

# State treasurer invests in the future

By JOSH FLINT

**F**OUR years from now, 10 Illinois students will graduate with ag degrees, paid in part by State Treasurer Alexi Giannoulas.

Each of the students received a \$2,500 Excellence in Agriculture Scholarship at the treasurer's annual Agriculture Breakfast. More than 100 high school students applied for the scholarships, which were awarded based on grades, community service and a personal essay.

"I think it's extremely important to keep kids interested in agriculture," Giannoulas says. "It's our most important industry."

This year, the amount of scholarships was doubled from last year's five. Giannoulas says it's important to recognize how many jobs agriculture provides Illinois.

Kaitlin Weitekamp, a scholarship winner from Raymond, plans to study agribusiness at the University of Illinois. As FFA president, she had the opportunity to meet ADM CEO Patricia Woertz. "That was an eye-opening experience," she remembers.

Upon graduation, Weitekamp hopes to work for a large company such as ADM or Monsanto. "After that, I'd like to start my own agribusiness," she says.

She already has some business experience. Weitekamp has owned and operated a lawn care business in her hometown since 2003. She does the bulk of the mowing, with her dad helping out only when she's overbooked.

Laura Overmyer of Oregon wants to be a veterinarian. She'll complete

her undergraduate work at Augustana College, majoring in biology.

Overmyer's inspiration comes from her mom, a vet technician. Plus, she enjoyed raising steers, sheep and rabbits as 4-H projects. At veterinary school, she'll specialize in large animals. Eventually, she hopes to conduct research on genetics and reproduction. The \$2,500

boost from the treasurer will help in the pursuit of her dream, she says.

"I picked one of the more expensive undergraduate programs, and vet school is not cheap, so the scholarship definitely helps out," Overmyer adds.

■ Visit [www.PrairieFarmer.com](http://www.PrairieFarmer.com) for a complete list and photo of winners.

## Key Points

- Giannoulas handed out \$2,500 scholarships to 10 college freshmen.
- All of the students plan to study some aspect of agriculture.
- Career plans range from large animal vet to global ag economist.



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