

Illinois 2003



Hometown: Gilson, Illinois
Year Inducted: 2003

John R. Block
President and CEO of Food Marketing Institute
Former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture

4-H Stats: Active 4-H member in Illinois.

As Director of the Illinois Department of Agriculture, he guided Extension/4-H-friendly legislation through the General Assembly that helped to preserve and expand Extension/4-H programs to all communities. Served as Secretary of Agriculture, fostered strong leadership roles for Extension/4-H and launched “Ag in the Classroom” and several Extension/4-H national program initiatives that redefined 4-H.

"Why do I believe that 4-H is important? We don't have enough time or space for me to give an adequate response to that question. If communications, records, business understanding, responsibility, and integrity are important building blocks for success, then 4-H is one of the most important places that you can develop these skills and build character. I recall that the first speech I ever gave as a 10 year old 4-H'er was 'What I Feed My Pig.' It all started right there."

John Block has been a lifetime supporter of 4-H and Extension. He was an active 4-H member in Illinois. In 1957, he graduated from West Point, and served three years in the Army. In 1960, he returned to his family farm, during which it expanded from 312 to 3000 acres. In 1977, he was appointed Director of the Illinois Department of Agriculture, where he guided Extension/4-H-friendly legislation through the General Assembly. The funding helped to preserve and expand Extension/4-H programs to all communities. From January 23, 1981 to February 14, 1986, he served as US Secretary of Agriculture. As USDA Secretary, Block was a key player in the 1985 Farm Bill. His efforts facilitated strong leadership roles for Extension/4-H as a valued educational resource for families. Under Block's administration, ““Ag in the Classroom”” was launched and Extension/4-H spearheaded several national program initiatives that redefined 4-H in terms of purpose rather than structure. He is now President and CEO of the Food Marketing Institute, which works on behalf of food retailers and wholesalers in the US and abroad.