

Today's Farm

Harvest 2023

A look at
farming today in
Ogle County
with contributions from the
Ogle County Farm Bureau and
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TFP2023

Rochelle FFA travels to Springfield for state convention

BY JEFF HELFRICH
MANAGING EDITOR

ROCHELLE — The Rochelle FFA Chapter recently attended the Illinois FFA State Convention from June 13-15 at the Bank of Springfield Center in Springfield. The three-day event annually recognizes achievements of Illinois FFA members, elects the major state officer team and celebrates agriculture.

The Rochelle FFA received awards at the convention, including Megan Seebach being conferred with the State FFA Degree, the highest achievement an FFA member can achieve in Illinois; Jack Richolson being recognized for earning the American FFA Degree, the highest degree achievable in the National FFA Organization, the chapter being named the Building Communities National Chapter

Award Section Winner; and Chapter Advisor and RTHS Agriculture Instructor Donna Page being conferred with an Honorary State FFA Degree by the Illinois Association FFA for outstanding service to agricultural education and FFA programs.

“The State FFA Convention is the culmination of the year for a lot of FFA chapters,” Page said. “It’s an opportunity for our students to be recognized for their efforts on a state level. For me, I always like to say it fills my cup as an FFA advisor. These students work tremendously hard all year on the things that we do. It’s fun to see them recognized for the things that they accomplish.”

To earn her state degree, Seebach had to do two years of a supervised agricultural experience (SAE), which for her involved working with her horses and at Maplehurst



Donna Page

Farms during the harvest season. She also had to complete an application and 25 hours of community service in two separate activities, and finally, an interview with a committee of teachers before being recommended and awarded.

Richolson is an RTHS alum. The American FFA Degree can’t be applied for until an

individual’s freshman year of college. His SAE revolved around his work at AgReliant, which is a crop research facility in Esmond. He took records on that and completed 50 hours of community service and an application and interview process at the state level.

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In October, he will officially receive his American Degree.

Page said the time in Springfield for the convention is enjoyable each year and it's an opportunity for students to see what FFA is outside of Rochelle and the local area. Rochelle had two chapter members participate in the state FFA band. The convention also allows students to bond as a chapter.

"It's fun to watch those interactions occur and listen to the stories and the jokes they tell and all those inside, funny things that really come back next year," Page said. "As we're sitting around FFA events they bring up fun stories and times we've had. It's fun to see them in a different capacity, and allow them to see me in a different light outside of the classroom."

Page called receiving the Honorary State FFA Degree

"extremely humbling." In August, she'll start her 19th year as Rochelle FFA advisor.

"In order for an FFA advisor to receive that degree, generally they have to nominate themselves," Page said. "They have to complete a form and it talks about achievements that your students have received and how many State Degrees you've had and how many American Degrees and more. I will never fill one out for myself. And someone nominated me this year. I was extremely humbled that someone thought that I was doing a decent enough job to have the opportunity to earn the Honorary State Degree."

Page comes from a farming background and is a product of ag education, FFA and 4-H. She called being able to teach kids about agriculture "very personal" for her. She's well aware that not every student is going to become a farmer, and her aim is to show how



Megan Seebach

far-reaching and beneficial ag education will be in the rest of students' lives.

The RTHS ag teacher said she enjoys teaching something

different every day, ranging from welding to ag business to animal science to horticulture.

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On the FFA side of her work as an advisor, what she enjoys most is seeing students grow.

“It’s fun to have those opportunities and to see them grow from awkward freshmen and get their own level of success, whatever that may be,” Page said. “That level of success might be for that freshman to speak in front of their classmates. Because sometimes that’s a big hurdle for kids. And sometimes it’s to get that senior their state degree or to just get them to graduate. For me, it’s really fun and that’s what really fulfills me is being able to help those kids on their separate journeys throughout high school and to let them become the people that they will become.”

Page called the support for FFA and ag education locally “amazing”, between Rochelle’s active FFA alumni chapter, local businesses and

individuals and the RTHS administration.

During this past week, Page attended the Illinois Association of Vocational Agriculture Teachers (IAVAT) State Conference which involves professional development, taking care of business that may affect the organization, presenting committee reports, celebrating membership, and the presentation of awards. Page currently serves as IAVAT president.

“I’ve been able to be a voice for ag teachers not only in our area, but across the state with what’s important to ag education and more importantly, what’s important to our kids,” Page said.

Page said she finds it “incredibly beneficial” to be involved in the greater ag education and FFA communities. As the year in FFA ends, she’s looking forward to another.

“I really do love my job,” Page said. “I love my kids.



Emily Lovett (left) and Trent Kreider (right)

RTHS has a tremendous group of individuals and it was fun to take those kids down there. Hopefully we can build on that success from this year. I know I’ve already had some ques-

tions about things they can do next year. That’s really fun to see kids see something that they can become interested in and where they can take it and run with it.”

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TFP23

Seebach's Sweet Corn open for business this fall

BY JEFF HELFRICH
MANAGING EDITOR

ROCHELLE — Seebach's Sweet Corn recently kicked off its 2023 season of sales at 11594 E. Kyte Road just outside of Rochelle.

The Seebach family has grown and sold sweet corn at the location for over 40 years. The tradition of selling sweet corn was started by the late Jerry Seebach, and it has since been carried on by his sons, Jeff and Scott, their stepmother, Christy and other family members and seasonal help.

Jeff Seebach heads up the sweet corn operation and has participated in the tradition for as long as he can remember. What's been out of the ordinary this year for him is the drought the area has seen, which has made the sweet corn



crop inconsistent at times.

"Some of the ears look like they're not ready yet, but they are," Jeff said. "And some of the ears look like they're ready,

but they're not. You can even see it in the corn stalks where it just gets lower and then the corn gets to a normal height. But there's a lot of valleys and

stuff in it. Just due to a lack of moisture, it's just been kind of inconsistent."

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The drought and inconsistency has caused occasional gaps between plantings and varieties when the family doesn't have corn on hand to sell. It can also impact the consistency of the kernels in the ears of kern.

"With that lack of moisture, the plant is only looking to survive rather than actually produce the fruit," Jeff said. "It may be back to 1988 when it was this dry last. The last couple of years it was kind of dry, but it never affected how the corn was because there was already moisture in the ground. This year, we didn't have much snow in the winter to get the moisture base down there. It just seems like it was a lot drier at the beginning of this season and then it stayed dry pretty much through the growth process of it."

Jeff said that Seebach's Sweet Corn was about halfway



through the season and he expects to sell for about 2.5 more weeks, depending on how fast the corn reaches readiness to sell and how fast it's sold. He expressed some disappointment in the drought's impacts, but

said he felt lucky that the family does have a crop to sell this year and that he's appreciative of late rains it got to help later plantings of corn. Seebach's Sweet Corn went through its first planting fast, Jeff said, due

to lower yields and a little higher volume of sales, which he said could be due to Rainwater Farms not selling sweet corn this year as it usually does in Rochelle.

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“It can be tough to see a year when we have higher demand and it’s a drought,” Jeff said. “I wish we had the yield that we normally would. We try to pick the day and let people know when we’ll have more corn next. It’s great seeing the customers and we’re very appreciative that they keep coming back. As long as they keep coming and they appreciate it, we’ll keep selling it.”

Christy Seebach, who usually runs the stand, said more sales have been seen this year than usual.

“Once we open up, everybody is hungry for sweet corn,” Christy said. “We were really busy the first week. After that, it kind of tapers off. But then people like to freeze it, too. Some call ahead. I have 10 dozen waiting for one lady. We hate to disappoint people. We put up signs that say when we’ll have more corn. We’re seeing some new faces this

year. And a lot of repeat customers from years’ past. A lot of people from town. It’s great seeing them.”

While the drought has been out of the ordinary this year, the work itself has not. Because that’s the way it’s always been done at Seebach’s Sweet Corn.

“The work has gone well this year,” Jeff said. “We have a few more people to help out. We have Gage working for us, who’s nine years old. He drives the tractor and for us and helps us. We don’t have to hop on and off the tractor to move it. We pick everything by hand. We can just pick and put everything in the cart while he drives along. It helps us out. I’m just used to picking by hand. It’s how we’ve always done it. If we ever had to grow more for more demand, we’d try and figure out options. We wanted to see how it went this year with how much volume we’ll need to see if we need to plant more next year or not.”

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TFM2017P

Guebert Jr.: Drought poses challenges for farmers

THIS summer growing season has brought a whirlwind of challenges for Illinois farmers, from severe drought to a devastating derecho and flash flooding. When it comes to how farmers are faring under such conditions, my friend and colleague said it the best: “It depends on what cloud you’re under.”

Every farmer’s situation is different. How drought affects profitability and yield depends on numerous variables, including crop variety and location, making it difficult to generalize how farmers will end up after this rollercoaster ride of weather patterns.

In a single county one farmer’s field of corn or soybeans might look completely different from another’s 5 miles down the road.

Illinois closed July with

some of the warmest temperatures so far this year with drought conditions spottily disrupted by pop-up thunderstorms across the state. While some areas were lucky enough to see rain, we’re not out of the woods yet. To quote the Illinois State Climatologist office, “drought is a complex physical and social phenomenon, usually with no clear beginning or end.”

At the end of the day, farmers want to produce a good crop. Drought and unpredictable weather are discouraging for farmers planning for a bountiful harvest, but we are still a long way from the bin. We are hopeful for good, timely rains in the coming weeks.

While we wait for the upcoming harvest, now is a good time to remind consumers to take full advantage of their local farmers markets. Illinois

ranks second in the nation for the number of farmers markets, which offer fresh, locally produced vegetables, meat and other food products at affordable prices.

Sweet corn, a summertime favorite, is now available so be sure to grab a few ears to grill on your next farmers market visit.

It’s hard to believe the dog days of summer are nearly over. I am eagerly looking forward to another lively Illinois State Fair. Some of my favorite memories are the years I spent showing dairy cattle owned by family friends. Now as a spectator, I am energized watching the youth exhibitors take to the ring during the Master Showmanship competition, which Illinois Farm Bureau proudly sponsors.

Ag Day at the Illinois State Fair is an annual event celebrating all that Illinois agriculture has to offer. This year’s celebration will take place on Aug. 11 and is a great opportunity for Illinoisans to connect with agriculture at every level, whether it’s stopping by the commodity pavilion for a pork chop sandwich or grabbing a refreshing cup of frozen apple cider and other fresh produce from the Illinois Specialty Growers tent.

Amid the excitement of

fair activities, however, Ag Day is also an opportunity for farm leaders to work collaboratively on agricultural issues. Such conversations are increasingly important as lawmakers hammer out the details of the next Farm Bill, which extends beyond the farm by protecting our nation’s food supply, access to nutrition and advancing conservation efforts.

Later this August hundreds of farmers and agribusinesses from across the globe will travel to Decatur for the 70th annual Farm Progress Show. This event will showcase the latest agricultural innovations and emerging technologies.

There is no better way to end a busy summer than celebrating Illinois agriculture, whether it is at the State Fair or Farm Progress Show. I encourage everyone to take a day or two to spend at the fair and learn more about how Illinois agriculture touches their everyday life.

Richard Guebert Jr. is the president of the Illinois Farm Bureau. This op-ed was distributed through a cooperative project between Illinois Farm Bureau and the Illinois Press Association. For more food and farming news, visit FarmWeekNow.com.

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County farmers impacted by drought as summer nears end

BY JEFF HELFRICH
MANAGING EDITOR

OGLE COUNTY — With fall approaching, Ogle County farmers have been impacted by drought conditions over the summer, Ogle County Farm Bureau Manager Ron Kern said Aug. 8.

While rain hit the area that same day of Aug. 8, Kern said rain before harvest may not make a difference in the quality of the corn crop due to the lack of moisture that has been seen. However, Rain could still make a difference for the 2023 bean harvest, Kern said.

“Basically as far as the crop goes, most likely what’s out in the corn fields now is what it’s going to be,” Kern said. “At this point with the rain, unless it was very late corn, the rain isn’t going to help the corn crop as much as it will



the bean crop. A lot of corn is starting to already drop. It will be what it is. The rain from here on out won’t help out the corn. For beans, pods are still filling and a nice shower

on those beans today or this week could help to boost that yield a little bit. Beans tend to be much more drought tolerant than corn.”

ing at corn fields around the county, he’s seen some crops that look like they should, but “a lot” with shorter corn.

Kern said that when look-

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“The ears are probably a little shorter and maybe not quite as thick with maybe not quite the number of kernels on the ear that you’d usually get,” Kern said. “If I was going to take a very uneducated guess right now, I’d say our corn crop is going to be somewhere around 10 percent off of average, maybe a little more or a little less. I think we’re going to struggle to get to an average yield.”

Kern emphasized that the county has been short on moisture for more than the current growing season. A dry winter was seen this past year, and the past two growing seasons saw less rain, despite showers coming when they were needed.

“Droughts run in cycles,” Kern said. “And I guess maybe this year was our turn in the saddle, I don’t know. Last year was one of those years where



we were dry, but we got rain just when we needed it each time. This year has kind of been the same way. We really haven’t had normal moisture in the area for the past 2-3 years. We’ve been short.”

The smog that has been seen in the area in recent months can have an impact on the photosynthesis process for crops, Kern said. Other growing factors this summer have included temperatures, but

Kern said warm temperatures are needed to grow crops and the mostly-seen mid-to-upper 80s conditions in Ogle County have been ideal for crops.

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From page 13

He hasn't seen much heat stress in crops this year where plants are forced to put more energy into staying alive than trying to grow an ear of corn or a pod of beans.

With the ongoing drought, Kern said not many farmers in Ogle County have irrigation

systems in their fields. Those are seen more south of the area in Lee and Whiteside Counties, he said.

Kern detailed the ideal conditions he would like to see in the upcoming months ahead of harvest.

"I still would like to see us pick up rain between now and the middle to end of Septem-

ber," Kern said. "We're short and we need it and we're going to need it going into next spring. It would be nice if in October or November we could see decent temperatures, a lot of sunshine, a nice breeze and low humidity to dry this crop out naturally in the field so farmers don't have to take out wet corn and spend money

on propane and natural gas and time to dry it out. That slows down the harvest. If we get those ideal conditions in October and November with nice weather and good drying conditions, I think that will improve a few attitudes. It will depend on what they see on yield monitors as they go through the fields."

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NCGA: U.S. could reclaim role as top exporter

BY DANIEL GRANT
FARMWEEK

BRAZIL is well on its way to unseating the U.S. as the top corn exporter this marketing year, which ends Aug. 31.

USDA estimates Brazil could account for 30.2% of world corn exports for the 2022-23 marketing year while U.S. exports are on pace to fall to a multi-year low of 1.65 billion bushels, which accounts for about 24.8% of the world market, according to USDA's latest world ag supply and demand estimates.

If realized, it would mark the first time Brazil has surpassed the U.S. in corn exports since the drought-riddled season of 2012.

However, much like the situation in 2012-13, the shift in the global corn market among the

two top competitors could be more of a temporary situation than the new norm.

Krista Swanson, lead economist at the National Corn Growers Association (NCGA), and Cary Sifferath, vice president of the U.S. Grains Council, discussed the market shift and outlook for U.S. corn exports during a recent webinar.

"U.S. exports have been hindered by droughts that have affected key areas of the Corn Belt," Swanson said. "But the U.S. has several relative advantages in the global corn market than can be harnessed to support our \$90 billion corn industry."

U.S. corn production totaled just 13.7 billion bushels for the 2022-23 marketing year, 9% lower than the previous year due to drought in key corn-growing regions. U.S. corn prices subsequently increased,



which along with a strong value of the dollar made corn sales less competitive on the world market.

This year, however, USDA predicts domestic corn production could rebound to a record 15.32 billion bushels despite the early-season drought while a small drop in Brazil's corn production is forecast for the

upcoming 2023-24 crop.

"While Brazil is positioned to surpass the U.S. in corn exports this year, the data do not indicate the trend leading to this development will necessarily continue," Swanson noted in her white paper analysis of the two markets.

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USDA estimates U.S. corn exports could jump back to 2.1 billion bushels in 2023-24, well above 1.65 billion this year but still off the pace of 2.47 billion bushels exported in 2021-22.

NCGA and USGC point to key corn production and infrastructure efficiencies in the U.S. compared to Brazil that put American farmers in the driver's seat to reclaim their role as the world's top corn exporter.

U.S. corn yields are about double that of those produced in Brazil and generally require fewer inputs. In 2020, farmers in Brazil used about 112% more fertilizer per hectare than U.S. farmers to provide the extra fertility needed to grow multiple crops a year, NCGA reported.

Meanwhile, in terms of shipping corn, Brazil is about 86% the size of the U.S. but has just 25% of the roadway miles compared to here. And, of those miles of roadway, only 12.4%



are paved in Brazil compared to nearly 70% paved in the U.S.

"While the U.S. and Brazil have both increased productivity over time, global sustainability is an important consideration," Swanson noted in the report.

Meanwhile, USGC continues to develop markets for U.S. corn, ethanol and distillers' grains around the world, which should help support future exports, ac-

ording to Sifferath.

"As we look to future markets, we see frontier markets in West Africa," while India and Bangladesh have growing feed, livestock and aquaculture industries, Sifferath said. "We're also growing exports in mature markets (such as Canada and Japan) in the form of ethanol."

To keep expanding markets, NCGA has called on Congress

to double funding in the farm bill for key trade programs, including the Market Access Program and the Foreign Market Development Program.

This story was distributed through a cooperative project between Illinois Farm Bureau and the Illinois Press Association. For more food and farming news, visit online at FarmWeek-Now.com

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Kern: Consumer food trends have shifted

WE seem to hear plenty about how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed people's lives as we try to migrate more towards normal. One thing is for certain, in the past two years consumer trends have shifted. That is also evident in consumer food trends as we examine a report issued by the American Farm Bureau.

USDA-Economic Research Service's (ERS) tracks the value of the U.S. food system by reporting on total food and beverage spending. This spending data is categorized as food consumed at home or food consumed away from home, such as at restaurants or hotels.

Between 1997 and 2022 total nominal spending on food at home increased from \$376 billion across the nation to \$1.047 trillion, a 178 percent

increase and an average annual increase of four percent. During the same timeframe, food away from home increased from \$336 billion to \$1.343 trillion, an almost 300-percent increase and an average annual increase of six percent.

Between 1997 and 2022, the consumer price index for food increased 95 percent, meaning inflation explains much of the increase in food spending across both categories, though there are other factors. Total food away from home spending has surpassed food at home spending since 2007.

Since 2015, food away from home spending has exceeded food at home spending by over \$100 billion, except during 2020 when COVID-19 lockdowns prevented many consumers from consuming food in public settings. Be-

tween 2019 and 2020 food at home spending increased eight percent while food away from home spending dropped 13 percent, the largest drop in the data series.

The reopening of many food service outlets in 2021 and 2022 rebounded food away from home spending 25 percent and 15 percent, respectively. Before 2010, food away from home spending increased five percent annually compared to four percent for food at home. After 2010, food away from home spending increased seven percent annually compared to four percent for food at home. Removing the 2020 COVID-19-linked outlier pushes average annual food away from home spending increases to nine percent.

These trends are not surprising to many of us as restaurants and quick service options

have played an increasing role in U.S. consumption culture. As convenience and time savings drive purchasing behavior, many of us prefer to grab a bite at a restaurant or through takeout options than to cook for ourselves. While the cost of many restaurant meals exceeds that of home-cooked recipes, the growth in low-cost, quick-service options has lowered the cost barrier for consumers.

For food consumed at home, grocery stores have consistently captured the largest market share, though this share has decreased significantly. In 1997, grocery stores accounted for 72 percent of food-at-home expenditures. This dropped to 65 percent five years later in 2002 and to under 60 percent in 2007.

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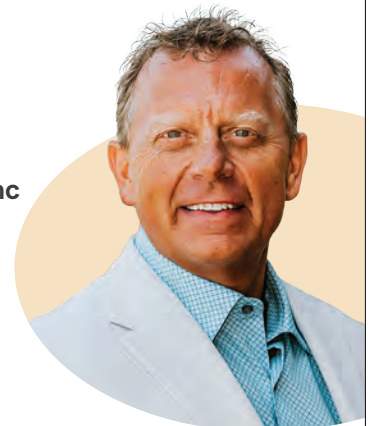
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From page 18

In 2022, grocery stores took up 54.2 percent of at-home food spending. The only time grocery stores' market share has increased since 1997 is between 2019 and 2020, a likely result of people returning to grocery outlets amid lockdowns.

Much of the decline in grocery store market share for at home spending has been the growth of warehouse clubs and supercenters and home delivery. Including popular bulk shopping centers like Costco and Sam's Club, this category increased its market share from eight percent in 1997 to 25.5 percent in 2012. Bulk shopping centers' over-a-quarter-of-the-market capture was then reduced by the entry of popular home delivery options between 2012 and 2017. In 2012, home delivery spending made up only 2.7 percent

of at-home food spending; by 2017 that share had risen to 6.1 percent. In 2022 warehouses and supercenters claimed 22.4 percent of food-at-home expenditures and mail order and home delivery claimed 8.8 percent.

These trends are further revealed in dollar value increases. Between 1997 and 2022 food expenditures at grocery stores increased from \$270 billion to \$567 billion, a 109-percent increase. During the same period, spending at warehouse clubs and supercenters grew from \$30 billion to \$234 billion, a 679-percent increase. Similarly, spending on food delivery increased 684 percent from \$11 billion in 1997 to \$91 billion in 2022. In a consumer environment where convenience is king, it is likely delivery food expenditures will only increase.

For food consumed away from home, limited-service

restaurants and full-service restaurants have fought for the top market share spot in terms of spending. Both outlet types had an average market share of 34 percent of food spent away from home between 1997 and 2022. The largest difference in these two categories occurred between 2019 and 2020 when limited-service restaurants claimed 38 percent of food away from home spending and full-service 29 percent, again linked to the COVID-19 lockdowns.

Food purchased and consumed at retail outlets or through vending machines has had the largest increase in market share. Making up only four percent of away-from-home expenditures in 1997, this category hit its peak in 2020 at 14 percent and made up 11 percent of away-from-home spending in 2022. Many retail outlets historically specializing in just merchandise sales

have attempted to diversify income streams by offering in-store food consumption or take-away options.

In dollar terms, between 1997 and 2022 food expenditures have increased from \$120 billion to \$462 billion at full-service restaurants (a 283-percent increase). Limited-service restaurant spending has increased from \$112 billion to \$468 billion (a 317-percent increase). During the same period, spending at retail stores and vending has increased from \$11 billion to \$154 billion, a 1,114-percent increase.

Food spending behavior also varies by state and region. Much of the at home spending distribution by state appears to be to a combination of average food prices in a state and a cultural preference for eating at home.

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From page 20

Maine and New Hampshire, for instance, have high rural populations and high food prices, likely contributing to a higher percentage of people eating at home at a higher cost. Likewise, New York and Hawaii have high comparative food costs but show up in the bottom 10 states for food at home spending, likely linked to a cultural preference for eating away from home in more

urbanized and tourist-heavy economies.

Each state's and region's characteristics contribute to how food is marketed and transported and requires producers to adjust business strategies accordingly.

How and where shoppers purchase food impacts the way in which food is transported, stored, packaged, prepared and ultimately consumed. Shifts in these conditions linked to local and global eco-

nomie conditions, as well as preference changes, introduce uncertainty for those attempting to establish marketing strategies.

Recent spending trends reveal a continued desire for convenience in eating experiences, favoring options that save time and money. Future higher cash access for consumers may shift food consumption toward immersive full-service away-from-home experiences. This would

contrast with the COVID-19 contact-sensitive environment that demanded fewer contact points between the public. A future with lower cash access and negative economic indicators would lead to a continued trend demanding low-cost and low time-intensive options.

"Part of the secret of a success in life is to eat what you like and let the food fight it out inside." -Mark Twain

Ron Kern is the manager of the Ogle County Farm Bureau.

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