

# Illinois Crop Improvement Association, Inc.

Annual Report to the Membership

Fiscal Year 2014-2015



June 11, 2015

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ISO/IEC 17025:2005 Accredited Laboratories

BQMS - Biotechnology Quality  
Management System - Puerto Rico



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# The Impact of People

Doug Miller  
Chief Executive Officer

“Don’t judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds that you plant,” Robert Louis Stevenson’s quote, provides a reminder that the seeds of improvement are planted every day. The Illinois Crop Improvement Association, Inc. showed a positive reserve for the second year in a row providing a much needed respite from the operational losses going back to fiscal year 2009. Our theme of “an honest assessment of purity, composition, viability and vigor for seed and grain producers” continued to serve as our foundation for Illinois based services. The improvement in seed quality, quantity and data in Puerto Rico has also made the farm profitable again. We “reaped” a profit at the end of the 2014-15 fiscal year but the seeds of improvement, in relationships, quality and efficiency, were “planted” every day by the great people of this organization.

I cannot stress enough that the seeds of improvement are planted by the people of this organization. We have wonderfully efficient machines and equipment that are essential to operations. But good people are the most important factor in our future; plus those wonderful pieces of equipment are also designed, built and serviced by people. People and their tools can make or break an independent third-party that sells services. New equipment purchased this past fiscal year included a new tractor, disc, harrow and seed treater for Puerto Rico. In Illinois upgrades in laboratory space and utilities, such as new water and power upgrades were initiated. We are improving the tools that help us deliver the quality and quantity of work to the seed and grain industries.

With the right people and tools, the relationships we have with our customers and associates grow and prosper. None

of our customers know our Miller Nitro sprayer they know the tremendous results that the operator and applicator achieve with that piece of equipment. Our new tractor and generator are fresh from the factory but without people they don't work the ground or protect the irrigation system's power supply. The reliability and consistency of our laboratories develops good relationships and pride in our people. We know that our ISO:IEC17025:2005 accreditation and the commitment of our people generates the quality our customers are looking for. Relationships are between our people and the people they serve. The relationship builds the desire to do quality work and the efficiency drives the reserves we generate. Again people make the difference; they make the relationships and ensure we deliver on our promise to the industry of continuous crop improvement.

The financial condition of the organization is improving with Puerto Rico showing a positive reserve of \$167,000. Illinois was in the black \$172,000; down from a reserve of 343,000 the previous year due to significant reduction in seed corn production. Illinois Crop Improvement also hired a few new staff members this past fiscal year. Brittney Stoll was hired in the seed lab and will be working towards her Registered Seed Technologist credentials from the Society of Commercial Seed Technologists. Jeff Morse joined the seed lab earlier in the year after working for us part-time. Rachelle "Rikki" Crist joined the organization as our new administrative assistant. We are excited about having them join the team. On behalf of the management and staff of the Illinois Crop Improvement Association I would like to thank the board of directors for their leadership, thoughts and skills that guided us through a delicate year that ended on a solid note. To the members, associate members and clients I say thank you for choosing Illinois Crop Improvement for your testing, field inspection and winter farm needs.

## Expansion and Experience

Steve Beals, Registered Seed Technologist  
Seed Lab Director

The IL Crop Seed Lab continues to grow. We are currently testing over 600 species, with 400 on a regular basis. We anticipate the number of samples to continue to grow as our expertise in grass, forage, vegetable and flower seed becomes more widely known. The Seed Lab has equipment and supplies in place to handle the increase in testing volume.

The IL Crop Seed Lab has 3 Registered Seed Technologists on staff and have hired Brittany Stoll full time. She will be working towards her RST. After working for us part-time Jeff Morse also joined the team. Our lab currently has 126 years of experience between RST's and analysts. This experience gives us the ability to test the diversity of crops that are submitted to the Seed Lab. All of our analysts participate in a number of proficiencies, referees, seminars and webinars. We conduct in-house training exercises that help our analysts become more efficient in the various seed tests that are conducted in the Seed Lab.

The Seed Lab is building for the future by hiring and training new seed professionals. The expertise we have, and will carry into the future, is exceptional. The right people and the right skill sets have and will continue to be our greatest asset.

The goals in the Seed Lab include:

- Remain up to date on samples received for testing
- Provide customers with timely, accurate, repeatable using AOSA Rules for Testing Seed

- Have multiple means for the customer to receive the Report of Analysis
- Continue to look for opportunities to improve efficiency
- Continue staff training through webinars, references, seminars and schooling when available

## Quality Ambassadors

Matt Raymond, Certified Genetic Technologist  
Field Services Director

The Field Services department offers a diverse set of services. Traditional inspections provide an assessment of field purity that is used to help determine the quality of the crop, while phytosanitary inspections are performed to assess fields for diseases and are needed for moving seed internationally.

After harvest, the inspection season comes to an end and trait testing begins in the lab and greenhouse. Trait testing covers a wide range of methods and is used to assess the purity of seed lots or contamination levels in grain.

Both Field Inspections and Trait Testing have QMS (quality management systems) in place to ensure the production of high quality services and to identify process areas that can be improved. External audits completed during the year indicated that the requirements of the QMS were being met and internal audits were used to improve processes in several areas. We continue to participate in a robust proficiency program to monitor our quality levels, to meet the requirements of trait providers and to fulfill our ISO 17025 standards.

Having a quality product is as important to Illinois Crop Improvement as it is to our customers. Our quality is a direct result of our people. Standards are just words on a page until someone puts them into practice. From the observation in the field to the results of a test, this human element is key. The Field Services Department has 45 ambassadors to the seed and grain growers in Illinois' industry. Every test result is a quality statement from the people working in the greenhouse and lab. The quality of their work is essential to the industry and ensures our relevance now and in the future.

The goals in Field Services include:

- Provide sample testing and field inspection results in a timely and efficient manner
- Stay up to date on existing testing validations and approvals from the trait providers and pursue new opportunities as innovations are released.
- Develop and provide new testing services as influenced by the introduction of new traited products and per the requests of customers.
- Provide a good balance of personalized customer service and technological conveniences to clients.
- Continually monitor the Quality Management Systems for methods and procedures that can be improved and implement these opportunities of improvement when resources allow.
- Maintain a high quality staff of field inspectors in Illinois and Puerto Rico
- Cooperate and maintain good relationships with other seed certifying and testing agencies.
- Maintain membership in and support the commercial seed testing group Society of Commercial Seed Technologists.

# Quality Grains are Relationship Driven

Doug Miller, CEO with Sandy Harrison,  
Identity Preserved Grain Lab Supervisor

The IPG Lab was established with the purpose of measuring the desired characteristics of corn, soybeans, wheat and other crops for customers in Illinois, across the country and around the world. Sandy Harrison, AOCS Approved Chemist and Lab Supervisor, was busy again this year with projects and samples from across the industry.

The data for the US Grains Council's Corn Harvest Quality report was delivered to Centrec in a timely fashion and their report was issued on schedule. The US Grains Council projects were collaborative efforts between our staff, Champaign-Danville Grain Inspection, participating elevators and export locations. Centrec Consulting Group coordinated, administered and prepared the report for each project. The US Grains Council's 2014/2015 Corn Export Cargo Quality Report work was completed in a timely fashion as well. Exports were said to be "top-notch" by Agrinews writer Tom C Doran and the IPG grain lab is proud to have been a part of the project again. Doran also noted that the United States is the only country that analyzes and reports on the quality of its corn crop.

Toxic metabolic by-products of fungi, known as mycotoxins, are another factor that can be tested by the IPG Lab. The grain lab offers testing for the various mycotoxins in corn and wheat as part of its quality projects and as a service to the industry. Despite the wet conditions during the 2014 corn harvest no samples approached actionable levels. According to the US Grain Council's Corn Harvest Report the incidents of aflatoxins were similar to previous years. Weather during the 2014 pollination and grain fill periods were not conducive to aflatoxin formation.

The lab also coordinated sample kits and testing services for the Illinois Soybean Association in conjunction with its yield challenge program. We truly value these types of relationships and can attest to the hard work the commodity groups make in promoting and encouraging the production and sale of quality grains. The hard work and people that moved grains and oilseeds towards differentiated, value-added seed, based on specific genetic and physical characteristics are greatly appreciated. To the breeders, researchers, merchandisers and processor who utilize our services we say thank you.

## Teamwork on the Farm

Kelly Watts  
Puerto Rico Division Manager

The Illinois Crop Improvement farm had a good year in 2014. We were able to fine tune a lot of things and get over the hurdle of a number of processes allowing the farm to produce the quality and quantity that customers are looking for. Also helping the company to achieve this was the development of the team and their willingness to work together and eliminate the silos that have existed in previous years.

The team is taking pride in their work and wants to provide quality results. They are willing to help one another out and work in other areas of the farm that they normally do not work on a regular basis. This has helped us to maintain and hold the cost of labor down while doing additional projects that require more hand labor than in previous years. Our part time labor costs are essentially the same while producing projects that require much more labor.

We have been learning more about what to do and fine tuning the cultural practices applied to the farm and the different crops.

With the efforts made so far, the fallow work for weed control is getting easier and this is showing up also in the crops. Our preventative spray control programs are yielding quality plants and seed in all species.

The drainage systems installed were put to the test this past year with a serious rain fall the first part of November. With the drains and escapes in place we were able to escape the storm with minor damages. We did learn of a couple of additional places we needed to improve for drainage, which has been done. With good crop placement planning we should be able to provide minimal risk or reduced risk for our customer's productions.

The improved equipment line has helped considerable. With the most recent purchases we can see that we can probably eliminate a step in the heavy tillage ground preparation processes. In the last field prepared, even in dry conditions, we were able to make a better seed bed than anticipated making crop establishment a lot easier. The new equipment has been greatly appreciated, but one has to keep in mind that it is not permanent and will not last forever, and that there are still needs on the list.

The biggest key to the success is the execution. There is some pride now in the team that they like to be a part of where the farm is going. They are taking more initiative on their own and they want to do a good job.

# Illinois Crop Improvement Association, Inc.

## 2014-2015 Board of Directors

### President

**Nels Kasey, Great Heart Seed Company**

### Vice President

**John Hiser, Illinois Foundation Seeds, Inc.**

### Secretary

**Ken Heinzmann, Gateway Seed Company, Inc.**

### Treasurer

**Mike Vanausdoll, Kitchen Seed Company**



### **Doug Baird**

Baird Seed Company

### **Phil Jordan**

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GROWMARK

### **Dale Wehmeyer**

Wehmeyer Seed Company

### **Larry Lewis**

Lewis Seed Farms, Inc.

### **Randy Wilken**

MWS Seeds, LLC.

# IL Crop Quality Policy

Illinois Crop Improvement Association  
is dedicated to providing superior  
laboratory testing service to customers by:

- 📄 implementing good professional practices,
- 📄 requiring that all laboratory personnel familiarize themselves with the quality documentation and implement the policies and procedure in their work, and
- 📄 continually improving our quality system.



Illinois Crop Improvement Association, Inc.

# Puerto Rico Winter Farm Quality Policy

Illinois Crop Improvement Association, Inc. in Juana Diaz, Puerto Rico is committed to:

- adhering to the requirements of the BQMS (Biotechnology Quality Management System) standard
- maintaining a high-level of quality and strong customer service within an environment that has safety as a first priority, is focused on the customers, and fosters continual improvement.



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# Notes