2026 AITC LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE



From Farm to Classroom: Bringing Agriculture to Life with Ag in the Classroom

Iowa Agriculture in the Classroom

Iowa Agriculture Literacy Foundation

Inspiring the next generation to understand and appreciate agriculture through K–12 programs, hands-on learning, teacher professional development, fairs, festivals, and community outreach.

A NOTE FROM IALF BOARD PRESIDENT, CASEY ANDERSON



Agriculture touches every student's life each day, from the food on their lunch trays to the clothes they wear and the fuel that powers their communities. As AITC educators, you are the bridge between the farm and the classroom. This year's theme, From Farm to Classroom: Bringing Agriculture to Life with AITC, celebrates the work you do to make agriculture accessable, engaging, and relevant for students. When students plant a seed, read a book about about an Iowa beef farm, or hear from a farmer who visits their school, agriculture becomes real, relevant, and exciting. Those moments spark curiosity. Curiosity opens doors to the careers we need now more than ever: agronomists, engineers, food scientists, data analysts, veterinarians, and so many more.

At IALF, we're proud to support you with ready-to-use lessons, grants, farm tours, and programs like Read Across Iowa. Empowering you along the way with workshops and professional development that build confidence and accentuate your creativity. Thank you for joining us at the 2026 Iowa Agriculture in the Classroom Learning and Leadership Conference. May you leave inspired, equipped, and ready to bring agriculture to life for the students in your community. Together, we'll grow a future with agriculture!

MEET OUR KEYNOTE



Emily Starr grew up in Eastern Iowa and still lives not far from her family's farmland, with her husband and two children. A former elementary teacher, Emily spends her days reading, writing, and helping elementary educators to inspire the next generation of science super stars through her STEM publishing company, StarrMatica. Emily has received the Prometheus Award, District Administration's Top Products Award, the Renew Rural Iowa Award, the Google Uptick Award, and the Iowa Entrepreneur of the Year Award. She presents at state and national conferences, teaches a variety of online courses, and is a peer reviewer for the National Science Teaching Association's journal Science and Children. Her debut middle grade nonfiction book, *Dig In! Uncovering the Secrets of Iowa's Veggie Farms*, was released in April from the Iowa Ag Literacy Foundation. Emily enjoys exploring nature with her boys, scuba diving with her husband, and reading every nonfiction book she can find. You can learn more about Emily's work on StarrMatica's website: www.starrmatica.com

NOV 11, 2026	PRE CONFERENCE AGENDA	
1:00 PM	**Check In/Welcome at Landus**	
2:00 PM	**Traveling Workshop to Rustic Star Alpacas**	
4:00 PM	**Traveling Workshop to Howell Tree Farm**	
5:30 PM	**Return to Landus**	
6:00 PM	**Networking Supper at Holiday Inn Express**	
NOV 12, 2026	**CONFERENCE AGENDA**	
8:00 AM LANDUS AUDITORIUM ROOM 260 WEST	**Check In/Networking**	
8:30 AM LANDUS AUDITORIUM ROOM 260 WEST	**Welcome from IALF**	
8:45 AM LANDUS AUDITORIUM ROOM 260 WEST	**AITC Data Collection**	
9:15 AM	**Breakout Session 1**	
LANDUS AUDITORIUM 260 WEST	TRAINING ROOM	LANDUS AUDITORIUM 260 EAST
Wool Ewe Keep Me Warm?	Connecting Agriculture, Waste, and Everyday Choices	Pizza and Ice Cream. Yay!
10:00 AM	**Breakout Session 2**	
LANDUS AUDITORIUM 260 WEST	TRAINING ROOM	LANDUS AUDITORIUM 260 EAST
Vines, Pines, and Possibilities	Don't Fear the Middle Schooler	Planning and Organizing an Ag Day
10:45 AM LANDUS AUDITORIUM ROOM 260 WEST	**Welcome from Landus**	
10:50 AM LANDUS AUDITORIUM ROOM 260 WEST	**What's new at IALF?**	
11:15 AM LANDUS AUDITORIUM ROOM 260 WEST	**Mini Session 1: Classroom Behaviors**	
11:45 AM LANDUS AUDITORIUM ROOM 260 WEST	**Mini Session 2: Summer PD Panel**	
12:30 PM LANDUS AUDITORIUM ROOM 260 EAST	**Networking Lunch**	
1:15 PM LANDUS AUDITORIUM ROOM 260 WEST	**Keynote - Emily Starr**	
2:00 PM	**Breakout Session 3**	
LANDUS AUDITORIUM 260 WEST	TRAINING ROOM	LANDUS AUDITORIUM 260 EAST
Q&A with Emily Starr	Meat Cutting 101	Book Talk
2:45-3:00 PM LANDUS AUDITORIUM ROOM 260 WEST	**Gather for Wrap Up!**	

BREAKOUT SESSION 1 DESCRIPTIONS

WOOL EWE KEEP ME WARM?

Jennifer Miler, Clarke, Ringgold, Lucas and Madison Counties Outreach Coordinator (jennifer.miler@ifbf.org)

Cooler weather is quickly approaching, and Wool Ewe Keep Me Warm is a great way to help students understand how they stay warm, thanks to a farmer! This lesson is hands-on and perfect for students in Pre-K through 2nd grades. If you're an educator who sees the same group of students the following year, (for example 3rd graders), I will also share how you can expand the sheep/wool lesson the following year. During this breakout session you will learn how farmers sheer their sheep, explore a variety of wool items, and try your hand at sheering. This lesson can easily be adapted to fit your classroom needs and can be taught with ease. I hope EWE will join me as we explore from the sheep to the sweater.

Jennifer is a lifelong advocate for agriculture who has spent five years connecting students across eight school districts to the journey from farm to food, fuel, and fiber. She enjoys creating engaging lessons that spark curiosity, including Farm Web, Pumpkin Catapults, Making Butter, and Seed Germination.

CONNECTING AGRICULTURE, WASTE, AND EVERYDAY CHOICES

Debra Kearney, South Central Iowa Solid Waste Agency Project Coordinator (dkearney@sciswa.org)

What happens to our trash after it leaves the curb? In this hands-on session, participants will build a model landfill to explore how landfills protect soil and water. They'll learn about landfill design, waste management, recycling, and composting while connecting these topics to agriculture and natural resources. Educators will leave with an engaging, adaptable activity to help students make thoughtful decisions about waste and environmental protection.

Debra Kearney combines experience in agricultural literacy, environmental education, and hands-on agriculture. Formerly with the Nutrients for Life Foundation, she now teaches waste management and consumer responsibility as Project Coordinator for the South Central Iowa Solid Waste Agency. She also owns and operates Dan-D Farms, a seasonal market in Knoxville, Iowa.

PIZZA AND ICE CREAM. YAY!

Sue Cook, Bremer County AITC Coordinator (susan.cook914@gmail.com)

Everyone loves pizza and ice cream, but where does it come from? In these two hands-on farm-to-table activities, students will explore the connection between agriculture and the foods they eat! Students will play The Pizza Game, a relay that follows a tomato from the farmer to the consumer, then make their own mini pizzas. For dessert, they'll learn about cow body parts through a fun cow-dressing activity before working together to make Yummy Ice Cream!

These activities have been enjoyed by students in grades K-4 and are sure to be a hit with your group!

Sue Cook is a former classroom teacher. Since leaving the traditional classroom, Sue has held a variety of jobs connected to agriculture: Education Coordinator at Cedar Valley Arboretum, ISU Extension and Outreach - Growing in the Garden educator, and Discovery Program at Cattle Congress. Currently, Sue is the AITC Coordinator for Bremer County Farm Bureau.

BREAKOUT SESSION 2 DESCRIPTIONS

VINES, PINES, AND POSSIBILITIES

Melissa James, Retired Teacher (mjamesagd@gmail.com) & Tara Tornabane, Education Program Manager (ttornabane@iowaagliteracy.org)

This session explores the history, economic importance, and environmental impacts of Iowa's grape and Christmas tree industries. Topics include grape production, varieties, and growing conditions as well as how science, policy, and the environment have influenced the grape industry. The session also explores Christmas tree farming, including tree varieties, farm management, and environmental sustainability, while encouraging critical thinking and real-world problem-solving.

Tara Tornabane is IALF's Education Program Manager, bringing 15 years of middle school science teaching and curriculum development experience to creating educational resources and professional development that connect agriculture to classroom learning. Melissa James is a retired high school science teacher with 33 years of experience who continues to promote agricultural education through IALF workshops and the Pointer Planters Garden Club's Little Sprouts events.

DON'T FEAR THE MIDDLE SCHOOLER

Hanna Jenkins, Floyd County AITC & Outreach Coordinator (hanna.jenkins@ifbf.org)

Ready to take your teaching skills to older students? In this session, compare the learning needs of elementary and middle school students and practice adapting an elementary lesson for older learners. Through collaboration and hands-on activities, gain practical tools to increase rigor, encourage deeper thinking, and build confidence in teaching middle school students.

Hanna Jenkins has been with Floyd County Farm Bureau for three years and has six years of experience teaching middle and high school agricultural science. With a master's degree in Agricultural Education, she is passionate about helping students understand where their food comes from.

PLANNING & ORGANIZING AN AG DAY

Madilynn Marburger, Cass & East Pottawattamie County Outreach Coordinator, (madilynn.marburger@ifbf.org)

In t**his session we will discuss what an Ag Day is and how to organize and plan one for your community. There will be examples of planning sheets and contact lists, schedules, sample emails to teachers and presenters, and anything involving communication and preparation for an Ag Day. We will go over where to begin planning, who to contact, and how to carry out the planning for the day of the event.**

Madilynn is the Outreach Coordinator for Cass and East Pottawattamie County Farm Bureaus. Originally from Griswold, Iowa, she studied agriculture in college and is in her second year teaching agricultural literacy in classrooms. She looks forward to connecting with fellow educators and sharing her experiences!

MINI SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AS A GUEST EDUCATOR

Kathy Castle, Retired Elementary Teacher (kallencastle@gmail.com)

Stepping into a brand-new classroom as a guest speaker is an incredible opportunity to champion agriculture, but capturing and holding students' attention in a limited timeframe can be daunting. Participants will learn how to turn the "host teacher" into an active teammate before arrival, establish instant routine resets, and master signals to maintain a focused learning environment. The session will cover ideas to eliminate chaotic transitions, apply pacing frameworks, and use strategies to manage student behavior during hands-on activities. Finally, attendees will discover how to handle common disruptions. By equipping guest educators with these concrete management tools, this session directly benefits AITC educators by ensuring that classroom visits are safe, structured, and highly engaging.

Kathy Castle, a retired teacher from Boone, grew up on a farm and spent 33 years as an elementary classroom teacher. For many of those years, she loved having Ag in the Classroom teachers present to her fourth graders. Last summer, Kathy served as a presenter on the Seed Survivor tour. She joins us to share strategies to help educators manage students and transform their next classroom visit into an enjoyable learning experience.

SUMMER PD PANEL

Alayna Hansen, LHAITC Program Coordinator, (ahansen@loesshillsaitc.org), Rachel Ambrosy, Dubuque County Education Outreach Coordinator, (rachel.ambrosy@ifbf.org), Karen Adams, Mahaska & Marion County AITC Coordinator (adams4cy@gmail.com), Melissa James, Teacher Leader (mjamesagd@gmail.com)

Alayna Hansen, Rachel Ambrosy, and Karen Adams will share their experiences hosting successful summer professional development workshops. Melissa James has served as a teacher leader for the past two years and will share how she has connected IALF lessons to classroom instruction. Throughout the session, you'll have opportunity to ask questions, exchange ideas, and gain insight into planning and hosting a professional development workshop.



BREAKOUT SESSION 3 DESCRIPTIONS

Q&A WITH EMILY STARR

Emily Starr, Author & Tara Tornabane, Education Program Manager (ttornabane@iowaaagliteracy.org)

Join our keynote speaker Emily Starr and Tara Tornabane from IALF for an interactive Q&A to dive deeper into the presentation, ask questions, and explore ideas for bringing agriculture and STEM to life in the classroom.

Emily Starr is a former elementary teacher and founder of StarrMatica, a STEM publishing company that inspires young scientists. An award-winning educator and presenter, she is the author of *Dig In! Uncovering the Secrets of Iowa's Veggie Farms*, released by the Iowa Agriculture Literacy Foundation. Learn more at www.starrmatica.com.Tara Tornabane is IALF's Education Program Manager, bringing 15 years of middle school science teaching and curriculum development experience to creating educational resources and professional development that connect agriculture to classroom learning.

MEAT CUTTING 101

Sadie Oberbroeckling, Story County AITC Coordinator, (sadie.oberbroeckling@ifbf.org) &
Ellen Brown, Greene County AITC Coordinator, (ellen.brown@ifbf.org)

Gain hands-on experience with meat-cutting fundamentals and the journey from live animal to retail cuts. Explore carcass weights, yield percentages, yield grades, marbling, USDA quality grades, and meat labeling. Participants will apply their knowledge while learning how retail cuts come from different sections of the carcass and how livestock production connects to the meat products found in grocery stores.

Sadie Oberbroeckling and Ellen Brown serve as the Ag in the Classroom Coordinators for Story and Greene Counties. With backgrounds in Animal Science and Agricultural Production Management, they combine their agricultural knowledge and industry experience to provide engaging, hands-on learning opportunities. As Farm Bureau members for more than two years, they are passionate about promoting agricultural literacy, helping students understand agriculture's impact on daily life, and inspiring the next generation to explore opportunities in the industry.

BOOK TALK

Gretchen Voga, Polk County AITC Coordinator, (gvoga@ifbf.org)

I will feature many books, including many that will hopefully be new to you, that can be used to enhance your lessons. Books for all ages will be highlighted. I'll give a short overview of each book and hand out a list of all books. Join us to find new exciting, engaging, and thought-provoking books!

Gretchen grew up on a heritage farm in Dubuque county. She got her elementary education degree at Iowa State University and spent 15 years teaching kindergarten, sixth grade, and substitute teaching before moving to Polk County Ag in the Classroom. She has been there for the past 13 years.

Breakout Session Notes

SESSION 1

SESSION 2

MINI SESSION 1

MINI SESSION 2

SESSION 3

THIS CONFERENCE WAS BROUGHT TO YOU BY...
THE IALF TEAM AND PARTNERS



KELLY FOSS
Executive Director



TARA TORNABANE
Education Program Manager



SIDNEY ORR
Education Program Coordinator



MELISSA ANDERSON
Administrative Assistant



LIZZIE HADLEY
Education Program Specialist/Intern

STAY CONNECTED

- Join the 'Iowa Agriculture in the Classroom' private Facebook group!
- Follow IALF on Social Media

Summer PD Host Guide

Scan the QR code to provide feedback for the conference

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