



# OFFICE OF ILLINOIS STATE TREASURER

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## **Treasurer Michael Frerichs Announces Winners of 2024 Cream of the Crop Photography Contest**

*Students Earn Bright Start Scholarships, Photos Displayed  
at Illinois State Fair*

Nine photographers ages 8 to 18 won Bright Start college savings scholarships in the Cream of the Crop Photo Contest, Illinois State Treasurer Michael Frerichs announced today.

“The students showed amazing creativity and talent with these photos,” Frerichs said. “The images beautifully capture the wonderful diversity of Illinois agriculture.”

The winning photographs will be displayed during 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 Ag Invest marketing material, including the 2024-2025 Ag Invest calendar. A list of the winners can be found below.

The contest consisted of three age groups — ages 8-10, 11-14 and 15-18. Top winners were awarded Bright Start scholarships, with first-place winners in each age category receiving \$1,000, second-place winners receiving \$500, and third-place winners receiving \$250. Students who won more than once were permitted to receive one scholarship award.

Treasurer Frerichs administers the Bright Start college savings plan, which helps families save and invest for college, a vocational program, a trade school, or an apprenticeship. During Treasurer Frerichs’ tenure, the Bright Start and Bright Directions 529 college savings plans have more than doubled to almost \$20 billion in assets and have grown to more than 890,000 accounts. Additionally, Frerichs has worked to reduce fees to ensure more money invested goes directly to college savings. For more information, visit [BrightStart.com](#).

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Students were allowed to submit up to two photos, and a panel of judges selected the winning entries. The judges were Mary Morgan, principal asset quality & assurance officer at Compeer Financial; Scott Rhoads, regional president of Carrollton Bank; Gary Mueller, vice president of Havana National Bank; and Riley Wells, associate director of Illinois Foundation FFA.

The *Cream of the Crop Photo Contest* is now in its 12<sup>th</sup> year. It's part of the Illinois State Treasurer's Ag Invest program, which provides loan opportunities for Illinois farmers and agribusinesses to start, expand or add value to their farm operations. Ag Invest offers affordable financing through two options: the Ag Invest Agriculture Operating Line of Credit and the Long-Term Ag & Value-Added Ag program. The Treasurer's Office partners with eligible financial institutions in Illinois to provide low-interest loans to Illinois farmers. The loans provided by the financial institution can be used for the purchase of farm equipment, land, construction-related expenses, operating lines of credit or other costs related to conventional or sustainable farming.

Since 2015, when Frerichs became treasurer, the Ag Invest program has supported more than 10,000 agriculture borrowers and partnered with more than 45 financial institutions.

### **8-10 Age Bracket Winners**

First Place: Chase S., *At Sunset*, Forsyth, IL (Macon County)

Second Place: Claire M., *Rural Soil Preparation*, Neoga, IL (Shelby County)

Third Place: Alex E., *Corn as Seen from the Ground*, Waterloo, IL (Monroe County)

### **11-14 Age Bracket Winners**

First Place: Lily D., *County Fair*, Indianola, IL (Vermillion County)

Second Place: Anna P., *Nap Time*, Mason City, IL (Mason County)

Third Place: Caroline L., *Mama and Baby*, Wellington, IL (Iroquois County)

### **15-18 Age Bracket Winners**

First Place: Adan S., *The Beauty in Planting*, Plano, IL (Kendall County)

Second Place: April V., *Planting*, Champaign, IL (Champaign County)

Third Place: Allison H., *This Is How We Roll*, Mulberry Grove, IL (Bond County)

Treasurer Frerichs has invited the first-place winners to an Aug. 9 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 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 unclaimed property I-Cash program, which has returned a record-breaking \$2 billion since Frerichs was elected. For more news about the State Treasurer's Office, please follow Treasurer Frerichs on Instagram at [ILTreasurer](#), [LinkedIn](#) and Facebook at [Invested in You – Treasurer Michael Frerichs](#). You can find our weekly newsletter [here](#).

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