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Illinois in new academy

State focusing on ag biotechnology,
bio pharmaceuticals in new program

BY KAY SHIPMAN

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Illinois plans to capitalize on its strength in agricultural biotechnology and bio pharmaceuticals as part of a new economic policy academy, a Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunities (DCEO) spokesman told **FarmWeek**.

Recently, Illinois was one of seven states selected for a new program by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices.

"We (Illinois) plan to focus on key biosciences -- ag bio and bio pharma. Innovation has been an area we have focused a great deal on," said Mark Harris, DCEO spokesman.

The goal of the policy academy is to help states develop comprehensive economic policies to be more competitive in the global economy. In addition to Illinois, the other selected states were: Georgia, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Oregon, and West Virginia.

Illinois officials plan to build "collaborative networks and talent pools" in ag biotech and bio pharmaceuticals, Harris said. The state officials and entities involved include DCEO

Director Jack Lavin, the governor's staff, the University of Illinois, and iBio.

One of the benefits will be access to national expertise, Harris noted.

The center's yearlong policy academy offers state leaders the opportunity to work with nationally recognized experts and colleagues from other states to apply innovation-based economic strategies.

One strategy is to locate groups of businesses and related institutions near each other. Known as a cluster, the related businesses and institutions can boost regional economies and entrepreneurship. One goal is to develop state policy that promotes clusters.

Illinois officials plan to focus their efforts and develop a structure to move ag biotechnology and bio pharmaceuticals "to the next level," Harris said.

Throughout the next year, the policy academy will help participating states:

- *d Scan major policy challenges and opportunities in different regions;

- *d Align state research and development investments, workforce development, and education systems with the current and future needs of the state's most promising sectors; and

*d Develop a plan for strengthening major industry clusters
and improving the general environment for innovation.

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