



HR0050

LRB103 25932 ECR 52283 r

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HOUSE RESOLUTION

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WHEREAS, The members of the Illinois House of Representatives wish to recognize Mark and Karen DeDecker and family on the occasion of being named the 2023 Family of the Year by the Illinois Pork Producers Association (IPPA); and

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WHEREAS, Mark DeDecker and his wife, Karen, are the proud owners of the DeDecker Pork Farm in Cambridge, where they currently farm 2,500 acres of corn and soybeans and market 7,000 hogs annually with their son, Lance; and

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WHEREAS, The DeDecker family history in Henry County goes back over 75 years and spans over three generations, beginning in 1936 when Mark DeDecker's grandparents, Eli and Lucy DeDecker, purchased 160 acres for his 21-year-old father, Marvin; shortly after the purchase, Marvin married Mark's mother, Betty, and they lived and worked on the farm; at the time, as it was not uncommon for a farm to be very diversified, the couple raised cows, chicken, and pigs and grew corn, soybeans, and oat and hay on rotation; and

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WHEREAS, In the 1970s, the DeDecker family farm was one of the first farms to begin farrowing inside at a time when livestock was primarily raised outdoors and many of their neighbors continued to raise 5,000 to 10,000 head on pasture;

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1 their first indoor hog barn was originally a chicken house  
2 that once homed 12,000 laying hens; later, their chicken house  
3 was disassembled, moved from its original location, and  
4 converted into a 40 x 214-foot farrow-to-finish production  
5 line building; their original barn and crib used for livestock  
6 still stands on the DeDecker Pork Farm today; and

7 WHEREAS, From an early age, Mark DeDecker had a passion  
8 for livestock; he participated in 4-H, winning first at the  
9 state level and fourth at the national level for 4-H Livestock  
10 Judging; he later attended the University of Illinois at  
11 Urbana-Champaign, where he was chosen as one of the top five  
12 outstanding seniors in the College of Agriculture; and

13 WHEREAS, After receiving his Bachelor of Science and  
14 Master of Swine Production, Mark DeDecker's interest in the  
15 pork industry became a career when he started farming  
16 full-time in 1973; while completing his master's degree, he  
17 married Karen DeSmith, who was also born and raised in Henry  
18 County; the couple initially resided in Champaign until he  
19 finished his master's degree; they then moved back to  
20 Cambridge, where he partnered with his father, farming 640  
21 acres and raising 1,000 hogs in a farrow-to-finish operation;  
22 while he and his father tended to the farm, Karen was employed  
23 at Deere & Company; and

1           WHEREAS, Mark and Karen DeDecker started their family and  
2 had three children, Jacob, Lance, and Ashley; he became  
3 involved in the organizational side of the industry and began  
4 serving on the Henry County Pork Producers Board; throughout  
5 his career, he has served as a director on the board for over  
6 50 years; during that time, he has held the position of  
7 president and scholarship chair, with the latter role giving  
8 him the opportunity to award several hundred thousand dollars  
9 to deserving students interested in pursuing a career in  
10 agriculture; and

11           WHEREAS, When the children were little, Karen DeDecker  
12 served as the secretary on the Henry County Fair Board; later,  
13 she was a bookkeeper for the Henry and Rock Island County Farm  
14 Bureau offices, splitting her time between both; she  
15 eventually worked full-time at the Rock Island Farm Bureau,  
16 retiring after 16 years of service; while raising the children  
17 and working full-time, she continued doing a number of tasks  
18 on the farm, including driving the grain cart, loading and  
19 moving hogs, and running for parts; and

20           WHEREAS, The entire DeDecker family has remained very  
21 active in agriculture, with all of Mark and Karen's children  
22 pursuing an agriculture-related career; their son, Jacob, was  
23 named the Illinois Pork State Ambassador in 1998; later, he  
24 received his Ph.D. and spent 15 years at the Michigan State

1 University Extension, where he served as a presenter and  
2 leader to visiting scholars and partnered with countries  
3 around the world; he is currently the director of the  
4 extension program and associate dean for Engagement at the  
5 University of Nevada in Reno; his wife, Kristina, homeschools  
6 their four children, Hayven, Isaiah, Zander, and Elijah; and

7 WHEREAS, Mark and Karen DeDecker's daughter, Ashley, also  
8 earned her Ph.D. and currently works as the director of  
9 Production Research for Smithfield Foods, Inc.; throughout her  
10 career, she has served on several national committees and  
11 speaks at livestock meetings in the U.S. and around the world;  
12 her husband, Ashley Weaver, is an Alcohol Law Enforcement  
13 Special Agent; they reside in North Carolina with their two  
14 children, Conley and Blair; and

15 WHEREAS, Mark and Karen DeDecker's other son, Lance,  
16 finished his studies at Black Hawk College East Campus and  
17 returned to the farm in 2001, where he partnered with his  
18 parents; today, he and his wife, Lindsey, live on part of the  
19 farm a mile away with their two children, Colt and Chance; and

20 WHEREAS, In addition to Mark DeDecker's leadership role on  
21 the Henry County Pork Producers Board, he also served as a  
22 district director for the IPPA for nine years; during his  
23 tenure as a board member, he served on the youth and research

1 committees; he also served as chairman of the Illinois Pork  
2 Expo when the show made the transition to Springfield after  
3 being hosted in Peoria for several decades; after stepping  
4 down as a district director, he has continued to remain active  
5 at the county level; and

6 WHEREAS, Mark and Karen DeDecker were named Prairie Farmer  
7 Master Farmers in 2016, a prestigious honor that is the  
8 longest running recognition for farmers in the country; and

9 WHEREAS, The DeDecker family has been active in several  
10 community organizations over the years, with Mark serving on  
11 the Henry County Soil & Water Conservation District for 25  
12 years, the Henry County FSA Board and the Cambridge Library  
13 Board for nine years, and the Edwards River Board for 10 years;  
14 the family also belongs to St. John Vianney Catholic Church;  
15 and

16 WHEREAS, The DeDecker family continues to make a lasting  
17 impression on their community and the pork industry; Mark and  
18 Karen have striven to adapt to changes and grow their business  
19 while remaining good stewards of the land and caring for their  
20 animals; their involvement in local and state activities has  
21 not only led to their success but has also been the foundation  
22 for their children's success in agriculture; therefore, be it

1           RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE  
2 HUNDRED THIRD GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that  
3 we recognize Mark and Karen DeDecker and family on being named  
4 the 2023 Family of the Year by the Illinois Pork Producers  
5 Association (IPPA), and we thank the family for their hard  
6 work and dedication to their community and the pork industry;  
7 and be it further

8           RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be  
9 presented to the Mark and Karen DeDecker as an expression of  
10 our esteem and respect.