LEADERS TAKE ON TOUGH ISSUES

TRANSPORT FOCUS Protects Profitability

NUTRIENT EFFORTS Enrich Sustainability
SOMETIMES OPPORTUNITY LOOKS YOU RIGHT IN THE FACE.

LIVESTOCK CAN PROVIDE ILLINOIS GRAIN FARMERS WITH SEVERAL DIFFERENT OPPORTUNITIES:

- Bring family members back to the farm.
- Spread your risk.
- Reduce fertilizer costs as much as $91-$112* per acre.
- Build organic matter and soil health.
- Add value to your farm and your community.

*Fall 2016 comparative nitrogen costs; Dr. Richard Gates, University of Illinois Extension, estimating cash value of applying 3,500-4,500 gal/acre of manure, less application cost.

Learn how you can capitalize on the benefits of livestock production at ILSOY.ORG/ANIMALAG.
Safe Rails Protect Soybean Basis and Industry’s Reliable Reputation
Illinois soybean farmers regained the title of top soybean-producing state last year, which means farmers are transporting more soybeans to market than ever. The rail industry plays a critical role in that transportation process — and the safety of that industry helps farmers have a fair shot at improved soybean profitability and continued customer reliability.

Fueling Sustainability
Two Illinois companies are finding they can gain a business edge through the green benefits of using biodiesel. Together these two privately owned companies consume nearly 2.5 million gallons of B20 biodiesel fuel every year. Learn what makes their message a sustainable success.

Containers Offer More Soy Export Opportunities
Illinois farmers are using empty containers as a lower-cost transportation option to move soybeans into export markets. Read about what the ISA leadership team who recently visited Taiwan and Indonesia did to reinforce Illinois as a high-quality soybean supplier. They also discussed investments the ISA checkoff program could make to further enhance container use.

Nutrient Forum Generates Useful Idea Exchange
Tweaking nutrient management strategies to further enhance soybean production and sustainability requires continued research into effective farm practices, and creation of new practices. Farmers and ag industry representatives met earlier this spring to discuss the options.

See for Yourself Double-Crop Demo Coming to Farm Progress Show
The ISA checkoff program, Illinois Wheat Association (IWA) and several seed companies in 2015 set out to create a show-and-tell double-crop plot at the Farm Progress Show. Attendees this August can see how wheat-soy rotations work and ask questions about the strategy.

LEADER PROFILE:
Transportation Consultant Ann L. Schneider
Ann L. Schneider has developed an alternative transportation funding model for Illinois, collaborated on a supply chain model to prioritize spending, identified funding solutions for local government infrastructure priorities and more. She shares her perspective on what’s ahead for transportation issues that affect Illinois soybean farmers.
Looking for Leaders

Are you the type of person who looks for opportunities to serve in leadership roles? Or are you the type of person who prefers the sidelines but may still participate? The Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) is looking for both of types of people. ISA encourages soybean farmers from all parts of the state, all sizes of farms, and from all walks of life to get involved.

Not all of us want to be in charge. That is fine. But I believe all of us should contribute what gifts we have to further the soybean industry. Rather than make up reasons why you cannot be involved as a volunteer, consider what you might have to offer. It may be more than you think.

As we focus on the future of our industry, we will need more farmers to participate in leadership roles. I encourage you to watch as the ISA board has openings for new directors, either in your district or as at-large positions. We always are looking for farmers to be board members, especially to join us in sharing our stories and needs on the Hill and in informational meetings. We must speak out to educate farmers about tough legislative and regulatory issues.

The late Steve Jobs was quoted as saying, “innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower.” ISA programs are all about innovation. Illinois is the top soybean-producing state in the nation. We have created many programs and generated ideas over the years to lead with innovation. Examples include the World Initiative for Soy in Human Health (WISHH), biodiesel, alternative transportation methods, sustainability guidelines and quality programs.

The Soy Ambassador Leadership Program, sponsored by the ISA checkoff and membership programs, is another chance to start down the leadership path. The program gives participants opportunities to gain leadership, expertise, industry exposure and a global perspective. Ambassadors develop skills and qualities crucial for future leadership roles in the industry. We currently have a very strong class of Ambassadors who are in the middle of their program. We will open the online application process for the 2018-19 class June 1, 2018.

As you read the articles in this issue, you will find other examples of Illinois soybean farmers who are on the cutting edge of technology use, offering fresh ideas and unique production tips.

It is time to focus on the 2017 growing season, but allow your mind to wander and think about how you can contribute to the Illinois soybean industry. As Woodrow Wilson said, “You are not here merely to make a living. You are here in order to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of hope and achievement. You are here to enrich the world, and you impoverish yourself if you forget the errand.” Have a safe planting season.

DARYL CATES
 ISA Chairman
American Agriculture Needs Strong Leadership Now More than Ever

> BY TOM ZACHARIAS

I became a die-hard Cubs fan while attending graduate school at the University of Illinois many moons ago. So, I naturally joined many of you in breathing a collective sigh of relief last fall when it finally happened — the beloved Cubbies pulled off an unbelievable comeback to become World Series Champions.

I am not a baseball analyst. But I think we can agree a lot of factors go into the making of a champion. Perhaps most important is having a strong leader at the helm.

Thankfully, when it comes to farm policy, we have strong leaders fighting on our behalf, and it makes all the difference. Our Founding Fathers, while diverse in age and profession, shared an appreciation for the land and a common belief that our young nation would have to be solvent and able to clothe and feed itself if it hoped to succeed.

Since then, our nation’s leaders have reaffirmed the importance of agriculture time and again. They have supported strong farm policies tailored for the unique challenges U.S. farmers have faced throughout history. It was Illinois’ favorite son, President Abraham Lincoln, that established the Bureau of Agriculture in 1862. In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA), the country’s very first farm bill, in an effort to stabilize the rural economy and our economy as a whole.

It was another Agricultural Adjustment Act — in 1938 — that established the federal crop insurance program. It has evolved with the help of numerous legislative actions over many decades into the effective centerpiece of the farm safety net that it is today.

Today’s crop insurance is unlike policies of the past. It is partially funded by farmers. It is delivered by the private sector so assistance arrives quickly and efficiently. It is based on a series of contracts between farmers, companies and the government to remove ambiguity. And, best of all, it is very effective. Illinois farmers spent $272 million last year for 122,000 policies protecting $9.3 billion of liability on 19.3 million acres.

We are indebted to those who have come before us and helped design meaningful farm policies, especially those who spearheaded the efforts to ensure our farmers received the support they needed to keep farming. But we cannot become complacent. In fact, we need strong leadership now more than ever. We are facing tough times in farm country, with USDA forecasting a fourth straight year of declining net farm income. Meanwhile, the weather remains volatile and highly unpredictable.

Despite this, anti-farm policy critics continue to call for elimination of America’s crop insurance system. They would prefer to send us back in time. The evidence is clear that crop insurance is working and is the cornerstone of the farm safety net.

With farm bill negotiations now underway, we will call on our agriculture champions on Capitol Hill who have remained steadfast and loyal in their support of crop insurance, to redouble their efforts. In addition, the coalition of farm organizations, commodity groups and rural businesses so instrumental in the past will lay an indispensable role.

In the words of Cubs skipper Joe Maddon, we have to be prepared to “do simple better.” It is a philosophy that worked for the Cubs, and I am confident it will work for farm policy as well, given the legislative leaders, public support and facts we have on our side.

Tom Zacharias is president of National Crop Insurance Services, a not-for-profit organization representing the interests of private crop insurance companies. Learn more at www.ag-risk.org.
SAFE RAILS
Protect Soybean Basis and Industry’s Reliable Reputation

Iowa soybean farmers regained the title of top soybean-producing state last year with a harvested crop of nearly 600 million bushels. That means farmers are transporting more soybeans to market than ever before via local grain elevators to transfer to customers here and overseas.

Like the soybean industry, the rail industry also broke a few records in 2016 — including safety records like lowest train accident rate, according to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). Rail companies have taken advantage of a plethora of new technologies, coupled with comprehensive safety programs, to ensure that moving soybeans by rail is now safer than ever.

According to the Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC), Illinois is home to the nation’s second largest rail system with more than 7,300 miles of track and more than 40 railroad companies, including all eight Class-I railroads, operating trains in and through the state.

Rail plays an important role for commodity movement. Illinois’ six soy processing facilities annually receive half of all soybeans by rail. USDA data suggest approximately 35 million Illinois bushels move by domestic rail and 74 million are exported via rail each year. As such, the immense rail network is a critical mode of transportation for Illinois soybeans.

“If a grain elevator sells grain to a destination and is not able to get it to that destination, it can impact the quality and price received by the elevator and the producer,” says Jeffrey Adkisson, executive vice-president of the Grain and Feed Association of Illinois. “Having the ability to move grain by rail and other modes of transportation is what makes the American system competitive. It’s vital to have an efficient and effective rail system to move grain.”

American Soybean Association (ASA) officials note rail service disruptions negatively affect basis levels and cash bids, and negatively impact the competitiveness of U.S. soybeans. More than 40 percent of U.S. soybeans are exported, so a safer rail industry can help translate into quicker and more efficient transportation for soybeans.

“Safety is a never-ending, constant pursuit for the freight rail industry,” says Association of American Railroads (AAR) President and CEO Edward R. Hamberger. “Our goal remains zero incidents and zero injuries, but it is still noteworthy that railroads today are the safest they have ever been. We see clear benefits of our investments, made possible through an economic regulatory framework that allows railroads to earn revenues needed to invest $635 billion since partial deregulation. We believe strongly in applying new and transformative technologies.”

> BY ALLISON DUKES
U.S. railroads had the lowest train accident rate on record in 2016, according to March 2017 data from the FRA, based on per-million train miles. Since 2000:

- Train accident rate is down 44 percent.
- Equipment-caused accident rate is down 34 percent.
- Track-caused accident rate is down 53 percent.
- Derailment is down 44 percent.

“During the past 10 years, I’ve seen the rail industry focus on and put a lot of investment into safety,” says Mark Heil, Prairie Central Cooperative general manager, Chenoa, Ill. “Now they are able to watch and test things more closely than ever before. They’ve raised the bar.”

**INVESTMENT IN SAFETY**

Railroads have dramatically improved safety and efficiency through the use of new technologies that help find problems before damage or accidents occur, says Hamberger.

“From an advanced system that uses multidimensional ultrasonic technology to locate defects in tracks before they create problems, to the use of drones for track and bridge inspections, freight railroads are increasingly technology-focused,” he says.

One such technology is wayside detectors. At BNSF Railway, for example, more than 2,000 wayside detectors across the 32,000-mile network generate data that is used to identify potential safety issues, such as high-impact wheels, overheated bearings and damaged or worn components. Wayside detectors monitor roughly 1,400 daily trains on the BNSF network, generating more than 30 million readings per day. The readings enable BNSF to monitor equipment health, generate alerts and determine severity of any identified issues.

“Technology is critical toward monitoring our wheels and cars as they roll across the railroad,” says John Miller, BNSF Railway vice president for agricultural products. “We even use drones to help us look around bridges that may not be accessible by foot, get to a site of a derailment quickly and address the issue in a timely and efficient manner.”

Class I rail companies and engineering firms which support their networks use unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to supplement visual track and bridge inspections. BNSF bridge inspectors conducted more than 61,000 examinations in 2016, while UAVs allowed them to gather additional information and keep team members, the general public and cargoes safe.

Another step the industry is taking involves implementation of positive train control (PTC) technology. PTC is a set of new technologies that use automation to stop trains before certain accidents occur. AAR says it is considered the largest and most complex safety system in the history of railroads. According to AAR, freight railroads have spent more than $7.9 billion on PTC development and deployment to date, as rail companies are committed to having PTC fully installed across the country in accordance with the Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008.

Other technology applications include advanced track-geometry inspection vehicles, which gather data using lasers and GPS to take track surface, rail wear and tunnel measurements to report variance locations. Wheel profile monitors use lasers and optics to capture images that show if wheel tread or flanges are worn and when wheels need to be removed from service.

**INVESTMENT IN EDUCATION**

It takes more than technology to keep railroads safe. Investment in people and programs also must be made for companies to meet safety goals.

This starts by working with grain elevators to ensure safe loading onto rail cars. “As a country elevator, we don’t run rail cars and locomotives every day. We refer to the rail companies for guidelines and expertise on how to utilize the equipment,” says Heil. “They help us make sure their best safety practices are followed. That includes making sure the equipment used is in good shape from a safety perspective to make sure no one could get injured.”

The rail industry also makes pedestrian and motorist safety a priority. One successful rail safety program is Illinois Operation Lifesaver, a program designed to increase public awareness of highway-rail grade crossing hazards. Illinois has the third-highest number of collisions by state. Illinois Operation Lifesaver began in 1976, which was a year when more than 800 railroad incidents occurred at public grade-crossings in Illinois.
ISA Seeks Rail Challenge Solutions

A vast infrastructure of roads, bridges, railways and waterways transports soybeans from Illinois farms to customers. The Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) checkoff program promotes transportation and infrastructure investments across all of these modes. ISA leads collaborations and facilitates discussions among industry, government, academia and transportation stakeholders, in order to develop innovative solutions to rural infrastructure challenges.

ISA participates in the Illinois State Freight Advisory Council (ISFAC), which meets regularly to discuss state freight transportation infrastructure and policy priorities with railroads and other transportation stakeholders in the state. ISA Transportation and Export Infrastructure Lead Scott Sigman serves as co-chair of the Infrastructure Committee and Long-Range Transportation Planning (Freight/Rail) Committee for ISFAC.
Two Illinois companies are finding they can gain a business edge through the green benefits of biodiesel. The renewable fuel is an integral part of the business plans for Cook-Illinois Corporation in Oak Brook, Ill., and G&D Integrated in Morton, Ill. Together, these two privately owned companies consume nearly 2.5 million gallons of B20 biodiesel fuel every year.

CLEANER AIR FOR KIDS

When you’re a school bus fleet operator like Cook-Illinois Corporation, there may be nothing more important than children’s safety and that includes clean air. Cook-Illinois Corporation is the nation’s largest family-owned school bus contractor. The company operates 2,200 buses in the Chicago area and runs passenger shuttles at Chicago’s Midway International Airport.

To reduce harmful engine emissions, Cook-Illinois operates its bus fleets on B20. “A lot of the children we transport are special education students, some with autism or learning disabilities. Many have breathing issues like asthma. Anything we can do to make the school bus ride safer and cleaner for these kids is a benefit,” says John Benish, Jr., chief operating officer.

Using biodiesel gives Cook-Illinois a marketing edge, Benish adds. While cost is still an overriding factor in awarding school bus contracts, the environmental sustainability message resonates with school boards and parents. “We tell them we’ve made a conscious choice to use biodiesel because it is a renewable fuel source and reduces emissions for better air quality,” he says. “We have gained contracts because we are a greener bus company.”

SUSTAINABLE GOODS TRANSPORT

Maintaining a sustainable operation also is important at G&D Integrated, a transportation, freight transfer and storage services company. G&D’s 400 trucks travel more than 24 million miles every year with B20 in the tanks for most of those miles, even during the winter months.

“Since we can’t always get B20 in other states, we try to divert all of our trucks to fuel up in Illinois. That way we know we are getting at least some percentage of biodiesel. Most often we refuel at our own G&D terminals, all of which have B20 at the pumps,” says Vince Buonassi, group manager of transportation programs. “We feel good doing our part to lower emissions.”

G&D Integrated customers also reap the benefits of B20. “Some companies analyze their entire supply chain for environmental impact and try to incorporate sustainability into their purchasing departments. Often companies award contracts to suppliers based on their sustainability programs,” says Buonassi. “For those companies, our use of biodiesel fuel is a definite plus.”

Both Cook-Illinois and G&D Integrated are members of the B20 Club, a partnership between the ISA checkoff program and ALAIL. To learn more about the B20 Club, visit www.B20Club.org.
Containers Offer More Soy Export Opportunities

Chicago is a top national container port, which gives Illinois soybean farmers a unique way to reach the Asian market. More than half of containers loaded in Asia and shipped to the United States are estimated to be returned in backhaul movement to Asia, empty. Illinois soybean farmers are using many of the empty containers to their advantage, as a lower-cost transportation option that economists say is quite competitive with bulk system and vessel freight costs.

• **Containers Originates in Northern Illinois**
  Ocean containers loaded with Illinois soybeans are trucked to intermodal terminals in Rochelle, Chicago, Joliet and Elwood, Ill., for rail transport to U.S. coastal ports. The containers then are loaded onto giant container vessels for delivery to international buyers.
  - Containers help maintain quality because smaller lot sizes reduce handling and blending and provide more product consistency.
  - Containers are easy to track, much like UPS and FedEx packages.
  - Buyers can be confident in the origin and source of the soybeans.
  - Customers can minimize inventory investments and manage cash flow by purchasing soybeans more frequently in smaller quantities.
  - Orders have a turnaround time of several weeks for container deliveries versus months for bulk vessel logistics.

• **Central Union Oil Corp. Taichung, Taiwan**
  Central Union Oil Corp. (CUOC) purchases U.S. soybeans in containers because foreign matter is low. Foreign matter adversely affects oil storability and quality. Price also is a big factor. If prices are not competitive, the United States could lose the entire soybean market. If U.S. soybeans are a good value, CUOC says they would import more soybeans in containers.

• **TTET Union Corp. Tainan City, Taiwan**
  TTET Union Corp. is a long-term U.S. customer of containerized soybeans with 70 to 80 percent of purchases coming from Illinois. The state’s soybean varieties work well for tofu production because the whiteness of tofu is influenced by variety and protein composition that corresponds with Illinois production. Brazilian soybeans cannot be used for tofu because of their yellow hue.

• **Chun Fong International Food Co. Ltd. Chiayi, Taiwan**
  Chun Fong International Food Co. Ltd. seeks soybeans that are high in protein. The higher the protein content, the higher amount of tofu soybeans will produce.

**Taiwan Overview**

- USDA’s Foreign Agriculture Service says Taiwan is the seventh largest market for U.S. agricultural exports and a top Illinois soybean customer.
- Genetically modified (GM) soybeans sold in containers are in demand for food use.
- GM labeling is a key market access issue.
- The non-GM sector is growing, so demand redirects market share away from U.S. soybeans sold and transported in containers.
The Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) leadership team recently visited Taiwan and Indonesia to strengthen relationships with top executives and decision-makers within soybean importing firms. These meetings provided an opportunity to reinforce Illinois as a high-quality, reliable soybean supplier, and to discuss program investments the ISA checkoff program could make to benefit customers and Illinois farmers. Here’s a summary from those customer visits:

**Appealing to a Younger Generation**

Many Indonesian foods contain tempeh, a fermented product made by soaking and cooking whole soybeans and then inoculating them with a mold. After fermentation has occurred, the soybeans are bound together into a compact cake.

**More Soy Export Opportunities**

Tempeh production is a big use of soybeans, with a value of more than $3 billion per year and approximately 10,000 people employed to support the industry. Most tempeh is sold in “mom-and-pop” stores. The food preparation plays an important role in diets of the 256 million people living in Indonesia. It has a short shelf life and is generally bought daily.

However, concerns have developed that the younger generations will not continue eating this product. Rumah Tempe is a pilot project designed to serve as a model for small tempeh producers. Launched in 2012, one of Rumah Tempe’s goals is to appeal to young people and encourage them to continue eating tempeh. Story-tellers visit schools to carry the message to the students.

**INDONESIA OVERVIEW**

- USDA’s Foreign Agriculture Service says Indonesia imports 75 percent of their soybean requirements. About 90 percent of these imports are U.S. soybeans.
- Soybeans are their largest agricultural import with an annual value between $850 million to $1 billion for the approximately two million metric tons.
- U.S. soybeans are in demand because of the market’s ability to supply consistent size and color with minimal insect damage.
- Local farmers receive incentives for growing corn and rice, so soybeans are not as profitable to grow locally.

**PT FKS Multi Agro**

Jakarta, Indonesia

PT FKS Multi Agro prefers U.S. soybeans and even has a branding program for them. Food processors want American soybeans because they provide better perceived product texture and yield a higher amount of product. Indonesia has a ban on corn imports, so full-fat soybeans are also purchased for use in full-fat soybean meal for animal feed.

**PT Charoen Pokphand Indonesia**

Jakarta, Indonesia

PT Charoen Pokphand Indonesia is the country’s largest producer of poultry feed — using 17 million tons of feed annually. They prefer to buy soybeans transported in 20-foot containers from the Joliet region, since delivery of competitive protein and oil can be provided with these soybeans. The 20-foot containers are cheaper and easier to move per ton of grain. It can cost up to twice as much to move 40-foot containers versus 20-foot containers.

**Photos by Amy Roady**
Tweaking nutrient management strategies to further enhance soybean production and sustainability requires not only continued research into effective farm practices, but also creation of new practices. Farmers and ag industry representatives earlier this spring met in southern Illinois to discuss the practices that are working, and to plug research holes for challenges that remain.

“The purpose of the Nutrient Management Forum was two-fold; to share current research priorities, strategic priorities and overall goals with farmers in southern Illinois, and to hear from farmers in that part of the state about their needs for additional and ongoing nutrient research,” says Julie Armstrong, executive director of the Illinois Nutrient Research & Education Council (NREC). The forum was held in March at Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC).

“There was good attendance and representation of many ag organizations and companies, along with farmers and that made for a comprehensive discussion about several key issues,” says David Droste, soybean farmer from Nashville, Ill., and Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) director. The ISA checkoff program supports NREC. “NREC is still a relatively new group, and this meeting was a good way for us to offer direction and input.”

Research updates were provided by SIUC researchers and staff members, including updates on nitrogen trials designed to reduce nutrient losses as measured by subsequent water testing.

“We learned split nitrogen applications make a big difference in terms of reducing nutrient loss. Farmers can expect to see significant improvements,” says Droste. “We also discussed cover crops and how some crops sequester nitrogen better than others and prevent leaching.”

Other topics of discussion among small groups included gypsum, and how it interacts with phosphorus in groundwater and impacts soil structure, water quality and crop yield. Talk about cover crop use, including best management practices (BMPs) for seeding and termination, strip till settings, weed and erosion control for different types of cover crops, also was a priority.

“Phosphorus was the most popular discussion item,” says Droste. “Phosphorus management is a big deal in southern Illinois. We need to focus on what BMPs might be best for placement and timing so we don’t lose any of the nutrient and maximize uptake. That includes how to use phosphorus in no-till settings, proper application methods and soil testing.”

Based on the day’s discussions, Armstrong says NREC will look at feasibility of incorporating tile drainage to manage nutrient loss on the rolling topography and highly erodible land of southern Illinois, as well as better understand diverse soil types and plant zones and the roles horticulture and specialty crops play in southern Illinois. Future projects could connect research to real-world farm applications with water quality measurements and economic analysis.

“Overall, the meeting received very positive feedback and support for continued dialogue of this type,” says Armstrong. “We hope to set a date for a similar meeting in northern Illinois.”
“We learned split nitrogen applications make a big difference in terms of reducing nutrient loss. Farmers can expect to see significant improvements.”

DAVID DROSTE
soybean farmer from Nashville, Ill., and Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) director.

By the Numbers

Nearly half of all farmers surveyed by USDA’s National Ag Statistics Service (NASS) indicate they are knowledgeable or very knowledgeable about MRTN (Maximum Return to Nitrogen as a measure of yield impact on adding more nitrogen).

Since 2012, NREC has invested more than TEN MILLION DOLLARS in nutrient research.

Source: Illinois Nutrient Research & Education Council
Challenge
What’s Always Been Done

> BY KENDALL HERREN

When Missouri farmer Kip Cullers broke the world record soybean yield in 2006 with 139 bushels per acre, central Illinois Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) Kris Ehler was paying attention. “I knew Missouri didn’t have beautiful, black, Central Illinois soil,” Ehler says. “I thought, ‘Why can’t we do that?’”

Growing up, he had watched his grandpa work through challenges with customers. “If the industry needed something and no one else was providing it, he would make sure that service or product was made available,” he says. “Like my grandpa, I like to know how things work. When something breaks, I want to know why it broke and how to fix it.”

When Cullers broke the yield record, the problem-solving sense kicked in and made Ehler question, “What are we doing wrong? What could we do differently?”

After conducting research trials and reading about record-breaking yields in Missouri, Iowa and Canada, Ehler realized the yield increase could be attributed to planting soybeans earlier. “Farmers were planting beans in April and seeing a six- to 10-bushel-per-acre yield increase,” he says. “Breaking down how the plant works and harvests sunlight, it made sense. By planting soybeans earlier in the year, they receive more sunlight. That allows for more opportunity to reproduce nodes, which leads to more pods, beans and, ultimately, bushels.”

Ehler planted his first early-season soybean trial in 2009. “Everyone thought I was crazy and wrote me off,” he says. “We had nine inches of rain and the soybeans were under water for three or four days. But they still came up out of the ground.”

Fast forward to the 2009 harvest. His yield was 10 bushels higher than average, confirming his hypothesis and raising some eyebrows from other growers and industry experts in the area.

Since 2009, Ehler has continued planting earlier in the season while experimenting with different seed varieties. This season he planted a two-acre plot on Feb. 22. “If Mother Nature allows me

“We need to be willing to see past our perceptions if we want to increase yield.”

KRIS EHLER
Illinois Soybean Association CCA
Soybean Master Adviser award winner
EHLER’S TOP TIPS TO IMPROVE PROFITABILITY

1. Utilize agronomists and retailers.
   They have studied and seen a variety of issues and can provide insight into treatments and prescriptions.

2. Do your homework on seed varieties and treatments.
   Try planting a different variety. Work with local agronomists and retailers to find the best varieties and treatments for your fields. Try planting a variety or maturity group outside of your typical range.

3. Conduct on-farm research.
   Look through data from your farm and compare it against industry standards to gain a better understanding of what is going on in your field, down to the square foot.

4. Save money and don’t overplant with large populations.
   Planting higher populations does not mean higher yields, it leads to plants not growing to their full yield potential.

to plant in February, I’m going to plant in February,” Ehler says. The accepted belief is corn is king, he adds. Growers typically plant corn first and roll the soybean planter when they find time. However, comparing the two crops side by side, Ehler realized soybeans should be planted earlier and corn later for better weather and soil conditions.

“It comes down to perception,” he says. “There’s still a perception that beans are less hardy than corn, but research has shown that it is actually the complete opposite. Beans are a much more resilient and tolerant crop than corn, and soybeans have greater yield potential because the number of nodes are not set at planting. The number of nodes on a plant is heavily influenced by planting date and the amount of sunlight they can capture. We need to be willing to see past our perceptions if we want to increase yield.”

Challenging those perceptions is something Ehler does every day. “The most rewarding thing is watching growers succeed,” Ehler says. “I want to build confidence in soybeans. It’s a challenge, and I enjoy every minute of it.”

Kris Ehler says when soybean are planted earlier in the year, they receive more sunlight, which leads to more pods, beans and bushels.
“Double-cropping soybeans after wheat is the single best thing you can do in soybeans,” says Dan Davidson, Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) research technical advisor. “All along the Ohio River, double-cropping is a great enterprise. There has been a lot of interest for it here in Illinois, as it can be more profitable than growing just corn or soybeans.”

That’s why the ISA checkoff program, the Illinois Wheat Association (IWA) and several seed companies in 2015 set out to create a double-crop plot at the Farm Progress Show. The site demonstrates what wheat-soy rotations can do, and the possibilities are shared with others.

“There has been limited research on double-cropping because there hasn’t been enough commercial interest,” says John Bailey, ISA’s contractor for the double-crop site.

ISA’s goal is to demonstrate different wheat varieties, from early to full-season, and different soybean varieties, to see what combinations are most successful for double-crop rotations. ISA is interested in results for not only southern Illinois, but throughout the state. The Farm Progress Show site demonstrates what an early system versus a conventional double-crop system looks like. It also provides a backdrop for conversations with those who have questions.

Davidson sees the previous lack of interest and research on double-cropping slowly changing. First, he says being able to obtain early-season varieties can make a huge difference in opportunity. What the group found in 2015 is that the concept of harvesting wheat earlier with an early-season variety will increase the soybean season by a couple of valuable weeks.

“For every day you plant earlier, you can gain a bushel of yield,” says Davidson.

In 2015, the early-variety wheat yielded just as well as the full-season variety. Farmers have the option to harvest wheat early and dry it. Soybeans planted early get a head start on the season.

“We always were told planting date is all that matters. While that is a huge part, there hasn’t been enough research for testing things like variety to know if planting date is all that matters,” says Gary Berg, ISA director from St. Elmo, Ill., and past IWA board member.

“When you get to the time of year to plant double-crop, most farmers don’t want to take the time to do some variety trials or think about treatments because their main focus is just planting,” says Berg. “Every single day you don’t get planted hurts yield. Research would help with that.”

Farmers headed to the Farm Progress Show later this summer can make plans to stop by ISA and IWA’s double-crop plot, lot 2141, in the Southwest Quadrant. The plot is using seed from five different companies, including Limagrain, Growmark, Beck’s, Syngenta and AgriMax.

After taking in the double-crop site, farmers can head down East Progress Avenue to ISA’s new tent location at lot 605. ISA is teaming up with the Illinois Corn Growers Association this year, and will provide information about what the checkoff organizations are doing for farmers. The Farm Progress Show will be held Aug. 29-31 at the permanent site in Decatur.
The National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) recently elected Ken Maschhoff, a pork producer from Carlyle, Ill., as president of the organization. Maschhoff is chairman of Maschhoff Family Foods and co-owner and chairman of The Maschhoffs, the largest family-owned pork production company in North America. A fifth-generation pork producer, Maschhoff formerly served on the Illinois Pork Producers Association board of directors as well as on the boards of Midland States Bank and Midland States Bancorp Inc.

Also re-elected to the board for a three-year term was Illinois producer Phil Borgic of Nokomis, Ill. Borgic was a part of the National Pork Board’s #RealPigFarming social media spotlight last year, and has worked with the Illinois Soybean Association on several initiatives.

Pigs eat 74 percent of the soybean meal fed in Illinois, according to national checkoff-funded research, and their success ensures the main local market for Illinois soybeans.

There are more than 860 soy-based products and ingredients in the 2017 guide. Soybean oil has been proven to be an effective and economical ingredient in products ranging from polyurethane foam to plastics, paints, rubber and lubricants. Soybean meal is used to make plastic composites, synthetic fibers, paper coatings and formaldehyde-free adhesives.

To view an interactive flipbook of the guide on a computer, visit www.SoyNewUses.org. The guide also is available on www.ilsoy.org.

**Farmers Get Access to New Sustainability Measurement Tools**

Field to Market: The Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture and the Sustainable Agriculture Initiative (SAI) recently announced an equivalency agreement, which will allow Field to Market’s Fieldprint Platform to be an accepted means of fulfilling the requirements of SAI’s Platform Farm Sustainability Assessment (FSA). Farmers now can be recognized by the SAI platform, if desired, which adds another layer of sustainability certification to farm operations.

Fieldprint Platform’s outcomes-based, metrics-driven approach to measuring environmental sustainability, when combined with the legal and regulatory framework required of U.S. commodity agriculture, results in a framework that is equivalent to FSA Bronze. Participating farmers can earn their FSA Bronze equivalency by completing the Fieldprint Platform and confirming that they comply with all local, state and federal laws and regulations that are relevant for their farming operation. Furthermore, farmers can qualify for FSA Silver or FSA Gold by answering up to 14 additional questions contained in a one-page questionnaire jointly developed by Field to Market and the SAI Platform.

Field to Market: The Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture brings together a diverse group of grower organizations; agribusinesses; food, beverage, restaurant and retail companies; conservation groups; universities and public sector partners to focus on defining, measuring and advancing the sustainability of food, fiber and fuel production. The SAI Platform is a global food value platform enabling sustainable agriculture through member-driven pre-competitive collaboration. It aims to build knowledge about sustainable agriculture, and to support development and implementation of sustainable ag practices in the food and drink value chain. ISA is a Field to Market member.

**United Soybean Board Releases 2017 Soy Products Guide**

The United Soybean Board (USB) has released its 2017 Soy Products Guide, which showcases innovative soybean technology and uses for consumers. USB publishes the Soy Products Guide every year to help researchers, product developers, manufacturers, businesses and consumers identify commercially available soy-based products and ingredients.
ISG Leaders Share Priorities in Spring Legislative Trip

While the new administration continues to drive its key initiatives, Illinois Soybean Growers (ISG) is keeping an eye on how those issues might affect the state's farmers.

ISG saw a string of successes in 2016, including loosening trade with Cuba, increasing biomass-based diesel volume requirements and preventing a messy patchwork of state GMO labeling laws. During meetings this spring, ISG leaders presented views on other priorities, including:

- **TRANSPORTATION:** President Trump has promised a $1 trillion infrastructure plan that will take time to negotiate with Congress. While Congressional leaders have expressed similar support in infrastructure improvements, ensuring there is enough room in the budget for a proposal of this magnitude is to be determined.

- **FARM BILL:** ISG is working with the House and Senate Budget and Appropriations committees, the House and Senate Ag committees and USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue to increase funding for the 2018 Farm Bill and to protect crop insurance.

- **BIODIESEL:** The federal biodiesel tax incentive lapsed Dec. 31, 2016, and has yet to be extended by Congress. The Illinois biodiesel tax credit expires in 2018. It is a top priority for ISG to extend both tax credits to continue expanding the soybean oil market.

- **REGULATIONS:** ISG monitors regulations to prevent overreach, and works to help drive rule-making for favorable outcomes for agriculture. Most recently, ISG took action to help preserve access to an important pyrethroid insecticide.

Farmers may make their voices heard through ISG's advocacy Twitter handle, @VoiceForSoy. Follow for updates and actions on all of the legislative issues affecting Illinois soybean farmers. To become a member, visit ilsoygrowers.com.

Key issues were discussed in Washington, D.C. this spring. Pictured here (left to right) are front row: Jered Hooker, Sen. Tammy Duckworth and Craig Ratayczak. Back row are Deb Moore, John Longley, Stan Born and Tara Smith.

Rep. Mike Bost from Murphysboro, Ill. (left), who represents the 12th district, sits down with ISG President Daryl Cates to talk about Illinois-specific needs.

To learn more information about ISA’s Corporate Partner’s Program visit ilsoygrowers.com
Ann L. Schneider is president and owner of Ann L. Schneider and Associates LLC. In her work, she has developed an alternative transportation funding model for Illinois, collaborated on a supply chain model to prioritize project spending, identified funding solutions for local government infrastructure priorities and improved the nation’s freight transportation system. Previously, Schneider served as Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) secretary. She lives in Petersburg, Ill., and sees daily how important the transportation system is to farmers.

**WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KEEP MAKING INVESTMENTS IN THE ILLINOIS TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM?**

Many studies show that low transportation costs for Illinois agricultural commodities keep them competitive in international markets. If our infrastructure begins to fall apart, or if we aren’t looking for ways to make the system more efficient, we’ll lose competitiveness. It’s important to look at how we can keep making investments in the system to keep farmers profitable.

**WHAT ARE SOME CHALLENGES YOU SEE IN YOUR WORK FOR THE TRANSPORTATION INDUSTRY?**

One significant issue that we’re seeing is the condition of our waterways, specifically locks and dams. If this infrastructure fails, it will have a devastating impact on farmers’ ability to move products. Even though it’s a federal issue, it’s something we have to pay close attention to and make sure lawmakers are paying attention as well.

Another challenge we’re trying to address is highway congestion. Lack of maintenance causes delays in product delivery and increases transportation costs. The interstate highway system needs further investments to maintain it to the level we see now. As we face challenges in funding at the federal and state levels, the maintenance investment will become more difficult and could increase supply chain costs.

**WHAT ARE SOME WAYS LOCAL GOVERNMENTS CAN GAIN FUNDING FOR INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM INVESTMENTS?**

During my time as the chairperson for the National Freight Advisory Committee, I had the chance to get to know the many programs that are available through the federal and state governments that give us opportunities for financing. I’ve also worked with alternative financing in the past and have seen how bringing sectors together can help make these improvements in the most effective way possible.

The most important thing is to understand the best way to phase projects. While many investments may seem too large to achieve at first, it helps to break the project down into phases so you start working toward the bigger project without making the bigger investment right away.

**“From farm to market really is how our road system was developed. Our transportation system handles all products, whether they are going to processing or being shipped raw to market. We have to examine the most efficient and effective ways for farmers to have that access.”**

**ANN L. SCHNEIDER**
Ann L. Schneider and Associates LLC

**PHOTO SUBMITTED BY ANN SCHNEIDER**
A SOYBEAN DISCUSSION IS HAPPENING ACROSS ILLINOIS.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION NOW.

At ILSoyAdvisor.com, you'll find management and production tips, the latest research, market information, weather forecasts and more. It's always relevant and from local experts—and it's all within a click of a button. Visit ILSoyAdvisor.com today for the tools to help increase your yields.

DID YOU KNOW?

YOUR CHECKOFF FUNDS developed the ILSoyAdvisor webinar series to highlight tools and technologies to improve soybean production.

Find out more at ILSoyAdvisor.com