Organizational Member Strategy (OMS)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

December 2023

1. Why are we working on an organizational member strategy?

   We are seeing:
   
   • Continued decline in membership,
   • Fewer and different types of farmers in the future with different needs and expectations,
   • The need to serve farmers at all stages of their careers,
   • Resource inconsistencies and concern over the development of future revenue streams (CFB finances),
   • Changing member and employee preferences on how to deliver services differently, through both staffing and structure, and
   • A need for better stewardship of current and future volunteer leaders.

   Therefore, county Farm Bureaus and Illinois Farm Bureau must work together with a sense of urgency and take intentional steps to reinvent the organization over the coming years to maintain relevancy for farmers of the future while ensuring the advocacy and engagement needs of all members are being delivered as efficiently and effectively as possible.

2. Who is working on this?

   An Advisory Committee was selected by President Rich Guebert and includes four IAA Directors, five CFB Presidents, four CFB managers, and two Young Leaders. These individuals were selected through an application process. This group meets at least monthly and advises staff on the next steps. The OMS staff team is made up of Chief Strategy Officer Mark Gebhards, and six IFB staff representing each division of IFB (Governmental Affairs & Commodities, Marketing & Communications, Finance, Legal, Field & Member Services, and the President’s Office).

3. When will county Farm Bureaus and members be further engaged and asked for additional input?

   • During this Annual Meeting, leaders can share their opinion during a series of focus groups. CFB Presidents engaged in the OMS Advisory Committee will present in a MicroTalk on OMS, and delegates will hear an update from Chief Strategy Officer, Mark Gebhards.
   • This winter, county Farm Bureau Managers will be asked for input on their roles as managers and what challenges and opportunities they see for Farm Bureau.
   • A survey will be emailed to members and prospective members in January 2024 to ask for their input on Farm Bureau.
   • There will be listening sessions at winter conferences including the Everything Local Conference, Young Leader Conference, and Governmental Affairs Leadership Conference.
   • OMS will be calling on members and area experts to serve on sub-committees to allow more in-depth feedback and help on different topics along the way.

4. What is different about this strategy effort compared to other efforts Illinois Farm Bureau has worked on in the past?

   President Guebert and IFB leadership took the opportunity to restructure IFB’s leadership team after two retirements this year, creating a new Chief Strategy Officer position and team, and allocating significant staff time to be utilized for the OMS. Within that restructuring, roles and responsibilities were shifted to improve how we serve members and county Farm Bureaus, setting the stage for future organizational change. We’ve asked ourselves many of these questions before. This time, steps have already been taken to initiate change, and the momentum is there to craft and take more actionable steps that will position us for success.
5. **Are we still utilizing Aimpoint Research consulting firm to assist with this work?**

Aimpoint will continue to be leveraged for industry intelligence, but the overall strategy will now be led by the OMS Advisory Committee and staffed by IFB’s Chief Strategy Officer and staff team.

6. **Why were Advisory Committee members asked to sign NDAs?**

Non-Disclosure Agreements (or “NDAs”) are fairly common practice for corporate initiatives of this size and scale, and they serve two main purposes. First, as part of this effort, the Advisory Committee will have access to and evaluate confidential source material that would be inappropriate to share outside of the group; this material may include not only proprietary research data from third party vendors but also confidential financial data specific to individual county Farm Bureaus, the Illinois Farm Bureau, and/or COUNTRY Financial. Secondly, NDAs help protect the Committee’s work-in-progress. As part of the strategy work, the Advisory Committee is likely to consider and discuss a variety of ideas and proposals, and the Committee may ultimately recommend pursuing some ideas but not others. Consequently, NDAs help manage the timing of updates and communications to various stakeholders about the Committee’s work-in-progress and any proposals the Committee is seriously considering.

7. **What has the OMS accomplished so far?**

IFB leadership commissioned consultant Aimpoint Research during 2022 to help evaluate the local and global factors impacting the future of agriculture and to facilitate “future state exercises” with the IFB Board of Directors. This work highlighted the need for a plan of action as we look to modernize our organization for the future. In 2023, IAA leadership decided to take that work ourselves, dedicating staff and volunteer resources to the effort. The OMS Advisory Committee has developed a “why” statement and has prioritized the challenges the OMS should tackle first. They have developed a plan to gather input from members through surveys and focus groups from now through March.

8. **Will the OMS work consider the future of our relationship with COUNTRY Financial?**

Illinois Farm Bureau will continue to have a strong relationship with COUNTRY Financial. The OMS timeline takes into consideration the current durations of the COUNTRY partnership agreements. Considering those agreements in the ongoing analysis and strategy development is crucial to our ongoing success. However, we believe it is critical to learn more about our members and what farmers will need in the future as the driving basis for change in the next several years.

9. **How will information and decisions be communicated?**

From now until March 2024, we are focusing on gathering feedback and input from members and prospective members and will plan to share those findings throughout that time. We understand that Illinois is a diverse state. From northern to southern Illinois, east to west, our members may need different things. There won’t be a one-size-fits-all solution. We also understand that not everyone is ready for change. We hope to pilot some new approaches based on this data collection phase, so we are interested in working with county Farm Bureaus that are interested in a different approach.

10. **Why are you using the old “Vintage” logo in your strategy materials?**

The “bug” icon is nostalgic for many, reminding members of the establishment of our partnership agreements with COUNTRY Financial. As we evaluate the best structure for our future, we wanted to remind everyone of the strong foundation we have now, and inspire creativity in current leaders, just like our forefathers had when they set us up years ago.

11. **How can members be part of this process?**

The next phase of the OMS will consist of a lot of discussions with members to gather information on their wants and needs. We’ll be hosting focus groups at the IAA Annual Meeting, Everything Local Conference, Young Leader Conference and Governmental Affairs Leadership Conference. Members who are unable to participate in those events can contact their county Farm Bureau at any time. Or, to reach the OMS Advisory Committee, send an email to oms@ilfb.org. We’ll also conduct a survey in January.