



OFFICE OF ILLINOIS STATE TREASURER

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State Treasurer Michael Frerichs Announces Winners of 2025 Cream of the Crop Photography Contest

*Students Earn Bright Start Scholarships, and Their Photos Will be
Displayed at Illinois State Fair*

State Treasurer Michael Frerichs has announced the winning photographers for the 2025 *Cream of the Crop Photography Contest*, which provides Illinois students with a creative opportunity to share their vision of agriculture in our state. The top nine photographers, ages 8 to 18, will be awarded Bright Start 529 college savings scholarships.

“Congratulations to the young photographers who have showcased their talents and creativity in the Cream of the Crop competition this year,” Frerichs said. “Their photos illustrate the beauty and diversity of agriculture in Illinois.”

The winning photographs will be displayed August 7-17 at the Illinois State Fair in the Treasurer’s Tent. You can see the photos of the top three finishers in each of the three age categories on the State Treasurer’s [website](#). Winning entries and other photo submissions will be featured in the 2025-2026 Ag Invest calendar, which you can order [here](#), and the first-place photos also will be displayed in the lobby of the Illinois State Treasurer’s Office building in downtown Springfield. A list of the winners can be found below.

The contest consisted of three age groups — ages 8-10, 11-14 and 15-18. In each age category, first-place winners will be awarded a \$1,000 Bright Start 529 scholarship, second-place winners will receive a \$500 scholarship, and third-place winners will receive a \$250 scholarship.

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Treasurer Frerichs administers the Bright Start 529 and Bright Directions 529 programs to assist families in saving and investing for higher education expenses such as at a university or college, community college, trade school or apprenticeship. For more information, visit BrightStart.com and BrightDirections.com.

The 2025 Cream of the Crop contest attracted 205 entries from students across Illinois. A panel of judges selected the winning photos. The judges were Scott Rhoads, regional president of Carrollton Bank, Gary Mueller, vice president of Havana National Bank, and Riley Wells, associate director of the Illinois Foundation FFA.

In its 13th year, the Cream of the Crop contest is part of the Illinois State Treasurer's [Ag Invest](#) program. Ag Invest offers loan opportunities for Illinois farmers and agri-businesses to start, expand, or add value to their farm operations. As one of the nation's largest agricultural linked deposit programs, Ag Invest has supported more than 13,000 borrowers and partnered with more than 80 financial institutions since 2015, when Frerichs became treasurer.

8-10 Age Bracket Winners

First Place: Jerry F., *Wheat*, Springfield (Sangamon County)

Second Place: Emery E., *Dinner Time*, Wyoming (Stark County)

Third Place: Vada E., *Cattle Feed*, Wyoming (Stark County)

11-14 Age Bracket Winners

First Place: John G., *Harvest Time*, Stillman Valley (Ogle County)

Second Place: Jackson S., *Highland Cows*, Mason City (Mason County)

Third Place: Hope L., *Evening Snack*, Jerseyville (Jersey County)

15-18 Age Bracket Winners

First Place: Ryan L., *Playtime*, Villa Grove (Champaign County)

Second Place: Davin G., *The Harvest*, Marissa (St. Clair County)

Third Place: Nolan L., *Dreaming of Big Wins*, Wellington (Iroquois County)

Treasurer Frerichs has invited the first-place winners to an Aug. 8 reception on Agriculture Day at the State Fair.

***Note: Please contact us if you'd like to interview the winners and their families, and we will help make the connections.**

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About the Illinois Treasurer

The Illinois State Treasurer's Office is a powerful economic engine that invests in people to drive prosperity, development and growth throughout the state. As State Treasurer, Michael Frerichs (FRAIR'iks) is the state's Chief Investment and Banking Officer and actively manages approximately \$60 billion. The investments help families pay for college and trade school; workers save for a dignified retirement; and local governments process bill payments more efficiently so they can pass along the savings to taxpayers. The office provides financial institutions with money to loan to farmers, small business owners, and qualified individuals at below-market rates because better jobs create stronger communities. The office operates the state's largest consumer-protection initiative, the missing money I-Cash program, which has returned a record-breaking \$2.3 billion since Frerichs was elected.

For more news about the State Treasurer's Office, please sign up for our [newsletter](#) and follow Treasurer Frerichs on Instagram at [ILTreasurer](#), Threads [@iltreasurer](#), [LinkedIn](#) and on Facebook at [Invested in You – Treasurer Michael Frerichs](#).

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