain to introduce Kathy and his grandchildren to DC, its policymakers and processes, just as he did for Illinois farmers.

Those that served with Len noted that his “legacy continues not only through his and Lila’s endowment, but in the people he inspired. He has a loyal and grateful cast of former staff and associates that continue their service in the agricultural policy arena, all with the imprint of Len’s skillful and effective way of doing business.” His influence in Illinois and national agriculture policy and politics was extensive. For example, Len helped convince Ed Madigan to run for office; Madigan went on to serve in Congress from 1973 to 1991, was ranking member on the House Agriculture Committee and became George H.W. Bush’s Secretary of Agriculture.

The endowment to the University of Illinois is dedicated to Len’s legacy and the Gardner Agriculture Policy Program seeks to continue and build upon it. He was passionate about policy and politics; full of integrity and known as a straight shooter. He worked hard, helping both farmers and policymakers. He wanted the gift to help continue this work and to produce things meaningful to policymakers but, more importantly, to farmers “where the rubber met the road” on their farms and for their businesses. It is the legacy and memory of Len Gardner—his passion, dedication, integrity and devotion—that will be the core of the Gardner Agriculture Policy Program.