



NEWS

From the Illinois State Senate
State Senator Dave Koehler

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Koehler Announces Organic Farms Registration Web Site

SPRINGFIELD—State Sen. Dave Koehler (D-Peoria) has introduced a Senate Resolution announcing the creation of a website for organic and specialty-crop farmers. The website will be used to help conventional farmers and chemical applicators avoid damaging sensitive crops.

“I encourage all organic and specialty-crop farmers to register with this website and to make every effort to keep their information current and accurate,” Koehler said. “We have a great opportunity to minimize crop damage from chemical drift, but only if everyone actively participates.”

The address of the website is www.driftwatch.org. It is still in the development phase at the moment, but officials from the Illinois Department of Agriculture and the agricultural industry are hopeful that it will be fully operational by the 2011 growing season.

“The establishment of a website for organic and specialty farmers is a very important step to help conventional farmers and organic and specialty-crop farmers all thrive in Illinois,” said State Rep. Donald Moffit (R-Galesburg), a conventional farmer who has also been active on this issue. “Both types of farming are very important to the agricultural economy of our state.”

The website is being produced at no cost to the state of Illinois because it is being funded by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). USEPA’s participation brings with it the additional benefit that all upper Midwestern states can participate, including Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, and Minnesota.

“Everyone knows that Illinois is in the midst of a crippling fiscal crisis, so USEPA participation was key to getting this program up and running,” Koehler said. “Creating this website might not have been possible if we had to rely on Illinois’ already over-stretched resources.”

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Senate Joint Resolution 105 also calls on the University of Illinois Extension Service Pesticide Safety Education Program to inform pesticide applicators about the new website. Since all applicators receive training from the Extension, this should prove an effective way to ensure the participation of the professionals who administer agrichemicals.

“I’ve been very pleased at how well all parties have cooperated on this issue,” Koehler noted. “We’ve received support from the agrichemical industry and the U of I, in addition to the USEPA. I’m very optimistic that this new system will help organic and specialty-crop farmers protect their crops from chemical drift without placing an undue burden on anyone.”

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