Consumer Understanding is Important to Your Profitability

- Consumer Opinion Affects Business
- Urban Legislators Have Say in Rural Affairs
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Cover Story

Consumer Acceptance Critical to Agriculture’s Success
Farmers may not realize that consumers like and support them. What consumers don’t know is that farmers do their job in ways that are ethical, socially responsible and sustainable. Learn what Illinois soybean farmers are doing to address consumer concerns, and what individual farmers can do to help consumers understand food production and protect freedom to farm.

Yield

Growing Demand Requires Attention to Production Detail
If global soybean consumption continues to grow at the same rate as the last decade, trade experts say the world will need another 2.5 billion bushels annually to meet demand by the end of the next decade. For Illinois soybean farmers, helping meet that demand is about much more than using production technology. Find out what else may be involved.

Leadership

Focus on Your Farm When Speaking with Consumers
Chicago-area Field Moms want farmers to explain what they do and be honest about it. Talk about what you know when speaking with consumers, and be sure they understand you do everything possible to provide a safe and healthy food supply. Listen to what Field Moms are willing to share in public forums that may influence other moms.

Market Access

New Website Strengthens Farmer Ties with Illinois Legislators
Illinois Soybean Growers (ISG), with funding from membership dollars, is taking steps to make sure the state’s legislators understand the impact of agriculture on the Illinois economy. See what you can do to build relationships with urban and suburban lawmakers.

Photo Essay

ISA Takes Many Paths to Reach Consumers
Illinois soybean farmers have found many paths to reach consumers with information about the benefits of soybean consumption and use. Get a look at some of the ways ISA helps consumers of all ages see the contributions soybeans make to the world, and get a better understanding of today’s farmers and farming.
Protecting our Image Protects our Profitability

As I write my last column as Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) chairman, I can’t help but reflect on what a difference our reputation has on our business. During the last 12 months, I have seen many instances where the image and reputation of Illinois soybean farmers has had a direct and positive impact on our customers and stakeholders and helped enhance our business.

Here are a few of those instances I would like to highlight:

• Thanks to the hard work of Illinois farmers and the soybean checkoff to promote biodiesel and renewable fuels, high-quality and consistent blends of 5 to 20 percent biodiesel are readily available throughout the state. Volkswagen and Audi took notice of that and earlier this year updated their policies to approve use of up to B20 in certain vehicles in Illinois. Previously the limit was B5 and is still the case in other states. What’s more, state legislation in effect until 2018 allows Illinois biodiesel customers to enjoy an exemption from the 6.25 percent sales tax when filling up with biodiesel blends greater than 10 percent.

• Illinois is uniquely qualified to export soybeans via containers, given its location, infrastructure and available soybean supply. Such opportunities were emphasized this winter when a Vietnamese soybean buyer specifically visited Illinois to meet with six container exporters, each with a distinctive niche. The buyer now is formalizing business arrangements to begin buying Illinois soybeans for distribution for human food throughout Vietnam. ISA representatives accompanied the buyer on a two-day, more than 500-mile trip to confirm Illinois’ consistent and reliable supply and relatively high-quality production of both biotech and conventional soybeans.

• Illinois soybean farmers, along with corn, beef and pork producers and Illinois Farm Bureau, continue to help promote the Illinois Farm Families (IFF) effort. IFF has made it easier, through a number of outreach programs, for farmers to answer tough consumer questions about the food they eat. Moms especially want to know that the food they’re feeding their families is safe and good for them. IFF has a WatchUsGrow.org website where consumers can ask questions and see what farmers are doing to grow food. The Field Moms, a group of Chicago-area moms, also tour Illinois farms and share their findings with others.

I hope you take seriously the personal role you play in advancing the soybean industry, and continue to support efforts to enhance and protect our freedom to operate. I have enjoyed serving as your chairman this past year and am confident ISA will remain at the forefront of our industry. Thank you.

Bill Wykes
ISA Chairman
Illinois Soybean Farmers Make Progress in Haiti

There is a Haitian proverb that states, “dèyè mon gen mon,” or “behind the mountains, there are more mountains.” Despite having the most malnourished children in the Western Hemisphere and numerous obstacles to overcome, there has been great progress in Haiti related to soy.

It was in 2010 when the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA), National Soybean Research Laboratory (NSRL) and the World Initiative for Soy in Human Health (WISHH) shipped a much-needed and greatly appreciated container of dehydrated soup mixes containing textured soy protein (TSP) to Haiti following the devastating earthquake of January 2010.

Since then, ISA, NSRL and WISHH have collaborated on additional projects in Haiti. Health and nutrition fairs for school-age children have provided unique opportunities for students, teachers, parents and school administrators to learn about soy protein as well as the importance of a nutritious and balanced diet in a setting that is enjoyable, entertaining and enlightening.

A highlight of one of the nutrition fairs in Haiti was a solo performance by a Haitian girl who had composed a song about soy and sang it on stage to express her appreciation. Her song was heartfelt and moved all who were there to experience it.

School children in Haiti also taste soy through MAMBA, a soy-enhanced school snack that is nutritious and delicious. MAMBA contains soybean oil, defatted soy flour and soy protein concentrate as well as vitamins and minerals. MAMBA was created by a partnership with Meds & Food for Kids (MFK) and Edesia through a grant awarded by the USDA’s Micronutrient-Fortified Food Aid Pilot Program. Soy also is being incorporated in local recipes like fruitbread during educational soy training classes using U.S. soy.

I lead NSRL’s efforts in Haiti and travel there on a regular basis. I will be in Port-au-Prince and Cap-Haiti this month facilitating the NSRL/ISA/WISHH Grower Leader Travel. While in Haiti the group will visit the Karyna Bakery, make soymilk with the Food for the Poor SoyCow, participate in a poultry nutrition seminar, and take in a nutrition fair at a school in Cap-Haiti.

Another Haitian proverb says “piti piti zwazo fè nich.” Literally translated it means, “little by little the bird makes his nest,” and generally implies, “many incremental changes will eventually make a significant difference.” Soy is making a difference in Haiti.

We are extremely appreciative of the funding provided by Illinois soybean farmers. In addition to Haiti, the financial backing supports NSRL programs in countries that range from Cambodia and Vietnam, to Nicaragua and Guatemala, to Nigeria and Mozambique, to India.

By Bridget Owen

We are extremely appreciative of the funding provided by Illinois soybean farmers.

Bridget Owen is associate director for the National Soybean Research Laboratory and directs international soybean endeavors that deal with malnutrition, economic development and sustainability. NSRL coordinates soybean research, outreach and education in the areas of production, nutrition and international development.
Consumer Acceptance Critical to Agriculture’s Success

By Laurie Redman-Steen

The work soybean farmers do in the soil may be just as critical to long-term profitability as the approach soybean farmers take in talking about agriculture with consumers, says one university specialist. While many people may not harbor ill feelings about farmers, they do have questions about food production that stakeholders say must be addressed.

“Farmers need to realize that consumers like them and want to support them,” says Candace Croney, Ph.D., and associate professor of animal behavior and well-being at Purdue University. “I don’t think farmers hear that enough.”

Then why the skepticism about bio-tech crops? Why is Canada phasing out gestation stalls? Why are so many dairy products hormone-free?

“People like farmers,” says Croney. “What many dislike is corporate or ‘factory’ food production. They don’t see that as farming at all. Unfortunately, when consumers are concerned about agricultural practices from an ethics perspective, and we answer only with science, we’re not saying the things consumers need to hear. We’re answering the wrong question, and we’re not indicating that we understand their ethical concerns.”

Croney says that is a shame, because in many instances agriculture may already be addressing some of those concerns. Instead, farmers are more comfortable talking about production practices, and generally fall back on discussing what they know.

“Phasing out gestation crates is an emotional issue,” says Rowen Ziegler, soybean farmer from LaHarpe, Ill., and ISA director. “As farmers, we want to talk about their benefits for herd health and individual care, but ultimately we have to accommodate our end users.”

“Agriculture should acknowledge that people have questions and concerns about certain things we say and do, and show them we’re willing to listen,” says Croney. “My biggest concern for agriculture is that we still haven’t figured out what the question is.”

What’s the Question?

The question is not, “Can you do the job?” It’s, “Are you doing the job in a way that’s acceptable to the public?” Croney says the answer isn’t whether farmers are

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**Illinois Consumers’ Top Concerns**

**Question:** How interested are you personally in the following?

- Protecting the environment: 89%
- Becoming healthier through the foods they eat: 87%
- Preparing foods with the most nutritional value: 85%
- Eating foods that are free of chemicals, antibiotics and hormones: 84%

Source: Illinois Farm Families
feeding the world, it’s whether it is done in a way that is ethical, socially responsible and sustainable with respect to people, animals and the environment.

“What we need to do is tell consumers why we do what we do right. We should respect that people may disagree with us,” she says. “If we are brutally honest, in many cases agriculture hasn’t been all that receptive to what consumers have to say because we often feel we know better. Even if that is sometimes the case, how many people like to be talked down to, and told their ethical beliefs are wrong? In a country based on freedom of choice, if we operate with that mentality, we can’t win.”

**Illinois Farm Families**

Croney encourages farmers to talk about where their foodstuffs are going. She believes the Illinois Farm Families (IFF) movement is a good start, but thinks the target audience and the scope of the effort should be broader.

“As a consumer, if participating in IFF would help farmers figure out what is important to me, what is happening in my life, I’ll sign on to that. And if you tell me that this farm I am visiting that uses practices I support donates to this local shelter or that food bank in my backyard or supports my community’s animal shelter or an environmental cause I believe in, now I see how that matters to me. Focus on connecting the dots,” she says.

Pam Janssen is trying to do just that. Janssen and her husband, Bob, raise pigs and feeder calves and grow soybeans and corn in Woodford County. A member of the Illinois Pork Producers Association board, Janssen also is an IFF volunteer and part of the effort to bring Chicago-area “Field Moms” out to Illinois farms.

“What I hear from moms is that they don’t trust our production practices,” she explains. “They see an internet video of horrible farm animal abuse and think farmers are really like that. We have to be transparent, show consumers how we farm, and that we do things in the best interests of the animals.”

Janssen says the urban moms are initially skeptical. “They are thinking, ‘Am I really going to get the truth from these farmers?’ But they appreciate being able to see what happens on farms, and the opportunity to ask questions about what concerns them, like biotech crops and antibiotic-free meat,” she says.

Ziegler took part in a 2012 Field Moms farm visit. “They are concerned about biotechnology,” he says. “That is not an easy sell. But at least the moms left with an understanding that there is a reasonable rationale behind the production decisions we make. We are not just selling out.”

Ziegler says another big concern is livestock handling. “That issue is important to us as soybean farmers. We need to look down the road at the end user, and be aware of what they want. It is a long chain, and farmers don’t always get the right signals back from consumers. The

**Prepare to be Transparent**

The food chain is going to become more transparent whether farmers want it or not. Jim Bradford, DVM and food animal veterinarian with global communications experience, notes people take food very personally, and sometimes fear what they don’t know.

“I’ve been reading about GMOs in Europe, and how that got out of hand,” he says. “Rather than the positive stories being told first, the ‘frankenfoods’ stories took hold first. Once there’s a level of fear in consumers, it is difficult to shift concerns with facts.”

Bradford estimates at least 80 percent of people don’t think about how food gets to the table. “But a percentage of consumers do have an interest, and a few have an anti-agriculture agenda,” he says, adding that while most Americans accept biotech crops they don’t consume directly, such as soybeans, corn and cotton, some are more concerned about biotech fish, wheat and potatoes.

“Be prepared. Have a plan to answer all questions honestly. And make sure you’re talking in as consumer-friendly language as allowed by law,” Bradford says. “I have never met a food activist who wasn’t really smart and prepared. We need to be equally prepared with good spokespeople who have high credibility with consumers.”

Finally, always consider the consumer benefit during discussions. “Most consumers have never hoed weeds out of beans, so it is hard for them to understand the benefits of plants tolerant to herbicides,” he says. “And ‘cheaper food’ doesn’t resonate as a benefit, since the people asking often aren’t price conscious or protein deficient.”
Field Moms program is a good way to get those signals,” he says.

The program also offers a good way to clear up misconceptions. “The moms thought we gave pigs antibiotics every day,” says Janssen. “They were really surprised to hear that we only use antibiotics on sick pigs—the same way we only use antibiotics on sick children. Then you hear the, ‘That’s not what we’ve been told!’ chorus.”

Janssen says IFF volunteers learn from the experiences, too. “We are adapting farm visits and outreach efforts based on what the city moms are asking us,” she says.

Janssen believes her farm’s future depends on keeping the lines of communication open between farmers and consumers. “Right now, consumers want more laws and regulations in place based on emotions, not facts,” she says. “If we don’t open our doors and talk with consumers, our children won’t be in business.”

Expert Offers Take-Aways for Soybean Farmers

Soybean farmers can learn about consumer acceptance by paying attention to what has occurred within animal agriculture, says Purdue’s Candace Croney:

• Actively listen to what people say. Don’t just listen for a pause to get to your talking points. Stop talking at consumers and starting talking with consumers.
• Tell people about what you do that speaks to their concerns, rather than what sounds like a good talking point.
• Find someone outside of agriculture and ask their opinions. Find out what they are reading, where they get their information about food and agriculture, and what they truly want to know. People concerned about animal welfare aren’t going to ag sites. They go to groups that make information easy to find, effectively communicate ethical and emotional connections, and are viewed as “in the business.”

Candace Croney (right) spoke to dairy producers at the Northeast Dairy Producers Conference earlier this year. She says farmers should acknowledge that consumers have questions and concerns about how their food is produced, and be prepared to address them honestly and directly.
Global soybean demand has increased 150 percent since 1990. USDA projects growth of more than 235 million bushels this year. What’s more, if global soybean consumption continues to grow at the same rate as the last decade, trade experts say the world will need another 2.5 billion bushels annually to meet demand by the end of the next decade.

Longtime U.S. soybean industry consultant John Baize believes demand could climb even higher, but how can Illinois soybean farmers help meet demand? Baize says farmers must think about what can be done to maximize yields. Technologies such as new varieties, equipment and inputs are available, but he says management skills are the key.

“Farmers must commit to staying competitive over time,” says Baize. He urges farmers to produce as efficiently as possible and maximize yields to get the greatest return and increase profits.

“Grow soybeans efficiently, but don’t worry about demand. Demand will be there. Will you be the one to supply, or will soybeans be supplied by someone else?”

Despite a wet spring and with a normal summer, Baize believes U.S. farmers could see production exceed 3.3 billion bushels. The U.S. harvested 76.08 million acres in 2012, up significantly from 73.77 million acres in 2011. Baize projects a harvest of 77 million acres or more in 2013, as:

1. Soybeans had a better yield experience in 2012 because of the crop’s ability to cope with drought better than corn.
2. Farmers want to improve their crop rotations.
3. Soybeans minimize risk because they cost less to grow.

Using data provided by the Illinois Farm Business Farm Management Association (FBFM), University of Illinois professors Gary Schnitkey and Nick Paulson took a close look at equipment-management strategies to help farmers find ways to improve soybean profitability.

FBFM figures find the asset value of machinery and equipment on most grain farms in Illinois has doubled since 2000. Power costs, which include utilities, repairs, fuel, light and depreciation, also have increased. Illinois farmers saw a nearly 150 percent increase in these costs from 1995 to 2011, with the largest increases coming for fuel and depreciation costs.

Paulson notes FBFM data show greater power costs for farmers with more corn than soybean acreage because of higher corn harvesting expenses. Paulson says historic returns are comparable between farms that grow more corn versus those that grow more soybeans, or those that grow an equal amount of each. Regardless, the pair offers several strategies that can mitigate equipment value and power cost increases:

1. Rotate crops. Although corn is usually more profitable on a yearly basis, a corn-soybean rotation can offset corn yield drag that can occur with continuous corn and increase long-term profitability. Higher power costs from growing corn also can be balanced.
2. Evaluate planter costs. Compare costs of different planting systems and match equipment based on farm size.
3. Consider alternative tillage systems. Cost differences between no-till, strip, typical and deep tillage can vary greatly, with less tillage resulting in lower power costs.

For more information about these and related topics, visit the 2013 Soybean Profitability Summit website at www.ilsoy.org/illinois-yield-challenge/2013-soybean-summit/.
Illinois Prime Location for Livestock Comeback

The global appetite for pork, poultry and beef is growing. As the middle class expands in countries like China, Mexico and Yemen, so does the demand for cost-efficient meat production. And Illinois is an attractive place to raise high-quality, soy-fed animals.

“Several companies that contract with farmers to raise livestock would like to work with more Illinois farmers,” says Rob Shaffer, soybean and Angus cattle producer from El Paso, Ill., and ISA director. “Illinois meat packing plants have capacity to process more.”

He says Illinois has captured attention as an ideal location for several reasons:
• Feed costs are the biggest input for livestock producers. The abundant local feed supply in Illinois helps manage costs and ensure a feed supply.
• Transportation options get products to market. Trucking, rail and barge space is at a premium, but Illinois has ready access to rivers, roads and rails for shipping.
• Clear guidelines in the Illinois Livestock Management Facilities Act define the process for building new barns.

Stronger Soybean Basis

Shaffer asserts that Illinois farmers should welcome the interest in bringing more animals to Illinois. Livestock creates demand for grain that keeps corn and soybean basis strong at local elevators.

“The elevator is not our final customer,” he says. “Animal agriculture is the number one customer for Illinois soybeans. Having livestock is a plus.”

The Maschhoffs, a family-owned hog operation based in Carlyle, Ill., fed meal from 80,000 acres of Illinois soybeans in 2012, according to Torrey Martin, feed operations and merchandising manager. If the company meets their growth goals, they will buy an additional 150,000 tons of soybean meal annually.

In Bruceville, Ind., across the Wabash River from Lawrenceville, Ill., turkey producer Farbest Foods is building a new feedmill that will use about 1,000 more tons of soybean meal per week. Soybean meal accounts for about 20 percent of turkey diets, says Jay Houchin, live production manager.

Given the advantages, ISA works to support industry growth. ISA is a member of the Illinois Livestock Development Group (ILDG) that promotes livestock business for Illinois. ISA also is partnering with the Illinois Pork Producers Association (IPPA) to support consultant Ted Funk, who evaluates hog sites to ensure regulations compliance.

“Illinois offers easy access to both a feed supply and export markets,” says Shaffer. “Growth in the Illinois livestock industry benefits farmers and local economies. Take advantage of opportunities to support it in your community.”

Should You Raise Livestock?

Many Illinois farmers may be a generation or two removed from having livestock, but Shaffer has several reasons why farmers may want to add livestock:
• The next generation may want to stay on (or return to) the farm.
• High cash rents and machinery costs limit crop expansion opportunities.
• Increasing fertilizer costs make manure a valuable crop nutrient source.
• Diversity spreads risk and increases sustainability of farms.

A wide variety of options for investment, involvement and labor exist with many livestock integrators doing business in Illinois. For more information, contact Leah Beyer, ISA animal agriculture lead, beyerl@ilsoy.org or 317-512-4025.
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Focus on Your Farm When Speaking with Consumers

Consumers have questions about food and how it is grown, and they're looking for answers from farmers.

Valerie Johnson from Elgin, Ill., became a Field Mom through Illinois Farm Families’ (IFF) program for Chicago-area moms to get a firsthand look at farming. IFF is supported by ISA and the Illinois soybean checkoff, along with Illinois Farm Bureau, corn, pork and beef producers.

In a www.WatchUsGrow.org blog post Johnson wrote, “The month before the tour I started researching, asking questions, and learning what I could, specifically about GMOs, pesticides, and organic foods. By the day (of) the tour, I was mad at the way the U.S. farmers grew food, disturbed about the lack of GMO labeling on U.S. packaging, and confused about organic foods. I read so much about ‘dirty’ foods…I was hesitant to eat anything in my refrigerator!”

As a farm mom hostess on multiple Field Moms farm tours, Kate Hagenbuch advises farmers to “take a step back and look at the questions they are asking.”

Hagenbuch grew up in the Chicago suburbs. Today, she and her husband John, an ISA director from Utica, Ill., manage a wean-to-finish hog farm, grow soybeans and corn, and raise three children. Hagenbuch easily relates to urban and suburban moms to talk about farming.

“We need to make sure we have a voice. For our farm, and agriculture, to continue, it is not an option to not talk about it,” says Hagenbuch.

Most frequently Hagenbuch hears, “Is what I am feeding my family safe? Can I trust that when I go to the grocery store, I’m going to get food that’s not going to hurt us?”

In her local community and through outreach efforts such as IFF, she explains, “This is what we do on our farm and we raise our children here. Just as you wouldn’t do anything to harm your kids, we’re certainly not going to do anything to harm ours.”

Hagenbuch stresses that farmers should talk about their own farms, and avoid using generalizations. “Explain what you do and be honest. They’ll see that you are the person they are getting their food from, and that’s comforting,” she says. “On the farming side, we have embraced technologies and do everything possible to confirm that what we’re putting on your plate – and ours – is safe.”

Johnson and other Field Moms visited a farm this spring to meet the family members and experts, including agronomists and researchers, who make up the farm’s team.

Johnson’s post continues, “I learned the same people who I thought a few hours before were out to get our family, and myself, are really people like you and I who are trying to make the best use of our country’s land using science and technology. Although, I still don’t believe that GMOs are completely safe for us, I now do understand why farmers choose GMO seed over non-GMO seed. I also understand more about pesticides, crop nutrients and organic foods. I feel fortunate to be part of this, and I am looking forward to what… (is) in store for us on the next tour.”

WatchUsGrow.org and Facebook have become popular spots for consumers to post questions to farmers about food production.
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Still Time to Share Memories

ISA is preparing to celebrate 50 years of the association and 100 years of soybean production, and wants Illinois farmers to chime in with memories. Illinois has a rich legacy of dedication, hard work and success, and there’s no time like the present to share memories.

Take a few moments to embrace your past and share your legacy, including photos, with ISA through the “Embracing the Past, Envisioning the Future” link on www.ilsoy.org.

County Groups Provide Strong, Local Voice

Farmer members and affiliate members of Illinois Soybean Growers (ISG) are joining together to form grassroots organizations at the county level to have a strong, local presence.

Peoria County farmer and ISG membership coordinator Ross Pauli is helping members form the groups throughout the state. As part of that effort, some groups are hosting “Make Your Mark” barbecues. County level leadership invites soybean farmers and related agricultural affiliates throughout the county to participate in the events hosted by ISG and funded by membership dollars. Local legislators are invited so that attendees can ask questions and discuss pressing issues that impact farming at the local level and beyond.

“Getting started is simple and supports membership value by boosting involvement at the local level,” says Bill Raben, soybean farmer from Ridgway, Ill., and ISG membership chairman.

Three Make Your Mark barbecues are scheduled for late summer. Check www.ilsoygrowers.org for event details. If your county has not formed a local soybean organization, call 309-663-7692 or email ilsoy@ilsoy.org for help getting started.

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Website Strengthens Farmer-Legislator Ties

Farmers are aware that agriculture supports the Illinois economy, all the way from the Chicago Mercantile Exchange to the Bunge elevator in Cairo, Ill. Now, Illinois Soybean Growers (ISG), with funding from membership dollars, is taking steps to make sure the state's legislators understand that impact as well.

“Illinois farmers know we are doing our part to feed the world and support the state's economy,” says Mike Marron, soybean farmer from Fithian, Ill. and ISA director. “But many people in urban and suburban areas, including legislators, think food comes from the grocery store. They take our work for granted. We need to remind them we are here.”

Directly and indirectly, USDA statistics show agriculture creates about 1.5 million Illinois jobs. The Illinois soybean crop contributes about $5 billion to the Illinois economy in direct sales, while shipping and processing add even more jobs and value.

“Legislators and their staff members without a background in agriculture aren’t cognizant of the industry’s impact on the economy,” says Marron. “They are responsible for laws and regulations, and their decisions directly impact our ability to do our jobs.”

While www.VoiceForSoy.org lets legislators know where their ag-industry constituents stand on key issues, many Illinois legislators don't have soybean farmers in their districts. To fill the gap, www.SoybeansForIllinois.org was created as a complementary site.

The new site features information and maps that show how the Illinois soybean industry matters to legislative districts throughout the state and profiles an Illinois soybean farmer. Topics addressed on the site include:

- Business climate for livestock and poultry production
- Illinois infrastructure
- Biodiesel and crushing industries
- Sustainability and environmental regulations

Marron explains that SoybeansForIllinois.org also will be used during personal meetings and direct communications with legislators and their staff members.

“Relationships are how you get things done in Springfield and Washington, D.C.,” he says. “We need to build relationships with all legislators to show that we are a reliable source of information that can be used to help them make well-informed decisions.”

Marron adds that building relationships – even with those you don’t always agree with or those outside your district – earns a willingness to listen to the farmer's perspective.

“Urban and suburban lawmakers have a lot of influence, and we need to stay connected with them, as well as with our own representatives,” Marron says.
Container-On-Barge Program Picks Up Speed

International customers are more frequently asking for soybeans shipped in containers, and will even pay more for them than those shipped in bulk. Good news for Illinois soybean farmers, where natural resources and industry infrastructure are in place to get containers to customers.

That’s why the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) is developing a program that moves loaded containers from prime Illinois soybean growing areas downstream via barge to the Gulf Coast where they are then shipped to customers abroad.

“After we drop beans at the elevator, we may not always think about how they get to customers,” says Paul Rasmussen, soybean farmer from Genoa, Ill., and ISA director. “The container-on-barge (COB) program creates another option for moving Illinois soybeans to end users.”

ISA is using results from a checkoff-funded study conducted last year to get the COB program running. The analysis found it is cost effective to move Illinois soybeans in containers to a coastal export position relative to rail by going down the Illinois and Mississippi rivers to the Gulf Coast. Soybeans and other commodities would be loaded into containers at intermodal facilities that may involve rail and truck, or at designated river ports or elevators, and then loaded onto barges.

“Few states enjoy access like Illinois, with rivers running through or bordering nearly the entire state,” says Chuck Dillerud, river transportation consultant and author of the COB transportation, operating and business plan study. “The high volume of containers coming in and out of the Chicago area makes the program outlook competitive with alternative modes of transport.”

Containerized soybeans are most commonly moved by rail to the West Coast for export to Asia, but a COB program offers a range of greater benefits for Illinois farmers, says Ken Eriksen, senior vice president of Informa Economics, Inc.

“The value in the COB program is that containers traveling via barge can be loaded to 20 percent higher capacity than railcars and current public highway weight limits allow,” says Eriksen. “There’s equal horsepower but more tonnage, which means reduced cost per bushel and expanding available margin. This could translate into better local elevator prices.”

Getting Containers in a Row

Eriksen adds that success of the COB program will rely heavily on sound locks and dams. They must operate at full capacity -- a goal currently constrained by deferred maintenance on U.S. locks and dams totaling nearly $560 million.

Even with massive maintenance backlogs in the U.S., current work to expand the Panama Canal makes it the right time to get the program sailing in the next year or two. With expected completion in 2015, the additional canal locks will accommodate ships that are 50 percent wider and 30 percent longer, with two to three times more cargo capacity than fit through originally. These larger vessels are comparable to those that leave West Coast ports for Asia.

Dillerud explains that about 350 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs), a relatively small container, of soybeans and other commodities will travel monthly down the Illinois and Upper Mississippi rivers on a dedicated unit tow or groupings of six barges. Once in position at ports such as Houston, Texas, or Mobile, Ala., containers will be directly loaded onto ocean vessels and routed through the canal.

“The next step is securing capital and equipment, as ISA is aligning the transloaders, elevators, river and ocean carriers who will be involved,” says Dillerud.
Progressive Illinois N-WATCH Program Offers Multiple Benefits

Illinois soybean farmers are taking the lead on nitrate management through N-WATCH, a program developed by the Illinois Council of Best Management Practices (CBMP) in fall 2012 that provides Illinois farmers, ag retailers and certified crop advisers (CCAs) with materials to track nitrate levels in soil. CBMP is supported by the Illinois soybean checkoff.

“Illinois is the only state tracking nitrate levels this closely,” says Jean Payne, president of the Illinois Fertilizer & Chemical Association. “Change is occurring from the ground up, as farmers apply rates that are best for their farms rather than following broad-brush recommendations.”

According to Joel Gruver, assistant professor of soil science at Western Illinois University (WIU), excess nitrogen (N) is a major contributor to the approximately 400 “dead zones” in oceans and large lakes around the world, where oxygen levels regularly drop below the concentrations needed to support most life.

“Greater attention to N management strategies can improve global water quality and reduce fertilizer costs at home,” says Gruver.

N Management Starts With “4 Rs”

Extreme weather, fertilization practices and tile drainage are the greatest drivers of nitrate movement into Illinois surface and groundwater. A recent study from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) confirms just how long nitrate in groundwater can take to reach streams.

“In some environments, we found nitrate in groundwater may take decades to reach streams,” says Jim Tesoriero, USGS research hydrologist. “Improved nutrient management in these environments will have positive impacts, but it may take a long time to fully observe the effects.”

Payne says CCAs and ag retailers can assist farmers with proper nutrient management by keeping the “4Rs” of nutrient stewardship in mind when making fertilizer recommendations: Right Source. Right Rate. Right Time. Right Place. For details, visit www.nutrientstewardship.com.

Illinois farmers applied 63,000 tons less nitrogen last fall than in 2011, an achievement largely due to the guidance N-WATCH provided on how much N remained in the soil following the drought, says Payne. Additional soil samples in the spring estimate how much soil N was lost, providing more accurate application needs prior to planting to optimize crop growth.

Cover Crops Can Reduce N Loss, Enhance Yields

A checkoff-funded program underway at WIU studies the effects of precision-planted cereal rye and radishes on soybean performance.

“Cover cropping strategies are more likely to achieve their objectives, such as erosion control and increased crop yields, if greater attention is given to cover crop genetics, seed placement and soil fertility,” says Gruver, principal WIU researcher of the study.

Cover crop biomass, soil temperature at planting, soybean stand establishment and soybean yield will be compared across treatments during the 2013 growing season. Results will help farmers refine cover crop strategies that help reduce seed costs and enhance soybean yields. In the meantime, Gruver says farmers can begin now to plan for fall cover crops:

1. Line up seed early, when it is more available and less expensive.
2. Plan multiple planting methods (e.g., grain drill, aerial applicator, broadcast blended with fertilizer).
3. Target highly erodible fields that will be no-till soybeans in 2014.
4. For farmers new to cover cropping, target fields near home to observe them easily.

Need more information? Visit www.ilsoy.org/isa/sustainability for N management resources.
Farmer Sees Checkoff in Action

Austin Rincker, soybean farmer from Moweaqua, Ill., and ISA Soy Ambassador, is one of 10 farmer leaders recently selected for the United Soybean Board’s (USB) 2013 See for Yourself program. The intensive, weeklong educational experience helps soybean farmers learn more about the soybean checkoff and the soybean industry.

“We are thrilled with the interest we’ve seen in this important program,” says David Hartke, soybean farmer from Teutopolis, Ill., and chair of the USB Audit and Evaluation program, which sponsors See for Yourself. “I think we have an outstanding group of participants this year, all of whom I see as having great leadership potential for the ag industry going forward.”

Selected participants will visit St. Louis, Panama and Colombia.

Raise Your Hand, Volunteer Your Talents

Illinois Farm Families (IFF) volunteers build consumer trust in how farmers grow food today. Farmers can join this conversation and make a difference for agriculture in several ways:

- “What’s Cooking Wednesday” recipes. A recipe is featured each week on the IFF blog. Send your family favorite with a photograph. Bonus points if you use soy or another Illinois ingredient.
- Share your story. IFF has many options that allow you to fit blogging into your schedule.
- Visit the city. Are you ready to take your farm story to Chicago? Volunteer at an IFF event for urban and suburban consumers.

Interested farmers may start by filling out the form at www.WatchUsGrow.org/farmer. IFF will follow up with you to find the right fit.

GOING WHOLE HOG:
How to satisfy animal ag’s big appetite for Illinois soybeans.

Animal ag consumes nearly 98 percent of U.S. soy meal. Soy meal is an efficient protein source for animal feed, particularly for poultry and swine, but U.S. soybean farmers need to continually improve the quality of their meal to compete with other ingredients and meet the needs of poultry and livestock farmers.

U.S. soy has lost some animal-feed market share to alternative feed sources, such as canola meal, synthetic amino acids and dried distillers grains with solubles (DDGS). Last year, the average protein content of soybeans grown here in Illinois was 34.5 percent. Opportunities exist to push that number higher.

It’s critical for soybean farmers to support their biggest customers, including by growing the best soybeans they can.

What happens if U.S. soy meal quality doesn’t improve?

Perdue Farms’ Randy Mitchell recently called properly processed soy meal the “gold standard” for poultry diets. Mitchell points to soy meal’s ability to cost-effectively deliver critical amino acids.

The 2012 Quality of the United States Soybean Crop study shows that optimal animal performance occurs when feed contains a high-quality protein source with an excellent balance of amino acids.

If soybean farmers do not continuously improve soybean quality, U.S. soy meal could lose its animal-feed market share to alternative feed sources.

What can you do?

Simple: Ask your seed dealer which seed varieties will produce higher-quality soy meal. These better beans will protect your current profits and preserve your place in markets for years to come.

To learn more about why soybean farmers should support their biggest customers beyond the elevator, visit www.BeyondTheElevator.com.
Inquiring Moms Want to Know

Why did you apply to the Illinois Farm Families Field Moms program?

As a stay-at-home mom with two girls – ages 2 and 9 months – I cook at home as much as I can. I feel guilty when we eat out because I don’t know where that food comes from or how it is prepared. I have become the food decision-maker, and I want to provide a healthy diet for my family. But the hysteria around GMOs, hormones, pesticides, antibiotics and other food topics concerns me.

My husband started a company four years ago, so our budget is tight. I need to make informed spending decisions. I have been buying all organic food, and that is expensive. I want to learn what labels mean and form my own opinions in the midst of the hysteria. I want to talk to farmers myself and learn enough to decide for myself what to buy. The Field Moms program gives me the opportunity to do just that.

What have you been learning?

I love being a Field Mom! I appreciate that I have been allowed to share my concerns, and farmers are eager to address those concerns.

For example, I am less fearful of GMOs than before because I understand what is being modified. Bt occurs naturally in soil and is used topically in organic corn production. It is being used regardless of what I buy. I also learned that “hormone-free pork” is a marketing ploy, since hogs aren’t given hormones. I am learning what to look for on labels and what terms mean. I still have concerns, and I may not agree with everything, but I am much more informed.

What should Illinois farmers know about you (and consumers like you)?

Moms like me shop at Whole Foods because they tell us much of what we want to know about our food. They help us feel more connected and informed, even though they charge more. We want to know what farmers do, but we don’t have many opportunities to learn. We are using our critical-thinking skills to make good decisions, but we don’t know what terms mean, so we have limited knowledge to base those decisions. At the same time, we value relationships and we want to get to know you. The Illinois Farm Families Field Moms program is a great way for us to connect.

“Our know moms have questions about how their food is grown and where it comes from. As farmers, we’re glad to show them what we do,” says Donna Jeschke, Mazon, Ill., farmer and host of the 2013 Field Moms’ Acre – an acre of corn and an acre of soybeans the Field Moms follow through the growing season.
ISA Takes Many Paths to Reach Consumers

Illinois soybean farmers have found many ways to reach consumers with information about the benefits of soybean consumption and use. With funding from the Illinois soybean checkoff, ISA helps consumers of all ages see the contributions soybeans make to the world, and get a better understanding of today’s farmers and farming.

Meet a Farmer Day

Meet a Farmer Day was held at the Children’s Discovery Museum in Normal, Ill. Children made a take-home snack that represented livestock feed ingredients including soybean meal, used soy crayons to color farm pages and explored the soybean play table.

Chicago-area Field Moms unearthed some just-sprouted soybeans at the Field Moms’ Acre located on Paul and Donna Jeschke’s farm in Mazon, Ill. The Field Moms’ Acre provides a firsthand example of how corn and soybeans are grown. Field Moms learn how farmers select seeds, provide nutrients, protect from pests, watch the weather, monitor crop growth and determine when to harvest and market the crop.

Field Moms toured Steve Ward’s wean-to-finish hog farm in Sycamore, Ill. Many moms were surprised to learn what a modern hog farm really looks like.
For me, farming was a given. I grew up wanting to be just like dad. Honest, hardworking, dedicated. He was then and still is today the type of guy that will help anybody out. You’re not just a part of your family farm. You’re a part of agriculture. And that’s a much larger family. That’s why I farm.

Bryon Coffman - Moweaqua, IL

Share your story at www.WhyIFarm.com