COVER STORY

Manage Phosphorus

Now may be the time for Illinois soybean farmers to reconsider their approach to phosphorus management. Nutrient specialists say even small actions may have big bearing on meeting the state's nutrient management goals. Get tips on making the best decisions for your farm.

Add Up the 4Rs

Right Source, Right Rate, Right Place, Right Time is the foundation for the 4R nutrient stewardship program. The initiative helps crop advisers and farmers enhance management practices while keeping key nutrients in the root zone. Find out what you need to know.

ISA, USSEC Talk Biotech with Customers

Illinois is one of the top soybean production and export states. Thus it's no surprise the ISA checkoff program and U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC) have partnered to update biotech information shared with soybean buyers overseas where biotech soybeans have raised concern. Read about efforts to keep customers educated about U.S. soybean production.

MANAGEMENT MATTERS MYTHBUSTER

Are Cover Crops All Peaches and Cream?

Not exactly. While the benefits of cover crops are many, they also can present challenges. Learn which myths soybean farmers and cover crops experts validate and which ones they debunk.

Skeptical Consumers Drive Sustainability Change

Consumers challenge agriculture to answer the sustainability question for a population that research shows does not understand the science or choices behind raising their food. Consumers have strong opinions about sustainability. The challenge is their definitions vary. Find out what farmers can do to help bridge the gap and increase understanding.

LEADER PROFILE: TOM KENTNER

Illinois Cover Crops Early Adopter

Sustainability is a priority for Tom Kentner, soybean farmer from Danville, Ill. Get his tips for using cover crops to enhance his stewardship program while maintaining profitability.
Bridging the Gap between Farmers and the Supply Chain

As a top U.S. soybean producer and exporter, Illinois plays a lead role in addressing the issues that affect soybean farmer profitability. To that end, one of the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) checkoff program’s objectives is to expand the influence and reach of ISA. That includes expanding soybean value chain recognition of farmer sustainability practices.

But how do we bridge the knowledge gap that exists between farmers and the supply chain? Through research and dialogue.

To begin with, ISA conducted a survey earlier this year to gather information about consumer perceptions of soybean sustainability. The project was set up to provide insights into their sustainability knowledge, how it relates to their buying habits, and what they learned about the soybean supply chain from participating in the survey.

Results from the first part of the survey provided responses from consumers regarding their perception of soybean production, soy products and transparency in the food system. More recently, we wrapped up the second portion of the survey, which helps identify the depth of consumer knowledge of soybean production and sustainable best management practices.

Survey results will be released this month during SoyTalk, a Chicago-area event sponsored by the ISA checkoff program. This is the second year SoyTalk will convene soybean supply chain members, including farmers, conservation groups, NGOs, food companies and others.

ISA also is partnering with other organizations to help bridge the gap between farmers and food companies. Key partners in these programs include the Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC), FieldRise and the Illinois Council on Best Management Practices (CBMP).

In addition, ISA participates in Field to Market. This alliance 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 food, fiber and fuel production sustainability. Field to Market’s 95 members employ more than 5.3 million people with total combined revenues of more than $1.3 trillion.

You can learn more about some of these and other sustainability efforts in this issue of Illinois Fields & Bean. We are providing a look at the expectations of millennials, when it comes to sustainability, along with what international customers perceive about biotechnology.

On the soybean production front, we report on the environmental aspect of sustainability, including nutrient management and what soybean farmers can do to better manage phosphorus. There also is information regarding the role cover crops play, including the advantages and challenges Illinois farmers face in testing cover crops strategies.

ISA is committed to bringing key supply chain players together to discuss the risks, complexities and opportunities of understanding and delivering sustainable soy to the market. Read the stories in the pages ahead, and get additional information at our website, www.ilsoy.org/sustainability.

DARYL CATES
ISA Chairman
Agriculture Critical to Illinois’ Success

> BY RAYMOND POE

Agriculture is a billion dollar industry. Success is critical to the state of Illinois. My goal as Illinois Department of Agriculture director is to grow the industry, and continue it on a path that will make Illinois agriculture something we can be proud of for generations to come.

The department is primarily a regulatory agency, but also is tasked with promoting the state’s agriculture and agribusiness industries. Through appropriate regulation, we protect our food supply and properly market our state’s agricultural products to the world.

When I talk with stakeholders, lawmakers and other interest groups, I enjoy bragging about the success of our farmers and ranchers. We need to do more bragging. Illinois ranks second for soybean production and fifth in ag exports worth $8.6 billion a year. It’s important to remember that the state, nation and world depend on Illinois agriculture.

I also want to make you aware of an important initiative this summer. USDA’s National Agriculture Statistics Service (USDA-NASS) will send out a survey regarding the Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy. The survey will ask farmers about crop production practices, including use of cover crops, tillage and nutrient application strategies. A high participation rate will help us prove Illinois does not need more mandates and that our state’s farmers and ranchers can make a difference through voluntary involvement, take ownership of the issue and meet the challenge.

As many of you know, I represented the 99th District in the Illinois General Assembly for more than 20 years. I take great pride in the work I was able to accomplish on behalf of my district, many of whom are farmers. With that said, I have brought with me to the Department of Agriculture a pet project. Call it unfinished business from my time in the state legislature.

I know firsthand how important the Illinois and DuQuoin state fairs are to our agriculture families and local economies. It is those memories and those experiences that are the driving force behind my support of the establishment of a fairgrounds foundation.

Both the fairgrounds in Springfield and DuQuoin could use an influx of cash to help restore them. More than $180 million in deferred maintenance is needed, but we must be realistic about our state’s current fiscal condition. The foundation would allow both fairgrounds to be less reliant on state money and would put no additional costs on taxpayers.

States such as Iowa, Indiana, Wisconsin and Missouri have established foundations that support their fairgrounds, and Illinois companies contribute money to them. We should keep that money in Illinois. Many want to donate to the Illinois State Fair, but there is no place for the money to go. A foundation is win-win-win for Illinois, and I hope you will partner with us on that.

I look forward to working with you to grow our number one industry. The key is to build strong relationships with commodity groups, farmers and stakeholders. An open dialogue is paramount to progress. I am proud to be your advocate and to work every day for Illinois agriculture.

“When I talk with stakeholders, lawmakers and other interest groups, I enjoy bragging about the success of our farmers and ranchers.”

RAYMOND POE
Illinois Department of Agriculture director

Raymond Poe became the Illinois Department of Agriculture director in November 2015. He spent more than two decades in the Illinois General Assembly representing the 99th District from Springfield. He is a third-generation farmer from Sangamon County.
Manage your Phosphorus

SMALL CHANGES CAN HAVE BIG IMPACTS

Illinois soybean farmers are no strangers to improving farming practices that make economic or environmental sense. Changing times mean farmers continuously must adjust their plans.

Now may be the time for farmers to reconsider their approach to phosphorus management.

“As producers become more aware of nutrient loss issues, positive changes are being made,” says David Droste, soybean farmer from Nashville, Ill., and Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) director. “It is important for everyone to be proactive and try new things to see what fits best.”

Even small actions may have big bearing on meeting the state’s nutrient management goals. Droste says everyone has a role to play in keeping nutrients where they belong. And farmers can optimize farm productivity while reducing phosphorus loss with the latest thinking, trusted conservation strategies and available technology. By voluntarily adopting practices best suited to a farm’s unique situation, soil and water quality can be improved.
HERE'S HOW:

1. **Start with the basics.**

   Nutrient management specialists advise the first step is to conduct a soil assessment test. Results enable farmers to establish field phosphorus requirements, predict risk of loss and determine next actions. A variety of soil tests and sampling methods are available depending on location and geography. Extension agents or crop advisers can ensure accurate results and interpret findings.

   "It is always valuable to have a second pair of eyes and ears to deal with the vast amount of information you get from a soil test," says Tom Bruulsema, phosphorus program director at the International Plant Nutrition Institute (IPNI). "With all the variables involved, a lot of complexities are introduced — previous crops, yield goals and harvest systems. Talk to a credible adviser."

   Droste starts with recommendations from his local testing service. "I combine that with university recommendations for variables like application rates and predicted yield, and talk my options over with consultants at the soil test center to develop the best strategy," he says.

2. **Build your plan.**

   No single, ideal solution for phosphorus management exists. Bruulsema says the right plan depends on testing methodology used, crops grown and unique geographic and economic factors. He recommends growers keep the 4Rs — right source, right rate, right time, right place — of nutrient stewardship in mind, particularly with regard to place and time.

   "Placement should be a primary consideration," he says. "Aim for minimal soil disturbance so you don’t exacerbate any erosion problem. In some situations, only broadcast placement is available, so incorporate phosphorus soon after broadcasting whenever possible. If not, think seasonally in terms of when runoff is least likely. Summer and into the early fall are often the best."

3. **Get help from technology.**

   Variable rate technologies (VRTs) offer one option to incorporate the 4Rs, since they feature site-specific nutrient placement recommendations and can help prevent over-application.

   New research is exploring alternative application methods, like using deeper phosphorus placement to reduce runoff. Other precision agriculture tools include the IPNI tool NuGIS, which Bruulsema says maps nutrient balances across geography and time.

   "NuGIS is an information system that shows us nutrient levels
Laura Christianson kicked off the symposium with a presentation titled, “Don’t Be a Black-Eyed P: How to Reduce P Loss from Fields.” She discussed the ways phosphorus moves out of fields, explained options available to growers for reducing loss and highlighted current research exploring the contribution of tile drainage systems to phosphorus loss. Tom Bruulsema emphasized the importance of improving efficiency while reducing environmental impact in a presentation titled, “Sustainable Thinking 4R Phosphorus.” He suggested a practical consideration of the 4Rs as a way to achieve the goals while meeting society’s expectations for agriculture. The series concluded with Antonio Mallarino’s talk titled, “Fertilizer Management Practices to Reduce the Loss of Dissolved and Sediment-Bound P from Fields.” Mallarino shared promising field research results that demonstrated the effectiveness of several manure management strategies at reducing costs, optimizing yields and minimizing risk of surface runoff. The webinar series can be accessed through ILSoyAdvisor.com.

**4. Keep soil in its place.**

Farmers should include conservation practices in long-term phosphorus plans. Practices can significantly influence Illinois’ ability to meet Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRS) goals during the next nine growing seasons.

“For soybean farmers, some of the top practices are reducing tillage or using cover crops, or anything you can do to keep your soil in place,” says Laura Christianson, University of Illinois assistant professor of water quality. She offers options suited to every situation. For instance:

- Incorporate conservation tillage practices as appropriate.
- Implement a crop rotation plan to help maintain soil nutrient balance.
- Update practices regularly to keep productivity and sustainability goals on target.

Christianson adds that phosphorus loss in Illinois is a complex issue, but Illinois soybean farmers readily are equipped to help the state meet reduction goals.

“Science will never have all the answers. But we have practices we know work, and I hope it is encouraging for farmers to know there are options,” she says. “Soil and water are our most important resources. I don’t know if you can put a price on protecting them for the long-term.”

**Take Stock of Excess Phosphorus**

Current high phosphorus levels in fields are largely due to years of fertilizer and manure applications. Much of that application has been in excess of soil’s actual nutrient needs, says Antonio Mallarino, Iowa State University professor of nutrient management research.

“In many areas of the Corn Belt and surrounding states, soils were originally deficient in phosphorus,” he says. “The recommendation from land-grant universities and crop consultants was to continue applying, maybe more than needed, to build it up. After so many years of sticking to those traditions, we have the very high test levels we see in some areas now.”

Excess phosphorus availability results in a higher risk of nutrient loss, which creates potential for impaired water quality hundreds of miles from Illinois fields.

“We have to start paying attention to things we never realized might be a problem,” says John Longley, soybean farmer Aledo, Ill., and ISA Production Committee chair. “It’s time to use our knowledge of what’s happening elsewhere to update our practices and avoid regulations here.”
Add Up the Four Rs

Better Advice = Better Farmers = Better Profits = Better Environment = Better Beans

> BY SHANNON LINDEROTH

The Right Source, at the Right Rate, in the Right Place, at the Right Time. These four Rs lay the foundation for the 4R nutrient stewardship program. The initiative helps crop advisers and farmers enhance management practices and operational efficiency while keeping key nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus in the root zone where they are most useful. Use of the 4Rs also can reduce fertilizer costs and boost downstream water quality miles away.

“4R nutrient stewardship addresses the agronomics of nutrient use efficiency, the economics of maintaining yields and avoiding excess inputs, the environmental issues such as nutrient contamination that leads to hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico, and the social issues such as interference with recreational water uses like boating and fishing,” sums Harold Reetz, owner of Reetz Agronomics and East Central Illinois Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) Soy Envoy.

While the 4Rs are not new — all CCAs and their clients have been encouraged for years to follow the 4R nutrient stewardship recommendations — the program recently developed a new 4R Nutrient Management Program (NMP) specialty certification.

ACKNOWLEDGE GREATER KNOWLEDGE

The certification allows CCAs who pass the test to prove their knowledge, advance their skills and draw awareness to their advanced abilities. It aligns with USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and state nutrient management standards.

“As CCAs, we should always strive to improve,” says Mike Wilson, CCA with Wabash Valley FS. “This certification shows your commitment to your clients and to your industry. It makes you stretch and think about not only the conditions and challenges in your own backyard, but also about how things are done in other parts of the country.”

The certification currently is available in six states. More than 100 Illinois CCAs have already met the requirements for the NMP, which is more than any other state. In addition, CCAs in Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin may participate in the certification and are required to be 4R certified. More Illinois CCAs are scheduled for the exam in August.

PUT THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Such skills are in demand, as the 4R program increasingly makes a positive impact in the field.

John Scates works with Wilson to implement improved nutrient management practices on his family’s corn and soybean farm near Shawneetown, Ill. “It makes sense. Improving nitrogen management saves us money and makes us money at the same time since we are more targeted with our applications and can better address specific crop needs,” he says.

Scates acknowledges waiting for the appropriate weather conditions or altering application strategies requires a shift in mindset. “It takes effort to do things differently or make a few phone calls to switch things around,” he says. “But it doesn’t take long and the 4Rs just become part of your thought process. If you try to do all the big things right, you’ll get a decent, average crop. When you start to do all the little things right, too, you really can make improvements.”

“We all want to do the right thing,” says Wilson. “The more time and effort we give the 4Rs, the better we can show that we can voluntarily manage our nutrients.”

> Checkoff COLLABORATION

ISA Joins CCAs in Nutrient Management

The Soy CCA Envoys are a network of Certified Crop Advisers (CCAs) in Illinois who share management information and recommendations on ILSoyAdvisor.com. These CCAs work directly with producers and, through partnering with the ISA checkoff program, share high-yield management strategies and technologies to help farmers maximize soybean profitability.
SUSTAINABILITY TOP OF MIND WITH SOYBEAN FARMERS

ISA conducts an annual survey of the state’s soybean farmers to help gauge awareness and understanding of ISA checkoff and membership programs. ISA recently started asking specific questions related to sustainability, conservation practices and on-farm adoption of Best Management Practices (BMPs). Farmers overwhelmingly support these efforts and are taking strides towards continued improvement. And while progress has been made farmers still need to do more. Here are a few key findings from the most recent survey:

Percent of farmers who agree or strongly agree with the importance of helping non-farm consumers better understand and trust the practices farmers use.

57%

Number of farmers who are aware of the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy.

81%

Percent of farmers who say they have already adopted BMPs to reduce nutrient loss on their farms.

88%

Percent of farmers who agree that sustainable soybean production is important and worth working towards.

81%

Percent of farmers who are already working towards sustainable soybean production.

67%

Percent of respondents who are willing to work towards sustainable production.

73%

Select Illinois farmers soon will receive a survey developed by the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) to identify crop production practices identified in the Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy. Response to the survey will help demonstrate farmers can reduce nutrient losses voluntarily, eliminating the need for additional mandates.
NUTRIENT LOSS
How Will Farmers be Part of the Solution?

It is a long way from Illinois to the Gulf of Mexico—about 800 miles from the middle of the state to the Port of New Orleans, in fact. Yet the actions Illinois farmers take, or don’t take, on their fields have a huge impact on nitrogen and phosphorus levels in water those farmers may not ever see. The two key nutrients don’t always stay where farmers put them, which can reduce farmer profitability and have unintended, detrimental effects on aquatic life found far from the farms on the Illinois prairies.

The Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) believes out of sight cannot be out of mind when it comes to reducing nutrient losses. Agriculture has made significant strides in improving nutrient utilization over the years, but the industry will be called on to do even better in the future.

“Farmers do a lot of things right,” says Jennifer Filipiak, American Farmland Trust associate Midwest director. “But we know we are still losing ‘fugitive’ nutrients — those nutrients that still escape the farm field despite best efforts to ensure that the crop takes them rather than the stream. We do know that Illinois farms disproportionately contribute to the excess nutrients that appear in the Mississippi River Basin and Gulf of Mexico.”

Volunteer Duty
So it may be time for Illinois farmers to pick up the pace and take more care to ensure that nutrients remain vital tools that can be put to work for crop improvement.

Nutrients should not be allowed to escape from Illinois fields and contribute to problems downstream. “There’s a renewed sense of urgency for farmers to voluntarily adopt improved nutrient management practices before they are mandated by regulations,” says David Droste, soybean farmer from Nashville, Ill., and ISA director. Droste also is president of the Council on Best Management Practices (CBMP). The Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NRLS) calls for a 15 percent cut in nitrogen and 25 cut in phosphate load by 2025.

The NRLS was developed last year by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) and the Illinois Department of Agriculture with input from agriculture groups. Droste says it builds on existing voluntary, incentive-based programs to implement best management practices (BMPs) that help reduce nutrient losses from farm fields.

“It’s time to be proactive regarding nutrient utilization,” says Filipiak. “Nutrient utilization is the next phase of agricultural management.”

Every Acre Counts
The challenge is that not every farm has the same type of soils or the same type of nutrient loss issues. But nutrient loss affects all farms, not just those in targeted watersheds. For the state to be successful in substantially reducing the amount of nitrogen and phosphorus lost, Droste says every farmer must investigate available solutions and incorporate their use on all acres.

“As a producer, you have to be aware of the big picture and what your potential problems are,” he says. “Figure out what works best on your operation.”

Farmers have a suite of systems and solutions at their disposal that are included in the BMPs spelled out in the NRLS, including many practices farmers already use.

“In my area, we’ve been using cover crops to a certain extent, as well as split-applying nitrogen. The crop receives nitrogen just as it needs it and is less vulnerable to leaching or volatizing,” says Droste. “Economic and environmental benefits are key to long-term farm sustainability.”

In addition, Droste is using a new tool from DuPont Pioneer that combines weather and forecast data, along with variety information, to help optimize activities like nitrogen applications.

But there’s also a learning curve. Droste says the current voluntary adoption situation gives farmers time to try options and determine which will most benefit their farms. In addition to technical expertise, available resource experts may have access to federal funds to help offset the costs of implementing new practices. Droste suggests consulting with experts from local NRCS offices, soil and water conservation districts or University of Illinois Extension.

“They know your soils, area and challenges,” he notes. “They are there to help.”

Community Service
“If you think of the entire Mississippi River Basin watershed as your extended community, then your nutrient loss management project gets a little smaller and hits closer to home. Think of your actions as doing right by your community, as being a good neighbor,” suggests Filipiak.

Droste believes now is the time to work together to address how nutrients are managed in Illinois. “We have nine seasons to show that we can do the right thing. We’ve seen what has happened in the Chesapeake Bay watershed and we want to avoid that happening here,” he says.
ILLINOIS FARMERS AND BMPs: A PERFECT MATCH

Illinois soybean farmers have a long history of increasing productivity while decreasing environmental impact. These skills have enabled farmers to meet expanding, worldwide demand for Illinois soybeans while reducing any negative effects on neighbors.

Yet the bar continues to rise. ISA farmer-leaders have learned that while they strive to produce top-quality soybeans, the focus on nitrogen and phosphorus utilization must also increase. Keeping key nutrients in their places is a point of increasing emphasis, local watershed communities expect it, and regulations may eventually demand even stricter nutrient control.

“A long-term approach is our only solution to this problem,” says Robert “Woody” Woodruff, who grows corn, soybeans and wheat in rotation on his farm near Modesto, Ill. “Yield is important, and it definitely pays the bills. But soil is our only long-term resource, and water is beyond critical. We have to protect both.”

The good news, says Woodruff, is that the tools, technology and resources are available to do this. Illinois farmers have a window of opportunity to prove they voluntarily do the right thing and adopt BMPs that will help reduce the need for additional rules. Farmers have nine growing seasons — until 2025 — to reduce nitrate-nitrogen loading by 15 percent and total phosphorus loading by 25 percent.

ISA is working to help every farmer in the state understand that they must consider adopting voluntary BMPs on every acre of land to help meet Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRS) goals. And they must do so without sacrificing profits.

“It’s a lose-lose if the nutrients you’re paying for end up going off-site or downstream,” says Doug Schroeder, soybean and corn farmer in Mahomet, Ill., and ISA director. “It is just common sense that if you’re losing nutrients, that is a bad thing.”

Schroeder notes, “If every day you checked your seed corn and every day you came up with a bag missing, you’d do all you could to stop that loss. We need to think about nutrients the same way. We have paid for them. Let’s keep them where we need and want them.”

Blueprint for Success

The loss reduction targets represent a hefty goal, but ISA leaders believe it is achievable. Not only will hitting the objective improve water quality, it will help improve farm performance and illustrate a commitment to sustainable farming practices throughout the soybean supply chain.

Farmers can select from a menu of practices to hone nutrient management. The list provides the opportunity to weigh the pros and cons of each and prioritize which practice makes the most sense. ISA leaders say just try one thing to begin. Add others as proficiency is gained.

The options are varied and many, and include such practices as:

- Cover crops
- Wetland restoration
- Bioreactors
- Precision agriculture
- Reduced tillage
- Split nutrient applications
- Buffer strips

Take Action Now

A recent opinion poll commissioned by National Crop Insurance Services found consumers have favorable views of farmers, with 86 percent of respondents holding farmers in high esteem.

To capitalize on those views, ISA leaders say voluntarily adopting BMPs that enhance soil health and protect water quality within Illinois and greater Mississippi River Basin can only build on an already solid reputation within local communities. Farmers in the Chesapeake Bay and Lake Erie watersheds and other critical areas have found mandated federal and state water quality regulations are frustrating, onerous and expensive and only increase future uncertainty.

Illinois farmers and advisors who have visited these environmentally sensitive areas note that the increased regulatory scrutiny and heightened uncertainty is the last thing farmers in the state need or want. Instead, “Be receptive to change,” says Alan Madison, who operates a farm near Princeton, Ill. “In this day and age with all of the technology we have, there is a huge difference in the information available. Understand that we do have an issue. If we aren’t proactive about addressing the issue, we won’t be happy with the regulations we get.”
What steps can farmers take to be part of the solution?

Every day, Illinois farmers already do their part to help reduce nutrient losses and improve water quality within their communities and watersheds. This map provides a sampling of the Conservation Story Map at conservationstorymap.com. It illustrates some of the best management practices (BMPs) farmers have invested in to keep nutrients where they belong, along with where those actions are taking place in the state. In most cases, farmers adopt several BMPs, as applicable, for their field conditions.

PARTICIPATING FARMS IN COUNTIES
(VARIOUS EXAMPLES LISTED BELOW BUT NOT ALL REPRESENTED ON MAP)

DeKalb: Buffers, cover crops, tillage practices
DeKalb: Cover crops
DeKalb: Buffers, soil nutrient testing, tillage practices, water nutrient testing
Whiteside: Buffers, nutrient management
Bureau: Constructed wetland
Kendall: Buffers
Grundy: Buffers, tillage practices
Henry: Buffers, cover crops, nutrient management, soil nutrient testing, tillage practices
Henry: Cover crops, nutrient management, soil health monitoring
Mercer: Buffers, constructed wetland
Kankakee: Buffers, cover crops, drainage water management, nutrient management, soil health monitoring, soil nutrient testing, tillage practices
Marshall: Buffers
Marshall: Drainage water management, soil nutrient testing, tillage practices
La Salle: Nutrient management, soil nutrient testing, water nutrient testing
Woodford: Constructed wetland
Peoria: Drainage water management, nutrient management, soil nutrient testing, tillage practices
Peoria: Cover crops, tillage practices
Peoria: Cover crops, nutrient management, soil health monitoring, soil nutrient testing, tillage practices, water nutrient testing
Peoria: Buffers, cover crops, nutrient management, water nutrient testing
Tazewell: Buffers, cover crops, nutrient management, soil health monitoring, soil nutrient testing, tillage practices, water nutrient testing, constructed wetland
Woodford: Buffers
Tazewell: Buffers
McLean: Buffers, water nutrient testing, constructed wetland
Hancock: Buffers, nutrient management, soil health monitoring, tillage practices, constructed wetland
McLean: Buffers, cover crops, nutrient management, tillage practices, water nutrient testing
Champaign: Buffers, cover crops, drainage water management, nutrient management
Menard: Buffers, nutrient management, soil nutrient testing, tillage practices, water nutrient testing
Cass: Cover crops, nutrient management, soil nutrient testing, tillage practices
Cass: Cover crops
Menard: Cover crops, drainage water management, tillage practices
Menard: Buffers
Champaign: Cover crops, soil health monitoring, tillage practices
Macon: Cover crops, tillage practices
Morgan: Cover crops, nutrient management, tillage practices
Douglas: Buffers, nutrient management, tillage practices
Sangamon: Cover crops
Sangamon: Buffers
Sangamon: Bioreactor, cover crops, nutrient management, soil health monitoring, soil nutrient testing, tillage practices, water nutrient testing
Pike: Buffers, nutrient management, soil nutrient testing, tillage practices
Douglas: Cover crops, tillage practices
Coles: Buffers, cover crops, nutrient management, soil health monitoring, water nutrient testing
Macoupin: Buffers, cover crops, nutrient management, soil nutrient testing
Christian: Nutrient management
Clark: Cover crops, nutrient management, soil health monitoring, soil nutrient testing, tillage practices
Macoupin: Buffers, cover crops, nutrient management, soil nutrient testing
Montgomery: Cover crops
Fayette: Cover crops, soil health monitoring, tillage practices
Clinton: Buffers
Washington: Buffers, cover crops, nutrient management, tillage practices
Edwards: Nutrient management, soil health monitoring, soil nutrient testing, tillage practices, water nutrient testing
Edwards: Cover crops, drainage water management, nutrient management, soil health monitoring, soil nutrient testing, tillage practices
Randolph: Cover crops, drainage water management, nutrient management, tillage practices
Massac: Tillage practices
Learn more about BMPs and programs supporting adoption of conservation practices to improve water quality:

**Illinois Soybean Association**
http://www.ilsoy.org/sustainability/showcasefarmers

**Illinois Council on Best Management Practices**
http://illinoiscbmp.org/

**Illinois Nutrient Research & Education Council**
http://www.illinoisnrec.org/

**Conservation Story Map**
http://conservationstorymap.com/

**N-Watch**
https://nwatchonline.com/about

**Midwest Cover Crops Council**
http://www.mccc.msu.edu/index.htm

**Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy**
http://www.epa.illinois.gov/topics/water-quality/watershed-management/excess-nutrients/nutrient-loss-reduction-strategy/index

**Conservation Technology Information Center**
http://www.ctic.org/

**American Farmland Trust**
https://www.farmland.org/

**Illinois Certified Crop Adviser Program**
http://illinoiscca.org/

**Illinois Corn Marketing Board**
http://www.ilcorn.org/priority-issues/nutrient-strategy

**Field to Market**
https://www.fieldtomarket.org/

**Field Rise**
http://fieldrise.com/

**Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program**
http://www.sare.org/

**Association of Illinois SWCD**
http://www.aiswcd.org/

**The Nature Conservancy**
http://www.nature.org
Since their introduction some 20 years ago, biotech soybeans have faced many hurdles for acceptance in several overseas markets. In Europe particularly, genetically modified (GM) soybean varieties have been through rigorous approval processes, coped with negative public demonstrations and legal pressures, and confronted consumer resistance.

The U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC) addresses many of these challenges on behalf of U.S. soybean farmers. Given that Illinois is one of the top production and export states, the ISA checkoff program also invests in promoting biotech facts. USSEC and ISA together are updating information that is shared with soybean buyers in Europe and in other parts of the world where biotech soybeans have raised concern.

“People pay a lot of attention to biotechnology,” says Brent Babb, USSEC regional director of Europe & Middle East/North Africa. “We have been educating consumers, feed and trade associations, government officials and others about the safety and value of biotechnology for 20 years, and it’s time to expand and even change our messages.”

USSEC traditionally has focused on European feed industry demand for biotech soybean event import approvals and informing the European Commission about the need for new technologies. The process of creating a new biotech trait, bringing it to market and obtaining global import approvals takes seven to 10 years. Several
new biotech events, including soybeans tolerant of diacamba and stacked traits, have been introduced and currently are seeking import approval.

Slow European Union (EU) government import approval processes can pressure U.S. soybean sales to Europe, although Babb says the European animal feed industry uses 90 percent GM soybeans. Most food applications are non-GM soy.

“The EU is the second largest total U.S. soy importer behind China; a big market for biotech soybean meal for feed. The European feed industry is very supportive of our efforts,” says Babb. “It is important to them and to U.S. farmers that import approvals are received and industry friction reduced so products go into Europe in a timely manner. We need to keep them updated about biotech soybeans and related issues.”

CHANGING MESSAGES

While the safety of biotech soybean seed has been a primary focus with buyers in Europe, USSEC sees a shift toward weed management and chemical use concerns, also.

“USSEC representatives who travel overseas are getting questions we didn’t get before about weed management and chemical use. In fact, we understand that Europe is reviewing the use of glyphosate now. Our message as U.S. farmers is that glyphosate is one of the best, most effective herbicides on the market with limited environmental impact. Positive safety reviews have been conducted by regulatory and scientific institutions worldwide,” says Laura Foell, USSEC chairman and Iowa farmer.

Weed management also is attracting additional attention. Babb notes that weeds continually evolve and some may develop resistance to specific herbicides. That makes new events like dicamba-tolerant soybeans even more important for Europe approval.

“We need to remind customers that herbicide-resistant weeds are not new, nor are they unique to GM crops. Herbicide-resistant weeds were first documented in the 1960s,” he says. “We want buyers to know farmers lessen the chance that resistance develops through crop rotation and non-chemical weed control measures, avoiding repeat applications of a herbicide, using new products with different modes of action and planting new biotech crops tolerant to different herbicides.”

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Re-energize your business opportunities at DTN/The Progressive Farmer 2016 Ag Summit December 5-7 in Chicago. You’ll hear the latest economic, weather, marketing, and financial insights in our industry. Surround yourself with hundreds of upbeat peers and problem solvers — and go home with a vision for managing today’s cycles.

2016 AG SUMMIT SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4

PRE-EVENT OPTIONS

DTN University: Tax Solutions to Enter and Exit Ag

10-Year celebration reception with ag’s most awarded Editorial Team

MONDAY, DECEMBER 5

7:30 a.m. Registration

7:30 a.m. Early Bird Profit Sessions/breakfast

12 p.m. Lite lunch with the sponsors

1 p.m. Ag Summit general session

6 p.m. Dinner at Fogo de Chão

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6

7 a.m. Breakfast buffet roundtable discussions

8:30 a.m. Ag Summit general sessions

12 p.m. Plated luncheon

1:30 p.m. Ag Summit breakout sessions

5:30 p.m. Reception with the sponsors

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 7

7 a.m. Breakfast buffet roundtable discussions

8 a.m. Ag Summit general session

12 p.m. Adjourn

FIND OUT MORE AT www.dtnagsummit.com OR CALL 888.576.9881

Hosted by: dtn THE PROGRESSIVE FARMER

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HOTEL INFO

Fairmont Chicago
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312.565.8000

Special Ag Summit Room Rate: $173/night. Cut-off for room rate is November 21, 2016. Reference DTN to receive the special rate. To reserve your room online, link to the hotel site from: dtnagsummit.com

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Guest evening rate: $225
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Regular rate: $650

Explore Chicago! Guest Tour: $155

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Are Cover Crops All Peaches & Cream?

NOT EXACTLY, say the experts. Cover crops can improve soil health, including increased infiltration, organic matter and biological activity, as well as reduce soil erosion and compaction. Add in a greater ability to reduce nutrient loss and it is easy to see why cover crops are popular.

But before jumping in with both feet and planting everything to cereal rye this fall, evaluate the risks that go with the rewards. Not all are created equal. And farmers reap better results if they match cover crops to their situations, rather than hoping for one-size-fits-all solutions.

EXPECT SUCCESS AFTER A YEAR OF PLANTING COVER CROPS.

FALSE. Successfully using cover crops involves a learning curve. “If you converted to long-term no-till, think back to how long it took to achieve measurable results,” says Dick Lyons, Illinois Council on Best Management Practices (CBMP) cover crop specialist, Harvel, Ill. “A cover crop is usually growing on the land for as long as your soybean crop, just at a different time of the year. You need to give it the planning and management it is due.” Jenny Mennenga, soybean farmer from LeRoy, Ill., agrees. “We started planting cover crops in the fall of 2008 with 30 acres of cereal rye that would be planted in soybeans in 2009.” Mennenga was able to get the cover crop established in cool wet weather, but later had trouble killing the cereal rye when it was time to plant beans. They were able to stunt it and plant soybeans, but with lots of biomass remaining. Things looked good, she says, until the second or third trifoliate, when slugs girdled the beans and required a replant July 30. “Everything that could go wrong, did,” says Mennenga, who has learned to adapt since that first fateful season. “Starting with 30 acres was the way to go. You need to start small and learn what works on your farm. Getting the cash crop planted is key.”

COVER CROPS STANDS SHOULD BE THICK AND LUSH.

FALSE. The best cover crop for your fields may not be as pretty as a picture. “The photos you often see are of the best stands, which has contributed to the impression that cover crop stands should be thick,” says Joel Gruver, Western Illinois University soil science associate professor. “A thick stand increases cost, increases risk of interference with the subsequent crop, and is not necessary to achieve significant conservation benefits.”

The optimum stand depends on what you want to accomplish. Lyons explains that cereal rye for weed control may require a bushel or more per acre, but simply working to improve soil health may require one-half to two-thirds of that. And if cover crop forage will be grazed or is in an erosion-prone area, consider planting a higher rate than in a less-intensive management situation.

TIMING IS THE KEY TO SUCCESSFUL COVER CROP ADOPTION.

TRUE. Regardless of species chosen, most often success hinges on the proper timing of key management activities. Gruver advises producers to start by using certified seed to ensure consistent germination and development. Different varieties develop at different rates, which can compromise termination. Combine field passes when possible and coordinate activities to reduce extra field operations. Last, but not least, plant as early as possible to ensure enough fall growth to capture nutrients and to protect against erosion.
Illinois Cuba Partnerships Demonstrate Success

USDA Secretary Thomas Vilsack earlier this year announced that soybean checkoff funds can now be used for research, information exchange and other efforts in Cuba. Illinois Soybean Growers (ISG) has been at the forefront of this movement, visiting Cuba eight times since 2012, using ISG membership dollars. Most recently, a trip in late May was used as an exploratory mission for new opportunities.

Through partnerships with the Illinois Cuba Working Group and the U.S. Ag Coalition for Cuba, ISG has been working to seek more soy exports to the country. Although the U.S. is currently allowed to export ag products to Cuba, with Illinois exporting the most soybeans, credit policies and the embargo have caused the U.S. to lose market share. At least 20 percent of Cuba’s U.S. corn and soy imports are estimated to originate in Illinois given leading production of those crops, sustainable production and reliable delivery.

Soybean checkoff dollars, with USDA approval, will be used to build on existing efforts and to leverage knowledge that helps farmers, agribusinesses and food companies market in Cuba.

Illinois Farmer to be Part of “See for Yourself” Program

Luke Crawford, Arenzville, Ill., has been chosen to participate in the 2017 See for Yourself program made possible through partnerships of the United Soybean Board (USB) and Qualified State Soybean Boards (QSSB) such as the ISA checkoff program.

Crawford and soybean producers from nine other states across the U.S. will travel to Panama and Costa Rica next month to get a firsthand experience in meeting with end users of the soybeans they grow. To learn more, visit unitedsoybean.org.

Registration Open for USB Sustainability Tour

USB is working with Qualified State Soybean Boards (QSSB) to find participants interested in taking part in a sustainability tour through Iowa and Illinois. The Sustainability Matters tour is scheduled for Aug. 1-5, 2016, and is designed for soybean leaders to receive in-depth training to build confident spokespeople who can discuss soybean sustainability and sustainable soybean practices.

Attendees will visit the ADM processing facility in Des Moines, then travel to Chicago to meet with Unilever staff to learn more about their goal of sourcing only sustainably-produced, raw agriculture materials by 2020. If you are interested in joining the tour, contact Jayne Godfrey at the ISA office at godfreyj@ilsoy.org.

Illinois Leader in 4R Certification

In an ongoing effort to reduce nutrient losses in Illinois, the Illinois CCA (Certified Crop Adviser) program is working with groups like the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) to offer sustainability training. Illinois now leads the nation in the number of CCAs who are trained to educate farmers as 4R Nutrient Management Specialists.

The 4R program stands for “Right Source, Right Rate, Right Time and Right Place.” By achieving certification in the 4Rs, crop advisers take a significant step to demonstrate their competence in specialized nutrient, soil and water management. The special exam developed by the American Society of Agronomy was first offered in August 2015 and a second time in February of this year. Currently 100 4R nutrient management specialists have been certified, nearly half of whom are from Illinois.

The 4R exam will continue to be offered two times a year through the Illinois Nutrient Research and Education Council (NREC), the Illinois CCA program and the Illinois Fertilizer and Chemical Association (IFCA). ISA offers training webinars for continuing education units (CEUs) at www.ilsoyadvisor.com.

University of Illinois Agronomy Day
> Aug. 18 · Savoy, Ill.

ISB Field Day, Illinois State Fair
> Aug. 16 · Springfield, Ill.

Agriculture Day, Illinois State Fair
> Aug. 2-4 · Hinckley, Seymour and Benton, Ill.

Illinois Farm Bureau Farm Income and Innovations Conference
> July 27 · Normal, Ill.

ISA Board Meeting
> July 27-29 · Springfield, Ill.

Illinois Leader in 4R Certification

Illinois Farmer to be Part of “See for Yourself” Program
Gulfood 2016 Bolsters Poultry Exports

Three Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) directors attended Gulfood 2016 earlier this year, the major global food trade show held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE). More than 90,000 people from 160 countries and 5,000 exhibitors participated, making it one of the largest annual food shows in the world. The strong presence of the U.S.A. Poultry and Egg Export Council (USAPEEC) anchors the U.S.A. pavilion.

The ISA checkoff program partially funds USAPEEC's presence at Gulfood to support a key soybean market. Poultry consumes more than half the soybean meal fed in the U.S., so increasing poultry exports expands soybean meal demand.

"The two-story booth funded by commodity associations has been a great opportunity for USAPEEC and our members," says Jean Murphy, USAPEEC senior director of promotions for the Middle East, Africa and Central Asia.

United Soybean Board (USB) research shows during the past decade, the U.S. exported 18 percent of broiler production and 11 percent of turkey production. That translates to an annual average value of $734 million in soybean meal. The analysis also projects exports may continue increasing in the next decade.

ISA directors Austin Rincker, Moweaqua, Ill.; Dale Asher, Sutter, Ill.; and Doug Schroeder, Mahomet, Ill.; visited the two-story USAPEEC exhibit at Gulfood 2016. The second floor allowed 12 U.S. exhibitors and 14 other USAPEEC member companies to conduct export business during the show. USAPEEC staff also met with foreign government officials from Iran, Iraq, UAE, Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Africa, Jordan and Kazakhstan to discuss market access and trade issues.

Chaz Wilson of Grove Services (left) and Neil Carey of Simmons Foods (center) meet with a visitor in the upstairs lounge of the USAPEEC booth. Gulfood 2016 exhibitors averaged 22 new contacts, $3 million in sales during the show, and another $2 to $4 million in sales after the show. For USAPEEC members, that equals more poultry exports and translates to more soybean meal demand for soybean farmers.

Illinois and Indiana soybean farmers and USAPEEC staff meet with Mohamed Taha (head of table) of the U.S. Consulate in Dubai, UAE. Dubai is the trade center of the Middle East, an export destination and re-export hub.
Funded by the Illinois soybean checkoff

Jeff Farver of Tyson Foods (right) talks with a show attendee. More than 90,000 people from 160 countries attended Gulfood 2016.

Koch Foods representatives Pete Gress (center) and John Patchoski (right) hold a meeting at the USAPEEC booth. Gulfood exhibitors build and strengthen significant business relationships during the show.

Consul General Paul Mallik (center) of the U.S. Consulate and others watch Chef Joe Truex (right) prepare U.S. egg dishes. USAPEEC joined with other U.S. export groups for culinary demonstrations at the show.

For the second consecutive year, the ISA checkoff program and the Indiana Soybean Alliance helped fund the upper deck of the USAPEEC Gulfood booth. Association representatives visited the two conference rooms, semi-private meeting spaces and coffee bar upstairs. Clockwise from bottom left: Austin Rincker, Doug Schroeder, Andy Tauer, director of livestock, Indiana Soybean Alliance; Tom Griffiths, Kendallville, Ind., farmer; Dale Asher and Matthew Chapman, Springport, Ind., farmer.
Millennials are often characterized as a socially connected, digital-dwelling demographic. A Goldman Sachs report finds that changes the way they interact with brands. They are turning to companies that offer experiences and quality over traditional drivers like price and convenience.

The report suggests millennials’ impact on the economy is going to be huge. Their size has surpassed other generations, and they’re reaching their prime working and spending years.

ISA is paying close attention to this generation, given its impact on food purchases and changes being driven in the ag industry. Meanwhile, many young farmers are trying to start their own businesses in a quickly changing world littered with increasing regulation and social pressure.

To better understand the millennial mindset in Illinois, Illinois Field & Bean talked with two millennials: a 25-year-old farmer from central Illinois and a 26-year-old salesman in Chicago.

WHERE DO YOU LIVE?
Shelbyville, Illinois
WHAT DO YOU DO?
I grow soybeans and corn with my dad and grandpa. I also sell seed and am a part-time semi driver.
WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS PROFESSION?
I’m the fifth generation to farm, so I guess you could say it’s in my blood.
WHAT DOES YOUR TYPICAL WEEKEND LOOK LIKE?
When we aren’t in the field, I play baseball and basketball and officiate youth sports. My wife, Hailey, and I enjoy spending time outdoors and watching Chicago Cubs baseball.
WHAT FACTORS DETERMINE THE FOOD ITEMS YOU PURCHASE?
Sometimes certain labels actually push me away, because I know many of them are just buzzwords to grab your attention. But I do try to buy foods with minimal processing.
HOW DO YOU USE SOCIAL MEDIA ON A DAILY BASIS, AND WHICH PLATFORM DO YOU USE THE MOST?
I use social media to keep in touch with family and friends, but will occasionally join a conversation to share my perspective on topics like GMOs. I use Twitter a lot because it allows me to quickly interact with others in short posts.
WHAT DOES SUSTAINABILITY MEAN TO YOU, AND WHAT ROLE DOES IT PLAY ON YOUR FARM?
Sustainability is the capacity to endure. I want our farm to be around for future generations, so it has a huge role on our farm. A lot of today’s technology allows us to increase our efficiency which goes hand in hand with sustainability.

WHERE DO YOU LIVE?
Ravenswood, a neighborhood on the north side of Chicago
WHAT DO YOU DO?
I sell high-end contemporary art and home furnishings.
WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS PROFESSION?
It allows me to make my own schedule, travel as I want and fulfill a passion for art and design.
WHAT DOES YOUR TYPICAL WEEKEND LOOK LIKE?
I like to work out, eat at nice restaurants with friends, attend church and coach a little league baseball team.
WHAT FACTORS DETERMINE THE FOOD ITEMS YOU PURCHASE?
I appreciate labels like natural and GMO-free. They make me have more trust in the companies behind them. I’m pretty health conscious so I never want to take shortcuts in the kitchen.
HOW DO YOU USE SOCIAL MEDIA ON A DAILY BASIS, AND WHICH PLATFORM DO YOU USE THE MOST?
I use social media to keep in touch with family and friends, but will occasionally join a conversation to share my perspective on topics like GMOs. I use Twitter a lot because it allows me to quickly interact with others in short posts.
WHAT DOES SUSTAINABILITY MEAN TO YOU, AND WHAT ROLE DOES IT PLAY ON YOUR FARM?
Sustainability is the capacity to endure. I want our farm to be around for future generations, so it has a huge role on our farm. A lot of today’s technology allows us to increase our efficiency which goes hand in hand with sustainability.

It is a foundation that can be built on, reliable and long-lasting. There’s so much technology out there today that I hope farmers will use it to their benefit and to better protect the environment.
SKEPTICAL CONSUMERS DRIVE SUSTAINABILITY CHANGE

> BY SARAH DUWE

As consumers become more disconnected from farms, they are asking more questions about their food — where did it come from? Who raised it? How was it raised?

And, more recently, was this food raised sustainably?

Consumers challenge agriculture to answer this question for a population that research shows does not understand the science or choices behind raising soybeans and other food.

"Consumers are increasingly interested in the sustainability of products they purchase and consume. But there are as many definitions for sustainability as there are different consumers in the marketplace," says Charlie Arnot, CEO for The Center for Food Integrity (CFI), a not-for-profit organization dedicated to helping today’s food system earn consumer trust.

For the past 20 years, Aimpoint Research experts have conducted extensive consumer studies to provide clarity on emerging consumer trends, attitudes and aspirations. Brett Sciotto, president and CEO, says consumers have strong opinions about sustainability, but their definitions vary.

“Our research shows consumers generally define sustainability related to agriculture as growing and producing healthy food without harming the ecosystem, abusing animals or being wasteful. The complexity in this rather simple description is the significant variance in how consumers view each of the three subcomponents and their tolerance for other interpretations," Sciotto says.

The rise in internet and social media use adds to the confusion, leading to more misinformation about farming. And, Sciotto notes, redirecting the conversation isn’t as simple as stating facts.

“Consumers tend to react emotionally to stories and may or may not seek out alternative views to substantiate a rational position on agricultural topics. Consumers tend to have a substantial gap between emotion surrounding a topic and their depth of knowledge about it,” he says.

Use of pesticides, insecticides and fertilizers are examples. According to Sullivan Higdon & Sink's FoodThink 2014 report, pesticide and insecticide use is the top food production concern among consumers. Meanwhile, concerns related to fertilizer use and sustainable production practices rose more than 14 percent each between 2012 and 2014.

"The concern is more directly related to food safety, which is a non-negotiable issue for most consumers. Once you address that, there’s concern about environmental impact," Arnot says.

The results of consumer concern trickle through the supply chain, starting with pressure on companies who make food products. “We now see both retail and food companies creating new standards, sometimes devoid of accurate understanding of on-farm practices, to make claims that are popular with consumers. This dynamic will continue to transform agriculture as farmers adjust to meet these demands," says Sciotto.

Arnot believes the answer to calming consumer curiosity lies with transparency. "If we are willing to be more transparent and more engaged in the public conversation about food, we generate more trust and support for what happens on today’s farms," he says.

“The rise of agri-tourism, farmers’ markets and farm-to-table initiatives gives farmers the chance to become more personally involved in sharing their passion for the land and the food they grow, while helping to educate consumers. This represents a very real opportunity for the industry to show the values, character and greatness of American agriculture," Sciotto says.

SURVEY SHOWS DECLINE IN CONSUMER CONCERNS

When it comes to food production, how concerned are you about the following? Very/Somewhat concerned

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*In 2012 survey "animal antibiotics and hormones" was combined line item but was separated in 2014 survey.
**GMOS line item was a new addition to the survey in 2014.

SOURCE: EMERGING FAITH IN FOOD PRODUCTION, SULLIVAN HIGDON & SINK FOODTHINK, 2014
Voice for Soy Advocacy Champions
Engage and Empower Peer Action

ADVOCACY CHAMPION SHERRY FLACK

The new Voice for Soy Advocacy Champions program, which launched this spring, is already increasing engagement with the legislative action network. Advocacy Champions have been sharing action alerts and key issues with their peers, encouraging other Illinois soybean farmers to advocate for the agricultural issues that affect their businesses.

Responses from a recent action alert show almost half—46 percent—of actions taken were a result of Advocacy Champions and their peer engagement. There was a 65 percent increase in action taken compared to a previous alert on the same topic. Those numbers represent more farmer voices being heard by lawmakers, and every voice can make a difference in legislators’ decisions.

Who are these Champions? They are soybean growers who know how important it is to advocate for their farms. Sherry Flack, a farmer from Shannon, Ill., is one of them.

ISG: WHY DO YOU COMPLETE VOICE FOR SOY ACTION ALERTS?

FLACK: When you have a system like the Voice for Soy legislative action network, sharing your side of the story becomes so much easier. The action alerts provide information that is written in an understandable manner. I read the letters and think, “Wow, that’s what I would say.” But I appreciate that Illinois Soybean Growers (ISG) encourages farmers to customize the letters with their personal stories, too, because using your own voice has a greater impact on legislators and regulators.

ISG: WHAT DO YOU WANT LEGISLATORS TO KNOW ABOUT HOW YOU FARM?

FLACK: I have seen how starting a dialogue helps so much, especially with current issues such as Waters of the United States (WOTUS). It is still in limbo, but the farmers who actively advocate against it have helped bring our perspectives to light.

ISG: WHAT IS ONE REASON YOU WOULD TELL A FRIEND TO TAKE ACTION FOR VOICE FOR SOY?

FLACK: Advocates who are experts in their field are critical regardless of the industry, and we, as farmers, are experts of ours. If we don’t tell our story and share our point of view, then people with no firsthand experience will make decisions on our behalf. Personally, that really scares me. We need to have the courage to stand up and speak out. That is why I advocate.

Learn more about Sherry Flack and other champions on www.voiceforsoy.org/champions.

“I’d rather be proactively having a conversation with lawmakers before rules and regulations are set in motion. At the very least, I’ve taken the time to stand up for my farm and family to say what I think.”

— Sherry Flack
Tom Kentner farms a 50-50 corn and soybean rotation in northeast Vermilion County near Danville, Ill., with his son, Alex Kentner. He also is an Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) director. The Kentners strip-till corn and no-till soybeans, as well as aerial apply winter kill cover crops in standing corn during August and September.

Sustainability is a priority. The Kentners apply dry fertilizer in the fall. In the corn strips, nitrogen is spoon fed 15 percent at planting time, and 85 percent as a sidedress. They rely on the 4Rs — right product, right rate, right time, right place — and soil test to determine nutrient needs. They have added, and maintain, their waterways and also do some pattern field tiling.

WHEN AND WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO TRY COVER CROPS?
We started with winter kill cover crops about four years ago. We were looking to scavenge nutrients, break up compaction, increase earthworm populations, hold down troublesome weeds like marestail and winter annuals and reduce soil erosion. We received help from our local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office to establish our cover crop program.

WHAT ADVANTAGES HAVE YOU SEEN?
The soil is more absorbent, is becoming more mellow and there is less erosion. The earthworm population is increasing since we stopped using anhydrous ammonia. Last December we had seven inches of rain. Where we had cover crops, crop residue stayed in place. Where we didn’t, residue floated into ditches, onto roads and left residue rings in fields where water ponded.

Cover crops are sustainable, and using them allows farmers to improve the social and economic well-being of farm families and the global community. If we can reduce or even eliminate soil erosion, we will save our precious soil. You can’t place a value on that and can’t reproduce it.

BESIDES ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL BENEFITS, WHAT ECONOMIC BENEFITS HAVE YOU SEEN?
We have less fuel expense. Since more nutrients are available, we can reduce our commercial fertilizer needs. We also are improving productivity, which reduces our break even price. As we scout and reduce pest pressures, we can reduce expenses to control pests, too.

ARE THERE DISADVANTAGES TO USING A COVER CROPS STRATEGY?
Planting cereal rye is the next step in our soil health plan. Cereal rye provides more biomass to increase organic matter. More roots going down cuts compaction and increases microbe feeding.

ANY FUTURE PLANS FOR COVER CROPS?
Science-based education opportunities such as more tours can help increase our understanding of food production. Access to newsletters, webinars, magazines and other resources that we can share with consumers and students to answer questions would be helpful. Illinois Farm Families is a great program to reach out to all types of people and concerns. Farmers should continue to interact with the public any way they can to educate consumers about food issues.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR FARMERS WHO WANT TO CONSIDER COVER CROPS?
My suggestion is to start with winter kill cover crops on a small amount of acreage. Make the commitment to cover crops and stay with them. It will take four or five years before you start seeing soil health results.

TOM KENTNER
ISA director and farmer near Danville, Ill.

“Make the commitment to cover crops and stay with them. It will take four or five years before you start seeing soil health results.”

PHOTO BY CYNDI WIGGS, ILLINOIS FARM BUREAU