Connect with Consumers on the Farm

- Profit from midseason production tips
- Prepare for sustainable future
Cover Story
Connect with Consumers
Most people don’t think about where their food comes from or who produces it because the grocery store is always stocked. Illinois soybean farmers are working to connect with consumers by raising awareness of the state’s agricultural contributions. Read what some ag leaders within the industry are doing, and how their efforts are producing positive results.

Animal Agriculture
Barn Helps Build for the Future
How can a farm be positioned for growth, especially when land for purchase or rent is scarce? One Illinois farmer answered that question by building a hog barn with other family members. Diversifying an existing grain farm may bring longevity and profitability to the business.

Yield, Composition & Profitability
Consider These Five Soybean Production Tips
ISA’s checkoff-funded Soybean Summits held each winter link Illinois soybean farmers with expert advice to increase yields and profits. Consider these timely soybean production tips presented by crop specialists earlier this year. Find out where you can regularly get soybean production management advice throughout the season.

Freedom to Operate
Sustainability Networks Build Partnerships
To answer questions about sustainability, the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) is investing checkoff dollars in partnership programs that educate both farmers and stakeholders. Read about the local to global efforts ISA has underway to build beneficial relationships.

Leadership
Soybean Servants
Having the ear of your local congressmen, as well as their staffs, can provide return on investment for your time and your profession. That’s why some soybean leaders say they have gotten involved in providing feedback to legislators. Get their take on public service here.

Management Mythbuster
Big Profits can Come in Small Packages
Soybean pod counts can have a big impact on soybean yields. Learn what really does and does not make a difference when it comes to converting pods into bushels. Agronomists share their tips and dispel untruths about the effect pod counts have on soybean yield.
We Should Just Tell the Truth

Consumers are bombarded with sensationalist stories about our food supply, whether it’s alleged hidden cameras at production facilities showing animal abuse, exaggerated facts about the impact of hormone or antibiotic use in livestock, and/or misguided science about the safety of biotechnology in crop production. At every turn it seems we are knocked back on our heels about what most of us do well. And that can eventually have a negative impact on farm profitability.

Getting consumers to listen to our side of the issues can be difficult. ISA, through the soybean checkoff and the United Soybean Board (USB) on a national front, is working to address some of these challenges. A number of programs are in place to talk with consumers. You can learn more about some of those efforts in this issue of Illinois Field & Bean.

USB recently highlighted what is working for a couple of farm bloggers. And quite simply, what it boils down to is just telling consumers the truth about what we do.

Farmers are and should continue to open their doors to show consumers how food is grown and answer questions about food and farming. From cooking oils and food ingredients to the soybean meal fed to hogs, chickens and cattle, Illinois soybean farmers play a significant role in growing safe food. And we do it responsibly with an eye on the environment.

Here are some tips from those farm bloggers that may help you too:

- Use words consumers understand. Talk about farmers, family farms and barns, not producers, operations and livestock buildings.
- Find common ground with consumers. Once you do, conversations are much easier.
- Be respectful. If you aren’t open to listening to consumers and acknowledging their concerns, they won’t be open to listening to what you have to say.

ISA, with funding from the Illinois soybean checkoff and in collaboration with organizations across the ag industry, is committed to the future of farming. That means we have to be willing to share our own farm stories so that we might remain profitable and productive.

Bill Raben
ISA Chairman

Checkoff Fact: IFF Shares Truth about Farming with Consumers

Illinois soybean checkoff dollars are invested in the Illinois Farm Families (IFF) program that continues to raise awareness of the truth about Illinois agriculture. For example, watchusgrow.org provides consumers with information about real farm families and what those farmers do to grow safe, healthy food. The site encourages farmer-consumer interaction.
Take Pride in Telling the Ag Story

I have been a farm broadcaster for 25 years, and I feel a part of my job has always been to tell the story of agriculture. I always have taken great pride in telling the non-farm public about the great job farmers do in raising the food and fiber we all enjoy every day in this country.

In the past few years it has become clear that consumers want to hear directly from farmers about how their food is raised. The agriculture media can help be facilitators and deliver that information to consumers through radio, print and social media tools. But the information must come from the heart and voices of farm families.

Mark Kern raises cattle in Franklin County. Snowflake Farm has been in the Kern Family for more than 100 years. Mark is now retired from his off-farm job as an educator-administrator, and he could spend his retirement anywhere in this country. But because of his love of the land and commitment to cattle, Mark never wants to leave Snowflake Farm.

Mark shared his story with me, and I was able to record it and share it with thousand of listeners who tune into RFD Radio across the state. Mark’s story is important for consumers to hear because he is producing food with care and complete reverence for the land and the environment. Fortunately, there are hundreds of other Illinois farmers with similar stories waiting to be shared.

The other wonderful thing that happens when a farmer shares his/her story is they themselves are reminded of why they love their job of caring for the land and feeding the world.

Ron Moore is a grain and livestock farmer from Roseville, Ill., past ISA chairman and currently a vice president of the American Soybean Association (ASA). Ron has always taken pride in telling his story on behalf of Illinois agriculture. He served as a panelist recently in Monmouth, Ill., at a local food forum. Because Ron was able to explain how he raises GMO crops and actually sprays less product/insecticides on the crops as a result, he answered a direct question from a local consumer. Ron and his wife, Deb, have also been very involved with the Illinois Farm Families coalition and have hosted hundreds of visitors on their Warren County farm and talked with consumers about how they grow food in a safe and careful manner.

Ron’s story also includes chapters about his travel around the world as a part of his service to ISA and ASA. During his visits to parts of the world that depend on U.S. farmers to produce a safe and healthy food supply, he also saw another reason to continue to speak out on behalf of continued use of GMOs – a growing and hungry world population.

There are plenty of stories out there in the mainstream media bashing farmers and the way U.S. agriculture feeds the world. The more accurate, heartfelt stories that are told by farmers, the better chance we have of getting consumers truly connected to the “hands that feed them.”

One story at a time.
Other Programs That Help Protect Our Freedom to Farm

The easiest way to connect with legislators is through Voice for Soy. If you haven't registered yet, you can do so now at www.voiceforsoy.org. Other ISG efforts to protect farmers' freedom to operate include:

• Literary Outreach – This pilot program puts accurate soybean-related books in urban areas. ISG is connecting with legislators in these areas, and asking them to help choose appropriate libraries to receive book donations.

• Illinois Farm Families – A coalition-led initiative aimed at reaching influential constituents — in this case, Chicago-area moms — and connecting them with accurate information about food and farming.

• www.SoybeansforIllinois.org — A site for legislators and regulators that simply, visually showcases the economic and social value of Illinois agriculture, to increase support for Illinois farmers and preserve freedom to operate.

• Personal relationships with legislators — Several ISA board members stay in touch with state and federal representatives to keep lawmakers up-to-date with what's happening on Illinois farms.

Get in the Game

“If Illinois farmers don’t tell our story, no one else will.”
— Lynn Rohrscheib

An at-large ISA director who farms near Fairmount, Ill., Lynn Rohrscheib is part of a family farm operation that includes a custom application business. She also is active on Voice for Soy — Illinois Soybean Growers' free, one-stop shop for connecting with state and federal legislators and regulators.

Why advocate for Illinois ag at Voice for Soy?
“Voice for Soy is our way of keeping in touch with our state and national representatives about how different proposed laws and regulations will affect us as soybean growers. We need a way to let legislators know about issues that impact our operations. Otherwise, instead of choosing our practices freely, how we farm will be mandated by people who aren’t familiar with agriculture.”

Why not leave advocacy to the American Soybean Association (ASA)?
“ASA's efforts are critical too, but they take a broader view. Farmers in each state also need to tell their stories and share their viewpoints on how federal and state laws will impact them. Soybean production practices vary from state to state.”

Why should Illinois farmers take the lead?
“Illinois soybean growers need to be more vocal. Especially now that we’re the No. 1 soybean-growing state, others are looking to us for leadership. We have a responsibility to speak up and protect our freedom to farm.”

Voice for Soy Advocate: Lynn Rohrscheib
Served on ISA board: One year
Contacts with legislators in 2014: 10
Issues advocated: RFS biodiesel, Farm Bill, GMO labeling

Funded by membership dollars.
Connect with Consumers
Ag Awareness Leads to more Profitable Farming

By Kenna Rathai

The current Farm Tech exhibit at Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry all started with a phone call from an Illinois soybean farmer. Sharon Covert from Tiskilwa, Ill., an Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) director, was visiting the museum in the mid-'90s with her grandchildren when she realized the old agriculture exhibit was no longer there. She was dismayed to learn that the museum had no plans to replace it.

Her next call was to the Illinois Farm Bureau, which started a statewide effort to fund an interactive, $2.3 million, 4,200-square-foot exhibit that was completed in 2000, with a $1 million renovation in 2008. Today, the exhibit educates 2.1 million visitors each year about farming, biotechnology and food processing, distribution and marketing.

“It took five years but it was worth it,” says Covert, who farms with her husband, Jim. “Most people don’t think about where their food comes from or who produces it, because the grocery store is always stocked. It is important to provide awareness and why farmers use the practices that we do on our farms.”

When the process first started, Covert hosted museum curators on a tour of her own farm during harvest, in addition to stops at a hog farm, ADM, Caterpillar, Monsanto and more.

Covert didn’t stop there. She also consulted with Chicago’s Lincoln Park Zoo on their Farm-in-the-Zoo exhibit. She currently is working with the Smithsonian’s American History Museum to establish a new exhibit called “American Enterprise,” which covers the history of U.S. business and economic development, including manufacturing, finance, technology and retail/service. It also will feature agriculture, which presently is not part of the museum.

“Illinois agriculture has a great story to tell about how we produce food in a safe and sustainable manner. I think it really opened the curators’ eyes to the possibilities,” she says. “Letting our customers know more about what we in agriculture do and why we do it is beneficial to both us in terms profitability and to them in terms of understanding food production.”

According to a recent Illinois soybean checkoff-funded survey of Illinois farmers, 89 percent agree that it is worthwhile to use their resources to increase consumer understanding of Illinois farming practices, and 87 percent believe that consumer support of farming is important to their long-term success. The survey showed 91 percent of farmers believe it is important that farm organizations help increase consumer understanding and trust of farming practices.

Industry Sees Education Value

Consumer education efforts such as the museum exhibit are funded with both dollar and in-kind donations by the Illinois soybean checkoff and companies that include Growmark, ADM and John Deere. “Our success is tied to agriculture. When farmers are successful, John Deere is successful,” says Don Borgman, former director of ag industry relations for Deere & Company.

Borgman is concerned about the widening gap among people tied to the farm and those who are not. “It used to be just about everyone had an uncle or cousin or grandparent who was involved in agriculture,” he says. “There was a natural trust with consumers. That’s no longer there.”

Borgman also has farmed for more than 30 years during his 40-plus-year career with John Deere,
from which he retired in May. Speaking as a farmer, “If we’re going to be able to continue to apply the technology and do the things we need to do to be a successful business, we have to have customers that believe in us and trust us,” he says.

Borgman believes the key is making certain the general public has a better understanding of, and appreciation for, agriculture. He sits on the board of the U.S. Farmers and Ranchers Alliance (USFRA), a farmer-led group created to help increase confidence and trust in today’s agriculture. USFRA has done research to better understand how consumers view agriculture and how best to communicate with them. The group gives farmers the opportunity to tell their stories.

“By our nature, farmers don’t typically toot our own horn,” Borgman says. “But we’re gaining momentum, we’re making progress. Not everyone has to be a great public speaker, but we can all apply our different talents, focus on and engage our customers in a discussion.”

Farmers Invest their Time
Katie Pratt and her husband, Andy, a seventh-generation farmer, raise corn, soybeans and seed corn in Dixon, Ill. She is one of USFRA’s Faces of Farming and Ranching because of her ability to tell her family farm’s story and her passion for educating consumers.

“Consumer opinions are incredibly important,” Pratt says. “They can affect the way people view legislation. And that affects the rules and regulations that we live by on the farm. We are definitely in a fight to keep the choices we have. If we don’t have the options to help us be more efficient, then that affects our bottom line.”

Pratt speaks regularly to food industry and consumer audiences through Faces of Farming efforts and to moms’ groups through Illinois Farm Families. In addition to chatting about GMOs, pesticides and food quality, she has fielded questions about why farmers raise what they raise and where they raise it. “I don’t think the moms were expecting that answer to be about Mother Nature, soil types, environmental conditions, infrastructure, politics and transportation markets. But it started to make more sense to them once they were given the explanation,” she says.

Pratt encourages farmers to reach out to consumers. “The most effective way a farmer can be part of the conversation is to just share your experience. You don’t have to be an expert on everything, but look for opportunities like local community organization meetings and moms’ groups. Blog, share photos online, comment on articles, provide perspective.”

91 percent of Illinois farmers believe it is important that farm organizations help increase consumer understanding and trust of farming practices.

“Consumer Outreach Works
“The cruelest thing I saw on that hog farm was at the hands of Mother Nature, not a farmer, as some alarmist propaganda may have you believe.”

That quote from Cortney Fries – a 2014 Illinois Farm Families Field Mom from Chicago – was part of a blog post about her tour of the Gould Farm in Maple Park, Ill. The post went viral, generating 200 shares on Facebook and reaching more than 59,000 people.

Something similar happened with 2013 Field Mom Amina Nevels of Chicago after a visit to the Drendel dairy farm in Hampshire, Ill. Nevels wrote a blog post titled, “Top 5 Reasons Why I’m Flippin’ the Bird to Organic Milk.” The post had more than 10,000 page views at www.mommamaina.com. She continues to post regularly in defense of conventional agriculture.

Meanwhile, Heather Guido, 2014 Field Mom from Oak Park, Ill., and Amy Hansmann, 2012 Field Mom from River Forest, Ill., felt compelled to tell others about their farm tour experiences. They recently spent an afternoon at the Oak Park Farmers Market sharing what they learned about soybeans, corn and pig farming. Guido will use the materials again: “I am going to save a few handouts to take to my block party in August to share with my neighbors,” she says.

Following the 2014 Gould Farm tour, the Chicago Tribune published a positive article about the Field Moms program. “By opening his family’s hog and grain operation…Eldon Gould hoped to give the Chicagoland mothers a better sense of where their dinner originates while allaying any fears about larger-scale farms,” the article noted. ISA is part of the coalition funding the Field Moms program, along with Illinois Farm Bureau, Illinois Pork Producers Association, Illinois Corn Marketing Board, Illinois Beef Association and Midwest Dairy Association.
U.S. Soy Value Reaches Record High in 2014

The U.S. has set a record high for soybean exports with five months to go in this marketing year. The U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC) reports huge demand from China is one of the drivers. Rising pork production, combined with South America’s transportation issues after last year’s harvest, has contributed to China stocking up on U.S. soybeans and meal at a record pace.

Consequently, U.S. soybean reserves are at their lowest level in nearly 50 years, but the value of soybeans has reached historic highs.

“We’ve been very fortunate to partner with several amazing farm families, which has enabled us to give consumers across the country a firsthand look at not only the hard work that goes into operating a farm, but also the values, concerns and aspirations farm families share with consumers,” explains Jessica Simmons, marketing director at Monsanto.

Simmons recognizes that consumer misperception about modern agriculture is a problem for farmers and the agriculture industry as a whole. “Farmers deserve access to the best tools, technologies and systems available,” she adds. “Growing consumer skepticism threatens to impede access to these tools.”

Borgman agrees. “If consumers do not embrace agriculture technology like they do medical or computer technology to improve mankind’s life and we have to return to older technology, then our ability to feed the growing population will diminish and there are going to be even more hungry kids going to bed at night.

“It is difficult to sleep at night thinking about how we may be risking the technology, the capability to feed the world because we haven’t done a good job of communicating to the American public,” Borgman continues. “That’s why I’m involved with the effort and why I’ll continue to help convince farmers to get more active and do what they can.”

Protect Options and Investments

Monsanto advocates on behalf of farmers with its America’s Farmers campaign, which launched in 2009. The campaign includes advertising in both urban and rural areas across the country, programs to help support rural communities and other activities to boost the image of farmers, including the Farm Mom of the Year program.

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89 percent of Illinois farmers surveyed agree that it is worthwhile to use their resources to increase consumer understanding of Illinois farming practices.

U.S. soybean farmers exported a record $25.58 billion of soy during the most recent marketing year.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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<td>Farm Journal</td>
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<td>ISA Soybean College</td>
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<td>ISA Anniversary Celebration</td>
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For more information, visit www.ilsoy.org
A new approach to managing nutrients is helping Illinois farmers reap yield and profit benefits while helping to protect Illinois waterways.

“Nutrient applications used to be something farmers crossed off planting checklists,” says Jean Payne, executive director of the Illinois Fertilizer and Chemical Association (IFCA). “Now, farmers think of crop nutrients as something they need to manage long-term over the growing season, not just during the time of application.”

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), representatives from commodity groups, state agencies and stakeholder organizations are developing a comprehensive program to address nutrient losses and improve water quality. The Illinois Statewide Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy outlines the status of water quality in Illinois, and will help agriculture and other industries reduce nitrogen and phosphorus losses to improve water quality. Similar documents are in development for other Mississippi River Basin states.

“Illinois agriculture’s primary focus is on better managing nitrogen loss because of the state’s flat soils and high amount of drainage,” says Payne.

Manage Nutrients with MOM

The ultimate goal of the EPA effort is to effect enough change from voluntary programs, such as those managed by the Illinois Nutrient Research and Education Council (NREC) and the Illinois Council on Best Management Practices (C-BMP), to avoid future regulations that could restrict the use of nutrients in crop production.

“Farmers should take advantage of these programs and work with agronomists to develop effective nutrient management plans,” says David Droste, soybean farmer from Nashville, Ill., and ISA director. “The best plan delivers the right amount of nitrogen to optimize yields and profitability while minimizing losses through runoff.”

Howard Brown, manager of agronomy services for GROWMARK, Inc., recommends keeping three principles, and “MOM,” in mind throughout the year. “The MOM approach is about minimizing environmental impact by optimizing harvest yield and maximizing nutrient utilization,” says Brown. “And this effort is not unique to Illinois. It is a systems approach that everyone involved in Midwest agriculture can, and should, embrace.”

Droste says farmers should look to the Chesapeake Watershed as an example for proactively tweaking nutrient management plans.

“Farmers there follow mandatory regulations and plans,” he says. “By participating in voluntary programs now, we want to be proactive in providing water quality solutions, and show regulators we want to be part of the solution without additional records and costs.”

Change Approaches to Fertilizer Use

Payne says many farmers already are changing their approach to the use of fertilizer, and ag retailers have noticed. “Demand for sources, timing and rates are all changing,” she adds.

For some crop management plans, that may mean moving from one application to three.

“While it costs more to apply nitrogen in three applications, it may be the best approach for keeping it for the crop,” explains Payne. “The approach helps reduce loss potential, but it also benefits yields, helping farmers to be more profitable.”

Brown and Payne agree this voluntary approach to nutrient management is important to reducing the chances of future regulations. “We need to include both accountability and profitability to make sustainable changes with how we manage crop nutrients,” says Brown.

“We need to keep management decisions between farmer and agronomist because they know the soil types, slopes and planting populations,” adds Payne.

A draft of the Illinois Statewide Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy will be available for public comment in August, according to the Illinois EPA. For more information, visit epa.state.il.us/water/nutrient.
How can a farm be positioned for growth, especially when land is scarce?

Daron Duke, farmer and agricultural lender from Lima, Ill., and his family answered that question by building a 2,480-head hog finishing barn.

Duke and his wife, Julie, have some farm ground and a small cow-calf herd. Duke also works full-time at a bank in Quincy, Ill. Duke’s sister and brother-in-law farm ground belonging to the Duke siblings’ parents. Then, Daron Duke’s nephew, Brock Brackensick, decided to farm full-time a few years ago.

“We were looking for a way to grow both farms and create potential for long-term expansion,” says Daron Duke. “There isn’t much land available in our area.”

Adding hogs to diversify and grow the farms fit the family needs well.

“I grew up on a diversified farm, and always had an interest in livestock. I helped raise cattle and hogs growing up, and now my children show meat goats,” he says. “This barn will allow both of us to build equity, and I can do chores and maintain my full-time job.”

Duke and Brackensick created D&B Farms, an equal partnership, to build on ground that Brackensick rents from his grandparents, who are Duke’s parents, and raise hogs under contract with Cargill. Brackensick will fertilize his crop ground with the manure produced.

**Invest for the Long Term**

Duke and Brackensick did their homework before making the investment decision. Duke drove past area hog farms, researched how barns hold value, and penciled out the return on investment potential. They wanted to be sure it was the right thing to do.

“The barn reduces Brock’s overhead for renting, boosts his profits and allows him to buy into the farm at age 22,” says Duke. “At the same time, I am investing in the industry I love, and creating a base to give my children, ages 9 and 10, the option to farm.”

Once they decided to move forward with Cargill, they chose the barn location carefully.

“We were concerned about the impact on our community,” he says. “The barn is surrounded by trees, and we will plant more. Additional taxes support the community.”

The barn opened in November 2013, about a year after beginning the permitting process. Duke and Brackensick split work and responsibilities. Contracting with Cargill helps them manage risk.

“We hope to expand with ground or additional livestock, and this asset is our first step,” says Duke. ◆
IT MAY BE PART OF A DEEPER STORY.

Do you want to increase profit margins?
According to Laura Pepple, University of Illinois Extension, a nitrogen limiting application of hog manure at a rate of 3,500 gallons/acre has a cash value of $171/acre. Replacing commercial fertilizer with manure can decrease input costs.

“With the N-P-K in livestock manure, you have the potential to replace all of your commercial fertilizer costs.” —Ted Funk, extension specialist, University of Illinois

Would you like to improve your soil and increase yields?
Manure returns organic matter to the soil, bringing added benefits to your crops that cannot be achieved through commercial fertilizer. Farmers tend to see higher yields in fields that utilize manure.

“Manure provides so many advantages to your soil. It provides micronutrients, increases organic matter and improves soil’s water holding capacity.”
—Ted Funk, extension specialist, University of Illinois

Are you planning to bring a family member home to farm?
High land prices and capital investments deter many young people from crop farming, and expanding your farm may not be feasible. Diversifying a grain operation with livestock creates income and labor opportunities for the next generation to join the operation.

“I was a banker for 7-8 years ... and decided I wanted to come home to farm. Putting a pencil to it and comparing it to the high price of land and cash rent ... we really thought this was the way to do it.” —Wes Strode, cattle and crop farmer, Marietta, Illinois

Visit ilsoy.org/animalag to learn more about the opportunities of livestock manure.

Funded by the Illinois soybean checkoff.
Consider These Five Soybean Production Tips

1. Protect pod potential. “Although seed size is important, it is actually seed number that increases yield,” says Bill Wiebold, University of Missouri plant sciences professor. “The focus throughout the season should be to increase node number and number of pods on those nodes.” Since the top third of the plant absorbs almost three-fourths of the sunlight, it is crucial to protect leaves all the way to seed-fill with scouting and foliar protection products. Narrow rows also help plants capture more sunlight and produce more bushels.

2. Double up modes of action. Arkansas soybean yield champion Eddie Tackett has faced challenges controlling Palmer amaranth and pigweed – weeds that increasingly threaten Illinois fields. He applies pre-emergent herbicides and postemergent, if needed. “We have to alternate different modes of action we have to battle the Palmer and pigweed,” Tackett says. Porton Farm Progress Group’s Willie Vogt refers to Palmer amaranth as the “plant from another planet.” He advises to spray at least two modes of action, pick up the plant and move it to the end of the row to destroy it.

3. Set cover crop goals. “Don’t wait until September,” says Joel Gruver, assistant professor of soil science and sustainable ag at Western Illinois University. “You would never get the planter out on the first day of planting corn or soybeans. It is the same with cover crops.” The Midwest Cover Crops Council’s “Cover Crop Decision Tool” can help identify species and planting dates with good potential based on location, goals, drainage and other factors. Access the tool at http://mcccdev.anr.msu.edu/VertIndex.php.

4. Root for soil health. With a solid system of beneficial mycorrhizal fungi below the surface, soybean plants will benefit from better rooting, nutrients and water uptake. Jill Clapperton, president of Rhizoterra, recommends farmers submit samples for the Haney Test to learn about available nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, soil nutrients and microbial activity. Another indicator of soil health? She says dig up roots and make sure your plants are nodulated. If they’re not, get a soil test or talk to an inoculants specialist.

5. Think before applying nitrogen (N). Although it may be tempting to dump it on, agronomist Steve Ebelhar advises against applying nitrogen on soybeans until more definitive research is conducted. “Most yield responses to supplemental N occur in high-yield situations when N is applied at R1 to R3,” he says. “But if the plant doesn’t use the additional N to make yield, someone will ask what happened to it.” Clapperton agrees, “We have to think seriously about how we use things and whether we really need to.”

Consult ILSoyAdvisor.com

Timely articles specific to soybean management in Illinois are published weekly on ILSoyAdvisor.com, ISA’s production website and forum that debuted March 7 at the Peoria Summit. ISA directors, ISA members and all Illinois soybean farmers are encouraged to register for the forum and join discussions about soybean management.
Sustainability starts with a seed in an Illinois field, which grows into a plant that bears a bean that is valued across the world in Europe, Asia and the Americas.

While customers value that bean for its rich protein and oil, they also care about the way it is grown. They’re asking questions about sustainability, as are consumers and farmers.

To answer these questions, the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) is investing checkoff dollars in partnership programs that educate both farmers and stakeholders, says Ron Moore, Roseville, Ill., farmer and director for both the American Soybean Association (ASA) and ISA.

“The more partnerships we have, the more people we contact to have that conversation,” he says.

Efforts Range from Local to Global

Sustainability starts at the local level. ISA supports groups such as the Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC) on a project near Fairbury, Ill., in the Indian Creek Watershed.

“We want to see what happens to water quality when we work with 50 percent of farmers to put in best management practices and conservation systems on 50 percent of the land,” says Chad Watts, CTIC project director. “Without partners at the local level, the program would not be successful. They provide the outreach and one-on-one contact with growers that are critical.”

At Indian Creek, CTIC partnered with the county Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) office to organize a steering committee. The committee has engaged local soybean farmers, monitored activities and helped secure additional funding. Other partners are the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Watts says he hopes CTIC and its supporters can use the positive stories coming from the project to show consumers and stakeholders the good things farmers do to improve water quality.

“There is a lot of curiosity out there and innovative farmers who want to learn how to do best practices,” he says. “We need to get those stories out.”

On a state level, ISA worked with the National Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (NISA) last year to document farmer sustainability practices in Illinois and Wisconsin. The survey found, for example, that 86 percent of soybean farmers use soil sampling to determine nutrient levels in the soil, 82 percent buy farm inputs from local sources, which help to maintain rural communities and businesses, and 73 percent have tracked and increased productivity in the last five years.

The survey should help growers know where they are today on adopting best management practices, says Shawn Conley, University of Wisconsin Extension soybean specialist who helped execute the survey. The next step includes putting dollar figures on different practices.

“We want to figure out how much they cost the grower or how much profit they make for the grower,” he says. “It’s also about figuring out what gets the most bang for the buck.”

The survey data have global implications. ISA collaborated with the U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC) to use it and farmer stories to build support for U.S. and Illinois soy during a recent mission to Mexico. The goal was to target an emerging market where sustainability questions are asked.

“More discussions globally are trickling down to farmers,” says Moore. “Farmers are focused on producing a crop and staying profitable, but need to know how to be sustainable and profitable. That is why NISA’s next steps are critical. Commodity associations can keep it in the forefront.”

This is the third in a three-part series examining ISA’s local to global partnerships. Part one focused on animal agriculture and part two explored transportation. See ilsoy.org for previous stories.
Want proof soybeans can be managed for high yields? Look no further than these three Illinois farmers who, through on-farm experiments in ISA’s annual Yield Challenge contest, continue to test new techniques that increase yield and profits. With successful experiments behind them, they’re up for the challenge again in 2014.

John Breedlove: 8 Bushel Increase
This year marks John Breedlove’s fourth season pushing soybean yield barriers in the ISA Yield Challenge. In 2013, he increased yields on his Manito, Ill., challenge plot by eight bushels and $70 per acre by applying fungicide and insecticide at R3 with an airplane. This season his goals are even higher – to break the 100-bushels-per-acre barrier.

“You never know what the season will bring, but I’m confident I’ll see results that can be adapted large scale,” says Breedlove.

With the support of agronomists and product specialists, Breedlove has dedicated 60 acres to the strategy. After fertilizing with potash and applying seed treatment, he planted May 12 in 15-inch rows, at a seeding rate of 140,000. Other techniques include applying a nutrient pack, use of growth stimulant products, fungicides and insecticides, nitrogen and fertigation.

Jeff Zick: 7.2 Bushel Increase
Jeff Zick had planned to conduct a yield experiment on his own in 2013. So when he heard about ISA’s Yield Challenge program, he decided to enter. Along with his agronomist son and crop specialist, Zick planted 10 acres of soybeans with two types of inoculants and a fungicide, as well as 150 pounds of granular lime and 150 pounds of potash.

“That’s what Yield Challenge is all about,” says Zick, who averages 58 bushels per acre in east central Illinois. “If you don’t document what you do, you’ll never know if it’s cost effective.”

The results? Zick’s challenge plot yielded as much as 8.5 bushels per acre more than the check plot, averaging out to a 7.2-bushel-per-acre increase. Zick is adapting this profitable investment to all 500 of his soybean acres in 2014. This year, the team wants to know if applying foliar feeding at different stages of growth has any effect on yields.

Dan Arkels: Seeks 100 Bushels
With a track record of successful Yield Challenge experiments, Peru, Ill., soybean farmer Dan Arkels is aiming for 100 bushels per acre in 2014.

“Someone needs to prove it’s possible in Illinois, and with the right growing season I know I can do it,” he says. “There’s no way to find out what works and what doesn’t if you don’t try.”

Arkels was one of three entrants to break 80 bushels per acre in the 2012 contest. In 2013, he recorded the fourth highest yield among participants – 76.6 bushels. This year, he fertilized with potash and phosphate prior to planting May 8 in 15-inch rows. Shortly after emergence, he applied a foliar plant nutrition product rich in nitrogen, zinc, manganese, iron and sulfur, as recommended by his certified crop adviser.

Farmers John Breedlove increased soybean yields by eight bushels per acre using fungicide and insecticide in the 2013 Yield Challenge to win second place in his district. Breedlove, center, receives his award from ISA Chairman Bill Raben, left, and Yield Challenge Coordinator Don Meyer, right.
If you want to have more of a say in legislative and regulatory issues that affect your farm, consider the value some Illinois soybean producers find in serving on legislator agriculture advisory committees. Having the ear of your local congressmen, as well as their staffs, can provide return on investment for your time and your profession.

Several ISA directors have served on such committees since the association was created 50 years ago. The opportunity provides a path for farmers to provide input on critical issues and allows congressmen to learn how issues might affect their farmer constituents.

David Droste, soybean farmer from Nashville, Ill., and ISA director, has been on Rep. John Shimkus’ committee since he was elected in 1996. “When the ISA legislative team came back from Washington, D.C., this spring, the message was that legislators want to hear from Illinois soybean farmers. They need to know our positions so they can represent us,” he says.

Mike Marron, soybean farmer from Fithian, Ill., and ISA director, also serves on Rep. Shimkus’ ag advisory committee. Marron has been involved with local politics. Staff from Rep. Shimkus’ Danville office asked him about a year ago if he was willing to serve.

“We met as a committee during the Farm Progress Show with Rep. Davis’ ag advisory committee. We talked about a variety of issues affecting farmers,” says Marron. “It gave me the opportunity to establish myself as a liaison between farm groups like ISA and the congressman. My involvement with ISA has helped me stay on top of key issues, and I feel like I am up to speed on them and can provide valuable input to Rep. Shimkus and his staff.”

Ron Moore, soybean farmer from Roseville, Ill., and ISA director, has been on Rep. Cheri Bustos’ ag advisory committee since she became a member of Congress in 2013.

“We have had several conference calls to update the committee on her efforts in passing the farm bill and her efforts on the House Transportation Committee. We also had a meeting in the district to give feedback on issues that are important to farmers in western Illinois,” Moore says.

“Rep. Bustos has been very receptive to what members of the ag advisory group have discussed. Her votes in Congress have reflected our positions on the farm bill, waterways and renewable fuels legislation and other issues,” he continues. “Farmers must continue to explain to elected officials how laws and regulations affect our ability to produce food for consumers worldwide.”

Marron encourages other farmers to get involved with their congressmen and staffs and create a working bond. “You have to develop a personal relationship to be effective,” he says.

“Farmers should get involved with any legislative advisory group, commodity association or local organization where they can interact with elected officials. It benefits all U.S. farmers,” adds Moore. “ISA leaders that preceded us have paved the way by making sure that ISA has the credibility and integrity to be considered the voice of soybean farmers in Illinois.”

Soybean Servants

Illinois Farmers Value Legislative Leadership Opportunities
MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Apply for Leadership Program

The ISA Soy Ambassador Leadership Program is looking for applicants for its 2014 class. The program is designed to give emerging farmer leaders the opportunity to gain expertise, industry exposure and global perspective to become a future ISA board member.

A select group of soybean farmers participate in the two-year program to develop leadership qualities and skills. ISA covers all program and travel expenses. Class size is limited to 10 participants. The application deadline is Aug. 1, 2014. For more information and to view the requirements, or to apply, visit www.ilsoy.org/soy-ambassador-application.

Members Raise Collective Voice

What makes membership with Illinois Soybean Growers (ISG) valuable? Is it to build your resume and help you achieve bigger goals in the soybean industry? Sure. Is it a chance to meet with other soybean growers and discuss new ways to help the industry? Absolutely. Is it the long list of benefits you receive that basically pays for your membership fee? Yes.

But while these are all great reasons to join, the most valuable reason for becoming a member is that it allows you to add your voice and your power for change with other Illinois soybean growers. When farmers band together against a damaging bill or provide support for something that will help farmers across the country succeed, we make a difference.

That is how we helped get the farm bill passed before heading into spring planting, and the Water Resource Reform and Development Act (WRRDA) that will help build better waterway infrastructures, and the efforts to motivate legislators to maintain tax incentives for biodiesel.

Become a member for a special three-year membership rate of $145. That’s a $140 in savings off the one-year membership rate of $95. Call 309-663-7692 or join online at ilsoygrowers.org.

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SOY TALK

Vigilance Pays

Once soybeans are planted, the most valuable tools to maximize yields for farmers are their own eyes. While farmers can’t do much to help seeds grow once they’re in the ground, regular scouting is vital to getting the most out of that seed’s potential.

“I like to see farmers in the field scouting as much as possible,” says Justin Dillon, customer agronomist for Mycogen Seeds. “It’s important that they’re out there at least every two weeks scouting, and not just through their windshield. They need to get out there in the fields.”

Pressures from weeds, insects and diseases can rob farmers of yield and profit. Keeping an eye on fields can minimize that harm.

Early in the growing season, farmers should evaluate the effectiveness of their weed control efforts, Dillon says. Determine whether the presence of weeds signals a weed flush or something more sinister — herbicide resistance. If growers catch weeds when they’re small, treatment is still usually an option. Once weeds grow too large, they can be very difficult to control.

Later in the growing season, the attention turns to the presence of diseases such as brown leaf spot or frog eye leaf spot. These foliar diseases generally don’t have much economic impact. Other diseases such as white mold and sudden death syndrome can be much more devastating, particularly as plants reach the reproductive stage.

“As soon as farmers see those soybean plants flowering, they really need to pay attention and get an idea of potential impacts,” Dillon says.

To maximize the value of scouting, Dillon recommends:

- Gathering as much information as possible from multiple sources
- Looking at what’s happening in nearby states to get an idea of what might be coming
- Consulting with an advisor, agronomist or crop consultant on treatment options
- Being proactive, not reactive, in treatment
- Using the best available seed and technologies based on the challenges

“I don’t relax on soybeans until they’re in the bin,” Dillon says. “From the time they’re seed in the ground until they’re seed in the bin, farmers need to be on top of things.”

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Big Profits can Come in Small Packages

TRUE: Seemingly small things – like soybean pod counts – can have a big impact on soybean yields and profits. Pod numbers, seeds per pod and final seed weight all are components of yield. While the number of pods per plant is determined by genetics and varies according to the number of plants per acre, the total number of pods is what matters.

So what’s the best way to convert more pods to bushels in the bin? Here’s a look at some of the top considerations for managing for higher pod counts.

Management Matters

MYTHBUSTERS

■ Genetics determine the number of pods a soybean produces.

FALSE: Setting pods and filling them is a complex business, and one that is rather susceptible to stresses, says Emerson Nafziger, University of Illinois agronomist.

■ Higher plant populations guarantee higher pod counts.

FALSE: When it comes to higher yields, it is all about the number of pods per acre. But increasing plant populations might not be the answer. In fact, lower plant populations produce more pods per plant, while higher populations produce fewer pods per plant.

“Higher yields and profits start with smart seed selection and genetics. However, protecting that genetic potential really involves minimizing plant stress all the way through harvest,” says Don Guinnip, soybean farmer from Marshall, Ill., and ISA Production Committee chair.

“Number of pods per plant can vary considerably based on number of plants per acre,” says Nafziger. Once the total plant number is set, weather or management decisions often affect pod numbers per plant and per acre. “Number of seeds per pod and total seed weight are important yield determinants, but total number of pods per acre is more closely related to final yields.”

A University of Missouri study confirms the importance of pod count. The study found decreasing pod numbers by just two pods per plant reduced yield by 4.3 bushels per acre.

■ One additional soybean pod can add two bushels per acre.

TRUE: According to Ross Bender, Ph.D. candidate and research assistant in crop physiology at the University of Illinois, nearly 60 percent of pods are located in the middle of the soybean plant. He advises paying particular attention to the leaflets at those nodes during foliar applications. Each additional soybean pod per plant can improve yield by two bushels per acre. By protecting those developing seeds from stress, farmers can preserve yield.

“The number of pods per acre is the most important factor in determining yield, and this number is largely influenced by weather and fertility,” Bender says. “If we can increase the number of nodes that achieve their maximum potential, we add pods and improve yield.”

Yield, Composition & Profitability Funded by the Illinois soybean checkoff.
A chain is only as strong as its weakest link. ISA is interested in strengthening all of its farmer links through various leadership development and service opportunities. For more information about how to get involved with ISA leadership, visit www.ilsoy.org/about-us/leadership.

ISA Director Dan Farney, Morton, Ill., talks about Illinois soybean export opportunities with a buyer from Asia. Farney has been active with the World Initiative for Soy in Human Health and World Soy Foundation, which have provided additional international leadership outlets.

Last November, ISA held leadership excellence sessions for directors to brush up and learn more about identifying opportunities for Illinois soybean farmers and making subsequent decisions. The two-day event was held at Illinois State University with business college facilitators.

Photos by ISA

Illinois soybean farmers often are called upon to address profitability issues with key industry officials. Ron Kindred, former ISA director, talked with stakeholders during last year’s Transportation Summit, which was funded by soybean checkoff dollars. Kindred discussed ISA’s efforts to raise awareness and funding opportunities to address infrastructure challenges.

ISA’s Soy Ambassador program is one way Illinois farmers can participate in leadership training and put that training to work in real-life situations. Current Soy Ambassadors traveled with ISA directors to talk with legislators in Washington, D.C., this past March.

Sharing key points with the media is part of the leadership training provided through ISA and American Soybean Association (ASA) programs, as well as the Illinois Agricultural Leadership Foundation. Here, ISA Chairman Bill Raben, Ridgway, Ill., puts his experience to work as he is interviewed by RFD Radio’s Rita Frazer.
FARMERS WEAR MORE THAN ONE HAT.

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