



Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity

Rod R. Blagojevich, Governor / Jack Lavin, Director

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Blagojevich Encourages Growth Of Illinois Ag Products Market Through Launch Of New Opportunity Returns Website



opportunity returns

Creating more jobs for today and tomorrow

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Rod R. Blagojevich – Governor

news

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BLAGOJEVICH ENCOURAGES GROWTH OF ILLINOIS AG PRODUCTS MARKET THROUGH LAUNCH OF

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NEW OPPORTUNITY RETURNS WEBSITE

SPRINGFIELD— As part of his innovative *Opportunity Returns* regional economic development plan, Governor Rod Blagojevich is soliciting interest for a new website that gives Illinois food or agricultural producers the chance to market their company and products on the internet. The new *Buy Illinois Products* website, created through the Department of Agriculture, is designed to keep the agriculture product industry on top of a constantly changing and competitive market. The website will officially launch early next year.

Each year, Illinois businesses spend billions of dollars on goods and services. One of the key components of *Opportunity Returns* is to encourage companies to "Buy Illinois" by spending more money in-state. Just a slight shift in spending would boost the state's economy by hundreds of millions of dollars, resulting in the creation of more jobs.

"Because Illinois is a state that is driven by agriculture, we need to remain aggressive in keeping up with market trends and technology," Blagojevich said. "It's a proven fact that more people are shopping from their homes. As a part of our *Opportunity Returns* initiative, I want to make sure that, with the click of a mouse, they have access to all the fantastic products our agriculture industry has to offer. Buying in Illinois will not only help your businesses get the best products and services around, but it'll also help us jumpstart our economy. It's an opportunity you don't want to miss."

Governor Blagojevich's *Opportunity Returns* regional economic development plan is the most aggressive, comprehensive approach to creating jobs in Illinois' history. Since a one-size-fits-all approach to economic development just doesn't work, the Governor has divided the state into 10 regions – finding areas with common economic strengths and needs, and developing a plan with specific actions for each region. This grassroots effort is a product of significant outreach over several months throughout each region, with business, civic and labor leaders, and elected officials. These economic initiatives are designed to be flexible and effective. Each plan is tailored to deliver real results that local businesses will see, feel, and, hopefully, profit from.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Department of Commerce, 2003 third quarter retail sales for online companies generated \$13.291 billion. That's an increase of 27% compared to an increase of only 6% percent for total retail sales. And projections by Jupiter research predict online retail sales are expected to double in the next five years.

"During this day and age, people expect companies, no matter how big or small, to sell their products online," Department of Agriculture Marketing Manager Gib Frier said. "In light of the great internet opportunities for small businesses, the Illinois Department of Agriculture has undertaken the ambitious task of developing this website specifically designed for vendors of Illinois products."

The Illinois Products web site offers participating companies a variety of features including:

- A unique web address for each business that can be used for promotional material

- Login and password to a secure member site
- Website statistics and update capabilities through the secure member site
- Search functionality on the Illinois Products Homepage to allow customers to search for a business or specific product
- Businesses listed by product categories
- Businesses listed by region
- Contact information for each business
- A link to existing websites associated with the business
- A web page that contains business and product information, as well as pictures of the product

Participants will have three membership options to choose from with annual fees ranging from \$30 to \$80.

"We're making it simple for people to support the local economy. And if agriculture thrives in Illinois, the rest of the economy is sure to follow," Blagojevich said.

Illinois food or agriculture companies interested in being listed on a "Buy Illinois Products" web page can contact Larry Aldag at (217) 524-3012 or by e-mail at laldag@agr.state.il.us.

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