Each June, the Illinois Cooperative Council (ICC) hosts a two-day youth conference for high school FFA members from across the state to increase awareness of cooperatives. This event, to be held June 4-5, 2015 on the Macomb campus of Western Illinois University, provides leadership development opportunities for future cooperative leaders. Each year, approximately 75 students attend and learn how cooperatives began in Illinois, how they are governed and led, who they benefit, and the importance they play in our everyday lives.

Students are able to attend the conference for free due to the generous sponsorships from co-op businesses. ICC and the WIU School of Agriculture also coordinates with Facilitating Coordination in Agriculture Education (FCAE) regional program advisors to host a professional development workshop for ag teachers bringing students to the conference. During the event, students learn about the cooperative principles and tour local cooperatives while staying on campus and experiencing college life.

For nearly 25 years, the conference was held on the campus of Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. In order to make attendance more convenient for northern Illinois students, the ICC decided to begin a rotation between WIU and SIU, and are excited that 2015 will be the first year of the new schedule. The WIU School of Agriculture is hosting the conference and the Illinois Cooperative Development Center, a program of the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs at WIU, is providing conference management services.

“The ICC is fortunate to have the support of so many dedicated cooperative-minded institutions throughout the state,” said Nancy McDonald, ICC Chairman and AIEC Marketing Administrator. “It is our hope that through widespread cooperative business support students will see demonstrated all seven of the cooperative principles, but especially #5: Education, Training and Information; #6: Cooperation among Cooperatives; and #7: Concern for Community.”

The Illinois Cooperative Council was organized in 1966 to promote the growth and development of Illinois cooperatives. The Council is dedicated to promoting a positive business climate for cooperatives, increasing the public’s understanding and awareness of the value of cooperatives, and recognizing excellence exhibited by Illinois cooperative businesses. To learn more about the ICC’s member organizations and initiatives, visit www.illinois.coop or on Facebook at Illinois Cooperative Council.