

Agricultural Law

The newsletter of the Illinois State Bar Association's Section on Agricultural Law

Letter From the Chairperson

BY NANCY METSKER-HANDEGAN

FELLOW AG LAW AND BAR ASSOCIATION MEMBERS, please let me introduce myself, Nancy Handegan. I am a graduate of the University of Illinois, Class of January 1983. I practice in Decatur, Illinois with my son. I also own title insurance company offices in Decatur, Shelbyville, and Sullivan. My daughter manages my title company offices in Shelbyville and Sullivan. I represent farmers, business owners, and landowners throughout central Illinois. I was the oldest child of a central Illinois farm family. We had grain, cattle, and hogs. I spent many hours cultivating corn and soybean rows and many more miles walking soybean rows. The younger generation will have no idea what I am talking about. My husband and I own central Illinois farmland that we custom farm. My granddaughter will be the seventh generation on my father's centennial farm that I am blessed to own. I was a member of the Illinois High School Rodeo Association the first year Illinois had an association. I still have a strong love for horses, barrel racing, and rodeos. My son jumps out of airplanes on the weekends, and my daughter, granddaughter, and I go to barrel races. I was a member of the committee when it was first created and later asked to be reappointed. In the beginning, we were a small group of attorneys who believed strongly in the need for shared information and insight. I continue to believe that the Illinois Ag Law Committee is a very important organization for the Illinois State Bar Association and the Illinois farming community. There is a tremendous wealth of knowledge among the members and a commitment to our clients and the ag community. I learn so much each time I attend a meeting. I would strongly encourage you to become involved in promoting the needs of the agricultural community. Please reach out to me any time to discuss thoughts or concerns you believe should be addressed. As the chairperson and a member of the committee, we will continue to monitor matters we believe are important to insure the well-being of the agricultural industry and our clients. ■

Letter From the Chairperson
1

FSA Information Corner
2

Ag Law in the News: July 2026
3

Illinois Farm Vehicles and
Implements of Husbandry:
What Farmers Should Know
Before Driving on Public
Roads
5

Lawyering on the Beach
(Or on a Tractor): What I
Learned by Attending LOTB
Conference 2026
8

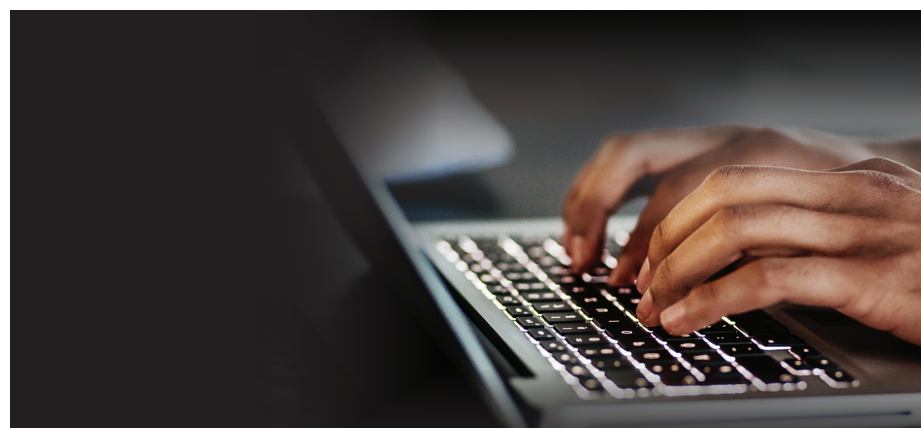


Agricultural Law Section Chair Nancy Metsker-Handegan (right) presents a plaque to outgoing Chair Garrett Thalgott during the ISBA Annual Meeting at the Ritz-Carlton in St. Louis on June 12, 2026. Congratulations, Garrett, on a successful bar year, and thank you for your outstanding leadership and service to the Ag Law Section!

FSA Information Corner

BY NANCY METSKER-HANDEGAN

CROP PLANTING REPORTS HAVE DEADLINES especially if crop insurance is involved. Conservation Reserve Program acres must be reported annually by July 15 (*Editor's Note:* The 2026 deadline for reporting has now passed at the time of publication of this Newsletter but be sure to mark your calendars for the 2027 reporting deadline). Planting dates for corn, soybeans, and other spring crops, including hay acres, must also be reported by July 15. Wheat and fall seeded crops must be reported by December 15. Late filing may be possible so contact the local FSA office if you need assistance. ■



Announcing
TWENTY | 20
by LexBlog, Inc.

Interested in having a legal blog but don't have time for the setup and maintenance?

LexBlog can help!

ISBA members receive a blog **FREE** for the first 6 months, and then **\$39.99/month** thereafter, with no setup fees and the blog will automatically be featured on Illinois Lawyer Now.

 ILLINOIS STATE BAR ASSOCIATION™

For more information, visit isba.org/lexblog

Agricultural Law

This is the newsletter of the ISBA's Section on Agricultural Law. Section newsletters are free to section members and published at least four times per year. Section membership dues are \$35 per year.

To join a section, visit www.isba.org/sections or call 217-525-1760.

OFFICE

ILLINOIS BAR CENTER
424 S. SECOND STREET
SPRINGFIELD, IL 62701
PHONES: 217-525-1760 OR 800-252-8908
[WWW.ISBA.ORG](https://www.isba.org)

EDITOR

Cari Brett Rincker

COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

Celeste Niemann
✉ cniemann@isba.org

ART DIRECTOR

Ticara Turley
✉ tturley@isba.org

PUBLICATIONS ATTORNEY

Kelsey Burge
✉ kburge@isba.org

AGRICULTURAL LAW SECTION COUNCIL

Nancy Metsker-Handegan, Chair
James R. Grebe, Vice-Chair
James F. Kane, Secretary
Garrett Wilks Thalgott, Ex-Officio
Christopher W. Byron
Tambra K. Cain
Keith W. Casteel
Kenneth R. Eathington
Laurie A. Harmon
Ronald K. Hoskin
James C. Krupp
Mary C. Ludwig
Michael A. Mattingly
Matthew L. McCarthy
Edward J. Mitchell
James R. Myers
Paul A. Osborn, CLE Committee Liaison
William A. Peithmann
Jerry W. Quick
Cari Brett Rincker, Newsletter Editor
Craig J. Sondgeroth
Alan E. Stumpf
Jeffrey L. Terry
Kyle M. Tompkins
Carolann Wackerlin-Temple
Andrew G. White
J. Nelson Wood
Ted M. Niemann, Board Liaison
Kimberly A. Furr, Staff Liaison

DISCLAIMER: This newsletter is for subscribers' personal use only; redistribution is prohibited. Copyright Illinois State Bar Association. Statements or expressions of opinion appearing herein are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Association or Editors, and likewise the publication of any advertisement is not to be construed as an endorsement of the product or service offered unless it is specifically stated in the ad that there is such approval or endorsement.

Articles are prepared as an educational service to members of ISBA. They should not be relied upon as a substitute for individual legal research.

The articles in this newsletter are not intended to be used and may not be relied on for penalty avoidance.

Ag Law in the News: July 2026

BY SAM ELLIS & CARI BRETT RINCKER

Federal legislation & regulatory developments

- USDA announced the Strengthening Processing for U.S. Ranchers (SPUR) Program on June 30, 2026, to provide temporary support for eligible small- and mid-size beef processing establishments. The program is aimed at strengthening domestic processing capacity and improving market access for ranchers, particularly in regions where limited processing options can affect livestock prices and producer bargaining power.¹
- A recent Texas Farm Bureau article reported that a federal executive order aims to lower fertilizer costs for farmers by addressing competition, supply chain, and input-cost concerns in the fertilizer market. Because fertilizer remains one of the largest input costs for many crop producers, the executive order may be relevant for producers monitoring federal efforts to improve affordability and market access for key farm inputs.²

- USDA also announced a \$125 million annual investment in agricultural research infrastructure on June 15, 2026. The funding is intended to support research facilities and long-term scientific capacity across the country, including work related to productivity, animal health, crop resilience, and food system innovation.³

Environmental law & land use

- EPA continued to emphasize rural water infrastructure in June 2026, announcing more than \$25 million in funding to improve drinking water systems in small and rural communities. The grants are intended to support upgrades addressing PFAS, lead, and other local drinking water challenges, which remain important compliance and public health issues for rural municipalities and agricultural communities.⁴
- EPA also announced \$25.5 million in technical-assistance funding for small, rural, and Tribal communities facing



Exclusive for ISBA Members

Try SimpleAI Free for 30 Days

Review, draft, and redline contracts in Microsoft Word.



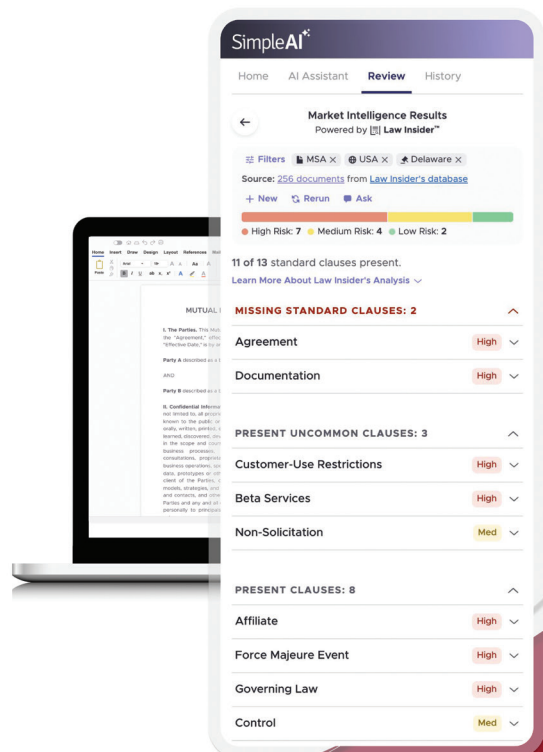
Grounded in contract intelligence from Law Insider.



Accelerate contract drafting and review by as much as 90%.



ISBA members also receive 25% off subscriptions



wastewater infrastructure challenges. The funding is tied to Clean Water Act compliance and may be relevant for rural communities seeking engineering, operational, workforce, or financial-management support for wastewater systems.⁵

Trade & market regulation

- USDA welcomed June 2026 federal guidance clarifying that dairy operations may qualify to use the H-2A temporary agricultural worker program when they can demonstrate a temporary or seasonal labor need. The clarification is important for dairy employers and their counsel because dairy work often presents year-round labor issues that can be difficult to fit within traditional H-2A requirements.⁶
- Producer sentiment remained under pressure in June 2026, with the Purdue University-CME Group Ag Economy Barometer declining from 121 in April to 119 in May. The report attributed the decline primarily to worsening views of current farm conditions, reflecting continued concerns over input costs, market volatility, and profitability.⁷

Energy and rural development

- Energy policy remained closely tied to agricultural markets in June 2026. In Illinois, Senator Dick Durbin visited Incobrasa Industries with representatives from the Illinois Soybean Association and soybean farmers to discuss biofuels and issues affecting the industry. The visit highlights the continued importance of renewable fuels to Illinois soybean producers and rural economic development.⁸

Illinois

- Illinois lawmakers approved a \$55.9 billion state budget in June 2026 that included current-level funding for the Illinois Department of Agriculture. For producers and agribusinesses, level funding suggests continuity in core state agricultural programs, even as broader fiscal and policy debates continue in Springfield.⁹

- Illinois conservation programming also remained active. In June 2026, the Illinois Soybean Association outlined available NRCS programs and encouraged farmers to continue using federal conservation resources despite uncertainty over available funding. These programs remain important tools for producers considering soil health, water quality, and conservation compliance practices.¹⁰ ■

Sam Ellis is an associate attorney with Rincker Law, PLLC, practicing in the areas of food and agriculture law.

Cari Brett Rincker is the owner of Rincker Law, PLLC, a national general practice law firm concentrating in Food, Farm and FamilySM law.

1. U.S. Dep't of Agriculture, *Secretary Rollins Announces Program to Support Small- and Mid-Size Beef Processors* (June 30, 2026), <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2026/06/30/secretary-rollins-announces-program-support-small-and-mid-size-beef-processors>.
2. Jennifer Dorsett, *Executive Order Aims to Lower Fertilizer Costs for Farmers*, Tex. Farm Bureau (May 14, 2026), <https://texasfarmbureau.org/executive-order-aims-to-lower-fertilizer-costs-for-farmers/>.
3. U.S. Dep't of Agriculture, *Secretary Rollins Announces Historic \$125 Million Annual Investment in Agricultural Research Infrastructure Across America* (June 15, 2026), <https://www.nifa.usda.gov/about-nifa/press-releases/secretary-rollins-announces-historic-125-million-annual-investment>.
4. U.S. Env't Prot. Agency, *EPA Invests in Making America Healthy Again with Announcement of \$25 Million to Improve Drinking Water in Small and Rural Communities* (June 26, 2026), <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-invests-making-america-healthy-again-announcement-25-million-improve-drinking>.
5. U.S. Env't Prot. Agency, *EPA Announces \$25.5 Million to Address Wastewater Challenges in Rural, Small, and Tribal Communities* (June 17, 2026), <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-announces-255-million-address-wastewater-challenges-rural-small-and-tribal>.
6. U.S. Dep't of Agriculture, *Trump Administration Welcomes Clarification on H-2A Eligibility for Dairy Operations* (June 17, 2026), <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2026/06/17/trump-administration-welcomes-clarification-h-2a-eligibility-dairy-operations>.
7. James Henry, *Ag Economy Barometer: What's Driving Continued Decline in Producer Sentiment?*, AgriNews (June 14, 2026), <https://www.agrinenews-pubs.com/business/2026/06/14/ag-economy-barometer-whats-driving-continued-decline-in-producer-sentiment/>.
8. AgriNews Staff, *Durbin, ISA Visit Incobrasa Industries*, AgriNews (June 27, 2026), <https://www.agrinenews-pubs.com/business/2026/06/27/durbin-isa-visit-incobrasa-industries/>.
9. Tom C. Doran, *Minimal Changes in IDOA Budget*, AgriNews (June 11, 2026), <https://www.agrinenews-pubs.com/business/2026/06/11/minimal-changes-in-idoa-budget/>.
10. Tom C. Doran, *ISA Outlines NRCS Programs*, AgriNews (June 5, 2026), <https://www.agrinenews-pubs.com/news/science/2026/06/05/isa-outlines-nrcs-programs/>.

PracticeHQ[®]
ILLINOIS STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

**Practice Management and
Technology Resources**

- ✓ Open a Firm
- ✓ Build
- ✓ Manage
- ✓ Protect
- ✓ Wind Down



ISBA.ORG/PRACTICEHQ

Illinois Farm Vehicles and Implements of Husbandry: What Farmers Should Know Before Driving on Public Roads

BY SAM ELLIS & CARI BRETT RINCKER

FARM EQUIPMENT DOES NOT stay in the field. During planting, spraying, harvest, and livestock work, farmers often need to move tractors, wagons, combines, nurse tanks, fertilizer equipment, and other machinery on public roads. Illinois law recognizes that reality, but it does not give every farm-related vehicle a blanket exemption from registration, lighting, weight, or safety rules.

The key question is usually not whether the vehicle is used by a farmer. The better question is whether the vehicle fits a specific Illinois Vehicle Code category and whether it is being operated in the way that the statute allows.

Start with the Illinois definition of “implement of husbandry”

Illinois defines an “implement of husbandry” as every vehicle designed and adapted exclusively for agricultural, horticultural, or livestock-raising operations. The definition includes farm wagons, wagon trailers, and similar vehicles used in connection with those operations, or vehicles used for lifting or carrying an implement of husbandry. However, under the current statutory language, a farm wagon, wagon trailer, or similar vehicle with a gross weight of more than 36,000 pounds is excluded from the definition. See 625 ILCS 5/1-130.

That definition matters because Illinois gives implements of husbandry special treatment under several Vehicle Code provisions. But the definition is narrow. A vehicle should be designed and adapted exclusively for agricultural, horticultural, or livestock-raising operations. A general-purpose vehicle does not become an implement of husbandry simply because it is used on a farm.

Registration: Implements of husbandry may be exempt, but only in limited circumstances

As a general rule, motor vehicles, trailers, semitrailers, and pole trailers must be registered and titled when they are driven or moved on an Illinois highway. Illinois then creates several exceptions. One important agricultural exception covers “any implement of husbandry” that is only incidentally operated or moved on a highway. The statute also states that this includes a not-for-hire movement for the purpose of delivering farm commodities to a place of first processing or sale, or to a place of storage. See 625 ILCS 5/3-402(A) (2).

For farmers, the phrase “only incidentally operated or moved upon a highway” is important. Illinois permits incidental road movement of qualifying implements, but the road use should remain secondary to the equipment’s agricultural purpose. Regular road hauling, for-hire transportation, or non-farm commercial use may push the vehicle outside the exemption.

Farm tractors and other implements must still follow roadway safety rules

Even when an implement of husbandry is exempt from ordinary registration requirements, the operator still needs to comply with safety rules that apply when the equipment is on the highway. Illinois requires every animal-drawn vehicle, farm tractor, implement of husbandry, and special mobile equipment to display a slow-moving vehicle emblem on the rear when operated on a highway, unless a statutory exception applies. See 625 ILCS 5/12-709(a).

When equipment is operated in

combination, the emblem rules depend on visibility. If a towed unit or load partially or totally obscures the emblem on the towing unit, the towed unit must display the emblem. If the emblem on the towing unit is not obscured, either the towing unit or the towed unit may display the emblem. See 625 ILCS 5/12-709(b).

The emblem must meet the specifications and mounting requirements established by the Illinois Department of Transportation. Illinois regulations implementing the slow-moving vehicle emblem statute are found at 92 Ill. Admin. Code Part 564. The statute also provides that a slow-moving vehicle emblem is intended as a safety identification device and may not be displayed on a vehicle or in a manner other than as allowed by the statute. See 625 ILCS 5/12-709(c), (d).

Lighting requirements matter, especially at night

Illinois law has specific lighting rules for farm equipment and slow-moving vehicles. Every animal-drawn vehicle, farm tractor, implement of husbandry, and special mobile equipment, except when used for road construction or maintenance within a properly controlled construction or maintenance project, must display a rear flashing amber signal lamp when operated on a highway during a time when lighted lamps are required. The lamp must be mounted as high as practicable and be visible from at least 500 feet in normal sunlight. See 625 ILCS 5/12-205.1.

For combinations of vehicles, only the rearmost vehicle needs to display the flashing amber signal lamp. The statute also permits use of the flashing amber lamp during daylight hours when other lamps are not required. Implements of husbandry manufactured on or after

January 1, 2003, and operated on public roads between sunset and sunrise must display markings and lighting meeting or exceeding the referenced American Society of Agricultural Engineers standard. See 625 ILCS 5/12-205.1.

Oversize and overweight movement: Do not assume farm equipment can go anywhere

Illinois also regulates oversize and overweight movement. Illinois Department of Transportation regulations explain that sections 1-130, 11-1418, 15-101, and 15-102 of the Illinois Vehicle Code provide information and exemptions for movement of implements of husbandry. The regulation also warns that implements of husbandry may be barred from controlled-access highways when official signs prohibiting such operation are posted. 92 Ill. Admin. Code § 554.706.

That same regulation states an important practical rule: because an implement of husbandry is a “vehicle,” a farm tractor must be used solely as an

implement of husbandry in connection with farming operations to qualify for the exemption. 92 Ill. Admin. Code § 554.706. This is another reminder that the operator’s actual use of the equipment matters.

Special low-speed and farm-related movements

Illinois also has a specific statute allowing certain farm tractors and self-propelled implements of husbandry to draw another vehicle in limited situations. Under 625 ILCS 5/11-1418, a farm tractor or self-propelled implement of husbandry may draw a registered truck, truck tractor, or motor vehicle on a highway when the drawn vehicle is empty, connected by a rigid tow bar, used only for agricultural transportation purposes, and operated under the limits stated in the statute. See 625 ILCS 5/11-1418.

Farmers should be careful with this provision because it is not a general towing authorization. The movement must fit the statutory conditions.

Practical compliance tips for Illinois farmers

- Confirm the equipment actually qualifies as an implement of husbandry under 625 ILCS 5/1-130.
- Do not assume a pickup truck, passenger vehicle, or general-purpose trailer qualifies just because it is used in a farm business.
- Use public roads only as incidental to the agricultural operation when relying on the registration exemption in 625 ILCS 5/3-402(A)(2).
- Display a compliant slow-moving vehicle emblem when required by 625 ILCS 5/12-709.
- Use required amber lighting and nighttime markings when operating farm tractors or implements on highways during times when lamps are required. 625 ILCS 5/12-205.1.
- Check route restrictions before operating large equipment on controlled-access highways or other restricted roads. 92 Ill. Admin. Code § 554.706.
- Review weight, width, and towing rules before moving large implements, wagons, nurse tanks, or combinations on public roads.

Conclusion

Illinois law gives farmers practical flexibility to move true implements of husbandry on public roads, but the exemptions are not unlimited. The vehicle must fit the statutory definition, the movement must fit the permitted use, and the operator must still comply with applicable safety, lighting, slow-moving vehicle emblem, and roadway restrictions.

Before taking farm equipment onto an Illinois highway, farmers and agribusinesses should ask three questions: What is the vehicle? Why is it being moved? And what safety equipment must be displayed? Answering those questions before the equipment leaves the farm can help avoid tickets, liability issues, and problems with insurance coverage after an accident. ■

Free CLE for ISBA Members

Eligible ISBA members can select from over 700 hours of on-demand CLE content to earn up to 15 MCLE credit hours (including PMCLE) per bar year (July 1 – June 30) *at no additional cost.*

That’s enough Free On-Demand CLE to meet your **30 hour** MCLE requirement over a two-year period. Access the programs anywhere, anytime via the internet!

ISBA’s **6-hour accredited Basic Skills program** will help new attorney members meet their newly admitted attorney MCLE requirements *for free.*

Please note: Live on-site programs and live web events are not included in Free CLE at this time.

Free online Fastcase training programs are also available and do not count towards the free online 15 hour maximum per bar year member benefit. To view those programs visit our Fastcase page.

ILLINOIS STATE
BAR ASSOCIATION

For information about benefit eligibility, programs, and to access our FAQs, please visit

isba.org/freecle

Sponsored by **ISBA** MUTUAL INSURANCE

ILLINOIS STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

SOLO & SMALL FIRM CONFERENCE 2026

September 17 & 18 | Peoria Marriott Pere Marquette
501 Main Street, Peoria



isba.org/cle/ssf



FROM LOG CABIN TO LEGACY: Growing and Sustaining a Solo or Small Firm in Illinois

Join us for ISBA's 2026 Solo & Small Firm Conference, "From Log Cabin to Legacy," a two-day, in-person event designed to bring Illinois solo and small firm attorneys together.

Hosted at the Pere Marquette in the historic city of Peoria, this program delivers actionable CLE, real-world insights, and the tools you need to help you build, grow, and sustain a lasting legal practice. Whether you're launching your first law firm or focused on strengthening an established law business, you'll gain the best practice tips and strategies for every stage of your professional journey.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 17

9:45 a.m. – 6:10 p.m. (social events to follow)

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 18

8:30 a.m. – 3:15 p.m. (complimentary breakfast served beforehand)

Attend live onsite and earn up to 13.0 hours MCLE credit, including up to 7.0 hours Professional Responsibility MCLE credit (subject to approval).

Be sure to book your room at the Peoria Marriott Pere Marquette no later than Sunday, August 16, 2026, for the special ISBA room rate of \$145/night (see website for details).

Presented by:



ILLINOIS STATE
BAR ASSOCIATION®

Sponsored by:



Lawyering on the Beach (Or on a Tractor): What I Learned by Attending LOTB Conference 2026

BY CARI BRETT RINCKER, ESQ.

THIS PAST APRIL, I TRADED MY rural Shelbyville, Illinois office for a stretch of Mexican coastline and joined with several other lawyers at the Lawyers on the Beach (“LOTB”) Retreat in Cancun. Before you write it off as a boondoggle, let me explain the premise—because it turned out to be some of the most useful continuing education I’ve had in years.

Being a “Lawyer on the Beach” isn’t really about the beach at all. It’s a state of mind—the belief that the practice of law can support the life you want, wherever that life happens to be. The organizers like to ask, “What is your beach?” For me, my beach is just as often on my small farm, at a goat show, or a quiet cabin as it is actual sand. For many of you in the Agricultural Law Section, I suspect your beach looks like a barn, a gravel road, or the kitchen table of a farmhouse. Wherever it is, the freedom to practice from there is worth building toward—and that freedom rests on good systems, sound processes, and, more and more, technology.

Nearly every session in Cancun circled back to one subject: artificial intelligence. Here is what I brought home.

AI isn’t coming—it’s already here

The most freeing thing I heard all week was that we are past the point of “choosing” AI. There is no opt-out button. Clients are already finding lawyers through AI tools, and the marketing experts on hand—like Colleen Young of Get Staffed Up—stressed that search engine optimization now has a sibling: “AI optimization.” Long-form, genuinely helpful content and a clear message about who you are and what you do matter more than ever. Ask yourself who the authority in your niche will be in five years. In agricultural law, where deep subject-matter credibility is everything, that question tends to answer itself.

Protect your clients (and your license)

For lawyers, the ethics piece cannot be an afterthought. A few practical takeaways: use paid, professional versions of AI tools and turn model training off. I discovered mine was already off because I pay for the professional tiers. Know your privacy settings and revisit the terms periodically, admittedly overwhelming advice even for those of us who draft privacy terms for a living. And put it in writing. At Rincker Law we are revising our retainers to include informed consent for our own use of AI, and we are weighing a separate, conspicuous addendum warning clients that their own careless use of AI could waive the attorney-client privilege.

A tool, not a toy—which means prompting is the skill

“Junk in, junk out.” The real power of these tools lives in the prompt and the information you feed them. Two lawyers can ask the same question and get wildly different results; this is no glorified Google search. Prompt engineering is a genuine, learnable skill, and I’d love to see bar associations teach it. The shortcut is specificity—tell the tool your role, your preferred tone, your learning style, and the output format you want.

Kristen David of Upleveling Your Business described three levels of AI: (1) simple question-and-answer, (2) automations, and (3) AI agents—and she insists you master Level 1 before climbing. I’ll be honest: I’m still a Level 1 beginner, using AI for job descriptions, brainstorming, and speaker introductions. And that’s okay. Like learning the Rules of Evidence, this education comes in layers, over time. One caution the room agreed on: an AI license is not an employee perk. It is a powerful tool that requires real training before you hand it to your team, and only firm-approved, paid versions should ever touch client information.

Get organized first

My biggest personal breakthrough was mundane but transformative: organization. I built a firm-wide “AI knowledge base”—a master document describing our mission, brand voice, client profiles, services, and team—so the tool actually understands who we are. A tip I wish I’d known sooner: you can tell it to wait until you finish uploading everything before it analyzes, then ask for a tidy summary. I also gave my projects a uniform numbering system that mirrors our practice areas and our task-management software, with private spaces my team can’t see and shared ones they can. Don’t assume the tool remembers anything, though—each new project needs its own information uploaded.

The real game-changer: Skills and agents

The moment it clicked was watching a colleague use “Skills” in an AI agent to finish, over a single lunch, a file-renaming cleanup project she’d been chasing for months. Agents can be taught repeatable workflows—scanning and renaming documents, moving them to the right folder, drafting routine correspondence—and I now expect a market where firms buy and sell ready-made legal Skills the way we once bought form books. For solo and small ag-law practices without a big support staff, this is the closest thing to hiring help that I’ve seen.

Freedom builds value

Victoria Collier of Quid Pro Quo drove home a point that should resonate in this Section: roughly 34% of lawyers are 56 or older. Many of us will eventually sell or transition our practices—just as our farming clients wrestle with succession. The lesson is the same on both sides of that table. A practice built on documented systems, playbooks, and low overhead is worth far more than one that lives entirely in the owner’s head. The more enslaved

you are to your practice, the less valuable it is to a buyer—and the less it resembles a “beach” of any kind.

A little passive income, too

Finally, Sonia Lakhany of 4L reminded us that the expertise we already have can become templates, e-books, or courses. Do your market research first, and consider housing that revenue in a separate brand and entity.

Back to the beach

The biggest shift for me wasn’t any single app—it was mindset. AI will not replace lawyers; if anything, our clients will need our human discernment and judgment more than ever. But the lawyers who thrive will be the ones who use these tools to build a practice flexible enough to run from a beach, a tractor, or a secluded cabin. That is a goal worth chasing—whatever your beach looks like. ■

I have no financial relationship with Lawyers on the Beach and am not part of any affiliate program. If you’d like to attend next year, it will be held May 3–7, 2027; you can learn more at legallypinktravel.net/lotb2027. I cannot recommend it more highly. I’m no tech guru, so if you have advanced questions, please consult one—I’m happy to share referrals to my resources.

*Cari B. Rincker
Licensed in IL, NY, NJ, CT, TX, KY & DC
Founder, Rincker Law, PLLC
cari@rinckerlaw.com • www.rinckerlaw.com •
Call/Text (217) 531-2179*



ILLINOIS STATE
BAR ASSOCIATION®

Law Practices FOR SALE

Looking to take down your shingle and move into the next phase of your life?

The ISBA has launched a new Law Practices for Sale service where sellers can post for-sale practices or firms, and buyers can browse listings and get connected with sellers. The service is available to all lawyers—rural or urban, boutique or general, solo practice or firm.

Listings for ISBA members cost \$200 and will remain available for viewing on the ISBA website for three months. Additional months can be purchased for \$50 per month. For non-ISBA members, listings cost \$300 for three months, with additional months costing \$50 per month.

List Your For-Sale Practice Today!

isba.org/practice-for-sale

2026 Annual Meeting

Illinois State Bar Association

June 11-12, 2026 | The Ritz-Carlton | St. Louis, Missouri

