

2024 IN-ACRE Year In Review

2024 was an eventful year for the IN-ACRE coalition! With involvement around the state, our team kept busy as we represented the coalition at a great deal of events while also meeting with our farmer members.

Continuing conversations surrounding climate issues and renewable energy was a key to our success this summer. Telling the story of the farmer and advocating for agriculture allowed us to work not only with those in the climate and energy sectors, but also with our elected officials. Meeting with state legislators and local officials, we were able to advocate for the best interests of the IN-ACRE coalition across the state.

2024 Legislative Session Engagement Indiana Renewable Energy Day 2024

The 2024 Indiana Renewable Energy Day at the Statehouse was a well put together event that IN-ACRE received a great deal of interest at. Several people were interested in the coalition and what types of approaches we take to bring agriculture and renewable energy to the same table. Many were also interested in the concept of IN-ACRE as they have received a lot of backlash from farmers in their area. Many took flyers and are excited to read more about the coalition on our website and our socials.

By The Numbers:

- 3 State Representatives stopped by our table
 - Rep. Errington, Rep. Garcia Wilburn, Rep. Gore
- 19 Physical Sign-ups for the Email Service

Opportunities for Future Engagement:

- Many wanted to know how they could be involved and learn more. They provided their information and were informed to respond to the emails with their ideas and questions on how to be more involved.
- This event was great to get in front of a diverse audience and really showcase agriculture and listen and understand the concerns regarding the disconnect between renewables and agriculture.
- A lot of support was shown for the idea of involving agriculture in the renewable landscape.
- We are looking into putting together a rural landowner council and partnering with several organizations on this effort.
- We have applied for a grant from DOE via Purdue University for outreach.
- We were nominated for the Governor's Environmental Award of Excellence.



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Other Winter 2024 Engagement

- We have made several connections over the course of the 2024 session. We are excited to continue to grow our relationships with Solar United Neighbors, Alliance Energy Independence, Hoosier Environmental Council, and many more.
- Rachel Conner was in Jasper Co. for their energy task force's public meetings. She spoke on behalf of IN-ACRE at these meetings.
- We are excited to be part of the Rural Climate Partnership. Being involved with this, we have been able to gain information on the following:
 - Key factors contributing to community skepticism towards clean energy projects
 - Strategies to foster support, and lessen opposition, using research-tested messaging
 - The role of trusted, local rural messengers in changing perceptions
 - Land use issues, including loss of farmland to projects other than renewables
- We submitted two-op ed pieces featuring commentary by Sarah Beth Aubrey and farmer members to the Capital Chronicle
- IN-ACRE Founder, Sarah Beth Aubrey presented about agriculture's role in clean energy and climate at the IU Sustainability and Resilience Summit on February 9, 2024

Social Media:

- We were active during this session on the social media outlets LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook, using both IN-ACRE and The Envoy Group accounts.
- 5 polling questions posted on all social media platforms
- 5 Statehouse posts

2024 Rural Energy Tours

Taking place at Fair Oaks Farms and Northeastern REMC, the 2024 Rural Energy Tours were a success. Both tours were well attended by a diverse group of individuals from many different industries. Whether it was agriculture, construction, legislators, farmers, or local elected officials, there were people from all different walks of life together learning more about these energy systems. As a founding organizer of the Rural Energy Tours, we are happy to work with Indiana Farm Bureau, the Association of Indiana Counties, the Indiana State Department of Agriculture, and the Office of Energy Development in putting together these events now in the third year.

June 4th - Fair Oaks Farms:

- The highlight of the Fair Oaks Energy Tour was a demonstration of how the farm utilizes digesters to produce unique forms of energy. The energy produced from the farm moves through the digester system and is then used to power vehicles. We also saw the digester operations, which was very interesting to the attendees. Some dignitaries in attendance were ISDA Director Don Lamb, State Rep. and Indiana Farm Bureau First Vice President Kendell Culp (R-Rensselaer), State Rep. Sue Errington (D-Muncie), State Rep. Matt Pierce (D-Bloomington), representatives from Congressman Baird and Senator Young's Offices, and several local elected officials.

July 17th - Northeastern REMC:

- Touring a battery storage facility was very interesting for the attendees at the Northeastern REMC location in Columbia City, IN. During this tour, those attending were able to see the structure of their battery storage system and learn about how it operates. This was another great event for professionals to continue networking with their peers while still learning about the evolution of the energy industry. Some dignitaries in attendance were State Rep. and Chairman of the Energy Committee Edmond Soliday (R-Valparaiso), State Rep. Jim Pressel (R-Rolling Prairie), and many local elected officials.



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Media Appearances

- Our team has appeared on the following media outlets:
 - **Abdul At Large** with Abdul-Hakim Shabazz -radio interview on ag and climate
 - **The Anderson Herald**, Anderson, IN-newspaper interview about farmers and solar
 - https://www.heraldbulletin.com/business/climate-summit-ai-to-help-farmers-get-greener/article_1cf47102-33de-11ef-9431-77a9d94ac40d.html
 - **EcoRight Speaks Podcast** -general conversation about climate and ag
 - <https://republicen.org/blog/ecoright-speaks-season-six-episode-7-sarah-beth-aubrey-in-climate-conversations>
 - **The Republican Newspaper**, Danville, IN - recap on siting
 - Published an Op-Ed in the **Capital Chronicle** - online newspaper op ed
 - <https://indianacapitalchronicle.com/2024/03/27/a-grid-for-a-greater-indiana/>

Stakeholder Engagement

We are engaged with a growing number of renewable energy advocates in the state. Below is a list of solar and renewable energy partners that we are actively working with through collaborations:

- Solar United Neighbors
- Drive Clean Indiana
- Indiana Ethanol Producers Association
- Hoosier Solar
- Center for Energy Education
- NIPSCO
- HSI Solar
- Farm to Power
- AES Indiana
- Energy Systems Network
- Indiana Conservation Voters
- The Nature Conservancy
- Indiana Land Preservation
- American Farmland Trust
- Rural Climate Partnership

We also began engagement with PACT - The Platform for Climate Agriculture.

Social Media Engagement

Social media campaigns have been important to the growth and exposure of IN-ACRE. We have not only promoted the Conservation Attitude Survey, but also began a ‘Did You Know’ campaign. This campaign included sustainability facts surrounding topics of what we call the ‘Six Pillars of the Climate Conversation. We also highlighted the Rural Energy Tours to gain interest prior to the events.



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Goals Met

- Connecting with local elected officials
- Building our producer network
- Advocating through all forms of media
- Conducting the Conservation Attitude Survey
- Adding members and stakeholders
 - 47 new members of our network from the Energy Tours

Survey Highlights

- 50% of surveyed landowners see carbon intensity score more than likely affecting their operation.
- 55.6% of surveyed landowners see the political environment as a factor in the shift toward conservation agriculture.

Other Collaborations Where We Participate

- Solar Siting table for the Rural Climate Partnership
 - This monthly group meets about new developments in the renewable energy space.
 - Highlights government programs that help support renewable initiatives.
 - Brings together experts in the field to discuss important issues within the space.
- Roots Clean Energy (ROOTS) Group - A Midwest clean energy consortium
- Federal Agriculture Committee Advisory (FACA) membership - nationwide group of agriculture groups that advocate for policy in clean energy.
- R-STEP
 - Added as a collaborator to the Purdue University Renewable Energy Siting through Technical Engagement and Planning (R-STEP) program in October 2024 to support increased delivery of farmer education on renewables and opportunities to coordinate advocate farmers and local elected officials. This will be a three-year program and collaboration with a variety of Indiana stakeholders.
 - IN-ACRE will have the opportunity to participate in multiple in person and online events each year within the collaboration and will host meet ups with rural landowners and local elected officials to see renewable energy projects in action.
- Launched and participated in a women in sustainability initiative and hosted first event in June 2024.
- Attended the Women in Green Breakfast sponsored by the US Green Building Council.
- Our team attended the Ham Breakfast, an ag and political leader gathering, before the opening of the state fair and volunteer during the State Fair to interact with farmers.



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Meet the Team

- Jayden Simpson, Policy and Coalitions Engagement Intern
 - Jayden is a junior at Purdue University majoring in Agricultural Economics with a concentration in Policy and Pre-Law. Jayden joined us in January with his primary focus being on statehouse action and working with other IN-ACRE events as well as managing day-to-day social media campaigns.
- Rachel Conner, Consultant
 - Rachel Conner is a Hoosier native and lawyer with experience in agriculture, renewable energy, and land use policy. Her career work has varied from farm advocacy to commercial construction litigation to local economic development projects and zoning. She launched her own firm, Rachel Conner Consulting, LLC, in 2023 to provide public affairs and project management services to energy and agricultural stakeholders in Indiana.
- Carty Beaston, Marketing Specialist
 - Carty Beaston works to coordinate digital media used by the coalitions we operate. As our Marketing Specialist, Carty builds and coordinates the website features that we use. In addition to this, Carty also assists in social media and content management.



Team Member Highlights

- Jayden Simpson, policy and coalitions engagement intern, was a member of the Indiana Farm Bureau Resolutions Committee representing the Collegiate Farm Bureau chapters in Indiana.
- Rachel Conner participated on the Indiana Farm Bureau Energy Subcommittee.
- Sarah Beth Aubrey spoke at the Indianapolis Carbon Removal Summit sponsored by IU Indianapolis in October.

Looking Ahead to 2025

- IN-ACRE is launching the Rural Land Owner Council in 2025 encouraging developers and stakeholders across any renewable energy sector to join.
 - This initiative will convene members and rural landowners multiple times per year in a neutral setting for roundtables, one-on-one meeting opportunities, networking, and training sessions in Indiana.
 - The program is gathering members and funding now and is expected to launch in summer 2025.
 - For information reach out to us at advocacycoalitions@gmail.com

