KLtGovDirectMktSummit with photo, Pressburger video clip. (Katie interview?)

Lt. Gov. Stratton: ‘Agriculture truly connects us all’

BY KAY SHIPMAN

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Lt. Gov. Juliana Stratton reached beyond divisions to touch on the unifying subject that drew people from across the United States and beyond to Rosemont Tuesday.

“Agriculture truly connects us all,” Stratton said, opening the second National Direct Agricultural Marketing Summit. Illinois Farm Bureau is among the sponsors of the summit, which included participants from India, the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

A self-identified “city girl,” the lieutenant governor told participants she knew the importance of traveling around Illinois and listening to rural people as part of a new administration. The state’s agricultural sector and rural communities have assets and strengths, but also have challenges, she added.

“I want you to know I’ve been listening,” Stratton said. “I’ve seen the deep challenges. ... This year, it has been the most humbling experience to talk to farmers who have great concerns.”

To offer assistance for extreme weather and flooding, the lieutenant governor pointed out the Illinois Department of Agriculture provided farmers with incentives to plant cover crops on prevented plant acres.

To support Illinois’ agricultural exports, the state hosted a delegation from Taiwan, and Taiwanese marketers signed agreements to buy $2.2 billion in Illinois corn and soybeans over the next two years. “Ending trade wars is imperative for Illinois,” Stratton said.

Seeking to strengthen rural areas, the lieutenant governor emphasized the importance of jobs to rural economies, an issue raised by the Governor’s Rural Affairs Council that she chairs.

“We want young people to return to town to start businesses,” she said.

Expanding Illinois’ broadband services is another goal of Gov. J.B. Pritzker’s administration, she pointed out. The state budget included $420 million for broadband that will extend to education, telemedicine and economic development. “In Illinois, we want to connect you,” Stratton said.

Not only does Illinois plan to connect farmers and rural areas, but the state does not intend to slip as an agricultural powerhouse, Stratton informed the out-of-state visitors. She recited a laundry list of the state’s production rank in several products, including horseradish.

“Illinois supports our agricultural industry,” the lieutenant governor said. “When it comes to agriculture, Governor Pritzker and I want Illinois to be the No. 1 state.”

Looking across an audience of farmers and ag professionals, Stratton said, “I’m most proud of the people in the agricultural communities who do the work, day in and day out. ... (Agriculture) is woven into the fabric of who we are as a people.”

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