

MARY AND RICHARD BENCK FAMILY AGRICULTURE CENTER
Inventing Agriculture Exhibit 2025

The Mary and Richard Benck Family Agriculture Center (Benck Center) represents a once-in-a-generation evolution and new interpretive paradigm for Naper Settlement. The Benck Center will introduce a vibrant and unexpected, technologically rich new approach into the interpretation of agriculture history, creating a one-of-a-kind site experience that links past, present, and future by celebrating the Illinois tradition of forward-looking attitudes and innovation in agriculture. The Center will serve as the hub of a cohesive sitewide experience that recontextualizes and unites resources, including an existing, active STEM lab, a newly redesigned and reinterpreted agricultural machinery display, a 19th century agrarian village and trade exhibits, and active gardens and agriculture-themed programming. The new long-term exhibit *Inventing Agriculture* exhibit will form the centerpiece of the Center, a space dedicated to sharing Naperville's agricultural roots, and the connection it has to our lives, health and careers.

Inventing Agriculture will be unlike anything we have done in the past as we explore immersive and interactive ways to engage visitors in farming. It will fill visitors with curiosity that will carry them through their present and future explorations of the many ways agriculture has affected and will affect their lives. Students will also be able to explore the many possible careers in agriculture, from health and nutrition to science and engineering, to economics and the environment.

Currently, Naper Settlement successfully engages thousands of 2nd through 5th grade students with multiple programs. *Inventing Agriculture* will expand that impact by targeting middle to high school students. It is our goal to develop a much-needed pipeline of skilled agricultural specialists with this exhibit and other agricultural programs that we offer.

The Center will house a compelling, contemporary interactive exhibit that complements, contextualizes, and extends themes encountered in other exhibits and infuses visitors with excitement and curiosity that will carry them through their explorations of the full 13 acres. It will upend expectations of an "old-timey" agricultural history museum, showing that agriculture often pushes science and society forward. And it will bring together multiple disciplines, connecting history and social studies with the STEM fields, highlighting stories of choices, discoveries, and technologies through the lens of human experience.

EXHIBIT FACTS

- Located in the Mary and Richard Benck Family Agriculture Center, the center of the Settlement's Ag Hub
- 1,200 square feet
- \$1.5M budget
- Planned opening scheduled for 2026