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The Searle Funds at The Chicago Community Trust in Partnership with the Illinois Farm Bureau Announce the Launch of The Food and Agricultural Roadmap for Illinois

New partnership for competitiveness and sustainable growth in food and agriculture

CHICAGO – At a time when population growth continues to strain the world’s food supply and drive up prices, the Searle Funds at The Chicago Community Trust, in collaboration with the Illinois Farm Bureau, announced today the launch of a new partnership for competitiveness and sustainable growth in food and agriculture in Illinois.

The partnership, The Food and Agricultural Roadmap for Illinois (FARM Illinois), will bring together Illinois’ top agricultural, business, and economic leaders to develop and advocate for the implementation of a comprehensive and integrated strategic plan for Illinois and the Chicago region to ensure the state is meeting the 21st Century challenge of global food security. FARM Illinois will be led by Dr. Robert Easter, president of the University of Illinois, and overseen by a high-level Leadership Council comprised of more than 25 experts and distinguished leaders with renowned experience in agriculture, international markets, global food security, sustainability, conservation, community development, and related issues. Lori Healey, Chief Executive Officer of Tur Partners, will manage the initiative.

“Chicago is a global economic hub and Illinois is a national leader in agriculture,” said Dr. Robert Easter, President, University of Illinois and Leadership Council Chair for FARM Illinois. “FARM Illinois will provide the guidance and policy outcomes necessary to further establish Illinois as a leader in agriculture and sustainability and meet the needs of consumers and producers in the future.”

The FARM Illinois plan will examine and assess all aspects of and influences on the agriculture-food value chain in Illinois and its impact on both the urban and rural economies and quality of life. The goal of the project is to release a plan on the findings in the spring of 2015 to help:

- Drive agricultural innovation
- Enable sustainable economic growth
- Encourage public-private partnership and collaboration
- Develop a world-class workforce
- Address community development and nutrition needs
- Conserve and enhance natural resources
- Adapt to climate change pressures
- Enhance global and local food security

“Agriculture is number one in terms of economic impact in Illinois bringing in more than \$9 billion to the state each year and exporting almost \$4 billion of goods annually,” says Terry Mazany, president and CEO of The Chicago Community Trust and advisor to FARM Illinois. “The urgency of this effort is underscored by the growing threat of climate change to regional, national and global food security combined with a mission to achieve improved health and economic development— Illinois is ideally positioned to be a global leader solving the 21st Century challenge of feeding 9 billion people with diets that are nutritious and sustainably produced.”

Approximately 90 percent of Illinois agricultural land could be used to grow crops and nearly one million Illinois workers are employed in the food and fiber system, ranking Illinois as one of the top states in

dependency on agriculture (Illinois Department of Agriculture). In addition to farming, Illinois is a leading state in agriculture-related industries. FARM Illinois will help to ensure Illinois' position as an economic leader in agriculture by assessing and making recommendations to the Illinois/Chicago region farm and food and related business sectors, state and city officials and legislators, educators, and other stakeholders.

“The Searle family has a strong commitment to promoting conservation and economic development through local food systems,” said Renee Michaels, Vice President of Kinship Foundation, a private operating foundation established to support the Searle family's institutional philanthropy. “FARM Illinois provides an exciting opportunity to develop a new vision for food production in Illinois that brings together the local, regional and global food systems. This opportunity depends on having diverse stakeholders work together to move beyond “business as usual” to true innovation. Illinois can be a leader in meeting the challenges of food production in the coming decades through a range of innovative practices that will build the Illinois economy while strengthening its natural resources.”

FARM Illinois' Leadership Council and its committees of issue-area experts will collect and assess data, offer recommendations, identify key strategies, and create and deliver an action plan for Illinois and the Chicago region to ensure future competitiveness and sustainable development in food and agriculture.

“The Illinois Farm Bureau is excited to be a part of this initiative and applauds the leadership of FARM Illinois,” said Richard Guebert, Jr., President, Illinois Farm Bureau and member of the FARM Illinois Leadership Council. “There are tremendous opportunities for Illinois' agriculture as global population and incomes rise. FARM Illinois will examine our strengths, weaknesses, and influences on agricultural production and distribution in the state so we can then improve both our rural and urban economies.”

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About The Food and Agricultural Roadmap for Illinois (FARM Illinois)

FARM Illinois is a new partnership for competitiveness and sustainable growth in food and agriculture. The partnership brings together Illinois' top agricultural, business, and economic leaders to develop and advocate for the implementation of a comprehensive and integrated strategic plan for Illinois and the Chicago region to ensure the state is meeting the 21st Century challenge of global food security. The FARM Illinois plan will examine and assess all aspects of and influences on the agriculture-food value chain in Illinois and its impact on both the urban and rural economies and quality of life. The goals of FARM Illinois and its plan are to drive agricultural innovation, enable sustainable economic growth, encourage public-private partnership and collaboration, develop a world-class workforce, address community development and nutrition needs, conserve and enhance natural resources, adapt to climate change pressures, and enhance global and local food security demands.