All Eyes on Infrastructure
Bridge Bundling Concept Builds
Feeding the Specialty Market
Boosting Connectivity

BUILDING BRIDGES BUILDS BETTER BEAN BUSINESS

A PUBLICATION OF THE ILLINOIS SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION • SEPTEMBER 2020
EVERY FARMER HAS THEIR REASON FOR WHY THEY DO WHAT THEY DO. FOR ME, IT’S FAITH, FAMILY, AND FARMING. I CARE ABOUT HONORING GOD AND FULFILLING HIS PURPOSE IN MY LIFE, IN MY FAMILY, AND IN THE BUSINESS OF FARMING AND AGRICULTURE.

SCOTT BECK, PRESIDENT

FARMERS AT HEART™
COVER STORY
All Eyes on Illinois Infrastructure
Illinois’ well-integrated infrastructure gives soybean farmers a competitive edge, as well as opportunities to improve resiliency, sustainability and cost efficiency. Trade, weather and economic challenges in 2020 only underscore the need to maintain a strong supply channel. Read more about the system of transportation systems to get soybeans from point A to point B.

The More the Merrier
To make more transportation improvements while maximizing available dollars, the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) checkoff program is engaged in a “bridge bundling” effort with other state stakeholders. Learn more about the unique repair funding process through this Q&A.

A Thrive, Not Just Survive Mindset
Specialty soybeans are generally shipped in containers to food-grade customers in Asia and Illinois farmers are well-positioned for the opportunity. But participating in the market requires a particular mindset. Find out what it takes to thrive and not just survive in this marketplace.

The Fiber that Binds
Businesses today need reliable, fast broadband connectivity, yet six in 10 farmers say they still do not have enough connectivity to run their businesses effectively. Efforts are underway across Illinois to address this challenge and provide more universal access in rural areas.

DIFFERENCE MAKERS
Rural Broadband Access
Land O’Lakes is calling for significant federal investment to help bridge the digital divide for both building out the necessary infrastructure and investing in technology for long-term sustainability. The company has organized an American Connection Project coalition, which includes America’s soybean farmers, to boost rural broadband access.
**Harvest Highlights Illinois’ Critical Infrastructure Issues**

How many farmers approach harvest with a little apprehension about safely managing trucks and machinery on our state’s questionable-condition roads and bridges? I am guessing most of us.

That’s why the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) places a high priority on investing checkoff dollars in beefing up the state’s transportation infrastructure. ISA funds projects and partnerships that generate awareness of the value of road, bridge, rail and river systems to agriculture. The hope is that such infrastructure can be refurbished and optimized. Remaining globally competitive requires us to ensure Illinois soy reaches its intended destinations efficiently.

Efficient delivery begins on our farms with well-maintained equipment and an eye on safety. This is a good time of year to check equipment for proper protective structures, for example, and make sure lights work. On a personal note, we need to take breaks, eat nutritious meals and get adequate sleep so we are alert and drive with care when headed out onto township roads.

Attention to the road is critical. Drivers aren’t necessarily looking out for us and we inevitably must deal with blocked visibilities, potholes and narrow, winding gravel road stretches.

We probably all deal with poor-condition bridges, too. Illinois is home to 26,775 bridges, the third largest bridge inventory in the nation. Yet nearly 10 percent of these bridges are structurally deficient – and likely near your farm. ISA is working on a solution known as “bridge bundling” which has worked to make repairs in other states. Read about the effort in this issue.

One bright spot for Illinois infrastructure is our location – we have a unique system connecting trucks to containers, rail and rivers. Overseas buyers seeking non-GMO, food grade soybeans routinely make their purchases from Illinois, which gives the state’s farmers a value-added edge. This issue features an article about work to continue to build this market for Illinois farmers.

And while not a traditional infrastructure challenge, rural broadband access is a concern ISA is more closely monitoring. COVID-19 has made abundantly clear the inadequacies of slow-speed Internet and the impact lack of service have on both rural education and healthcare. Find out more about what is being done in Illinois to improve connectivity around the state.

As we prepare to harvest an abundant soybean crop, we need to do what we can via our infrastructure to enhance soybean quality and sustainability, beat the competition and keep our reputation for exemplary customer service and reliability. From farmer to buyer, ISA connects the supply chain dots and addressing infrastructure needs is a major part of that effort.

Have a safe and productive harvest. And watch your mailbox in November for a return to the *Illinois Field & Bean* title with more farmer-facing articles to drive your business into 2021!
Is Improved Rural Illinois Transportation in the Future?

> BY MIKE LEVIN, Senior Director Government Affairs

It’s been a little more than a year since Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker signed into law the Rebuild Illinois program, a six-year, $45 billion plan that includes $33.2 billion earmarked for transportation projects, including $25.3 billion for roads and bridges with lesser amounts each to be invested in mass transit, rail, grade crossing protection and ports.

So, what does that mean for Illinois farmers?

For starters, the historic, bipartisan legislation gives Illinois its first capital commitments in nearly a decade—and the governor believes the most robust in history. Rebuild Illinois is the largest, multimodal capital program ever, with virtually every aspect of infrastructure included.

We hope that is good news for Illinois soybean farmers, given the deterioration in the roads and bridges relied upon to move our goods to market. A few years ago, research studies confirmed just how much soybean farmers stand to lose if rural transportation systems are not improved.

The report, funded by the soybean checkoff and conducted by Informa Economics, Inc., found current inadequacies in the Illinois transportation system resulted in as much as $1 per bushel added expense. The study also found that increasing road weight limits from 80,000 pounds to 97,000 pounds would decrease the need for drivers moving ag products by about 20 percent, which could save $84 million industry-wide per year. Even if trucks operated with 91,000 gross vehicle weight ratings, significant efficiency and profitability improvements would result.

Informa also concluded many Illinois bridges are unfit to support modern farm equipment. That requires farmers to travel longer distances to avoid them. Researchers studied a subset of bridges and estimated an average return of $10.24 to a local economy for every dollar invested in repairs.

Illinois Soybean Growers (ISG) has shared this information with lawmakers in Springfield and continues work to find ways to spend transportation-earmarked taxpayer dollars effectively on rural soy movement infrastructure. Unfortunately, funding has been largely inadequate during the last 20 years, forcing local communities and Illinois counties to focus on whatever maintenance they could afford rather than on replacing infrastructure that needs to be replaced.

We know the state and counties can’t fix every road and bridge. By prioritizing the routes that go to elevators or river terminals, it would improve the outlook for soybean farmers.

Crumbling roads, railroads, waterways and underutilized intermodal containers make Illinois soybeans less competitive in domestic and international markets, decrease efficiency, erode productivity and foreshadow future cost increases for Illinois farmers.

I invite you to monitor and engage in our efforts by joining the Voice for Soy movement. Visit VoiceforSoy.org to learn more and receive alerts to talk with your legislator about infrastructure and visit Illinois Soybean Growers on Facebook. ■
Soybeans rely on a complex network of transportation systems to move from Illinois fields to all customers. From rural roads and interstate highways to railways and rivers, each system helps farmers sustainably and competitively move soybeans. Trade, weather and economic challenges underscore the importance of building resiliency into every aspect of the supply chain.

"Historically, these modes of transportation have been viewed as competitors," says Del Wilkins, president of Illinois Marine Towing, Inc. "But I see barge, rail and truck as complementary. We need the complete network to move goods like soybeans to and from each system. Other global regions don’t have their systems as integrated as we do in the U.S."

Illinois infrastructure provides soybean farmers several key opportunities to improve resiliency, sustainability and cost efficiency. Check out the latest about this system of systems.

**ROADS:** Potential Seen for Heavy Haul Corridors

Road and highway weight limits can hamper soybean movement. In recent years, the Illinois governor has issued statewide exemptions during harvest that allow 10 percent load weight increases to ease challenges. During the state’s shelter-in-place order, agriculture, as an essential industry, has hauled similar heavier loads to processors and exporters to keep the food supply chain functioning. Heavier loads also reduce total trips, burning less total fuel.

With Heavy Haul Corridors, permitted vehicles could travel at 90,000 pounds or more on designated routes anytime, says Mark Schneidewind, Will County Farm Bureau manager.

“Other states with these corridors describe improved price competitiveness, reduced traffic congestion and better safety because heavy loads travel the same route,” he says. "Other drivers learn to recognize the flashing amber lights that signal heavy loads and can avoid those routes."

Schneidewind says equipment investments required to prepare trucks for heavier loads and lack of compensation may deter some. But he sees great value for container shipping, which has increased dramatically from the growing intermodal facilities in Joliet and Elwood, Illinois.

“The Union Pacific (UP) and Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroads have expanded intermodal facilities. More grain terminals are moving into the area to do container business,” he explains. "Soybeans and other agricultural products come from the local area, but also from Indiana, Iowa, Michigan and Wisconsin. A Heavy Haul Corridor along I-80 and I-55 in Illinois would help ensure the infrastructure to safely bring heavier loads into these facilities."

Heavy Haul Corridors would most benefit those near them but improving paths to get soybeans to more markets more competitively can improve basis for the entire state.

**RAILS:** PSR Creates Efficiencies

All seven Class I railroads in North America run through Illinois, and six of them have adopted Precision Scheduled Railroading (PSR), a management practice that supports efficiency.

“PSR focuses on keeping rail cars moving with minimal handling,” says Gary Hunter, CEO of Railroad Industries, Inc. “It maximizes use of assets—cars, engines and tracks—while reducing costs. Shippers need to adjust operations and logistics to fit into the PSR schedule. Shippers that move soybeans in 25, 75 or 100 cars or more, fit into PSR well. But smaller shippers who handle smaller units may face less frequent service and longer transit times to final destinations.”

In addition, 34 local Class III rail lines, or short lines, operate in Illinois on more than 2,190 miles of track. These smaller carriers also adjust to PSR at interchanges with Class I carriers.

During the Class I transition to PSR, short lines sometimes faced reduce volumes and increased costs, says Michael Williams, vice president of corporate communications for Genesee & Wyoming, Inc., a holding company for short lines.

“As Class I railroads achieve their goals of a more fluid network with consistent service, short lines and their customers, like local
RIVERS: Addressing Aging Infrastructure Reduces Risks

The inland waterway system efficiently moves large quantities of soybeans. The Illinois River alone moves 40 million tons of goods annually, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). However, aging locks and dams are creating risks.

“Physical infrastructure has a lifespan; it needs maintenance and upkeep,” says Del Wilkins. “Our locks and dams have outlived their projected lifespans.”

Wilkins thinks the system to fund waterway maintenance works well when executed as intended. The combination of waterway taxes paid by shippers and government funds given to USACE is a sound model. But challenges develop when funds are re-appropriated for other uses.

“Our model can be a win when we work together,” he says. “Take the current shutdown and overhaul of six locks and dams on the Illinois River. Shippers, other stakeholders and USACE worked to develop the solution to consolidate repairs to this year and 2023, rather than close the river every summer several years in a row, which we felt would be too disruptive.”

Wilkins believes careful planning is successfully addressing priority repairs needed to prevent failure while minimizing impact on shippers and their customers so far.

He notes, “Staging materials at each lock and dam, anticipating challenges and putting resources in place to manage potential surprises when the locks are dewatered should help keep projects on schedule. When the river reopens this fall, we expect significant mitigation of the risk of failure.”

INTERSECTIONS: Multimodal Terminals Enhance Access

Access to various transportation modes gives Illinois farmers advantages, but the ability to shift from one mode to another provides even greater efficiency and economic opportunities. Multimodal terminals are the transloading facilities that move soybeans between systems.

The Illinois International Port District (IIPD) in Chicago bills itself as “the greatest multimodal terminal in North America,” says Executive Director Clayton Harris III. IIPD facilities give barges and oceangoing ships access to the Great Lakes, St. Lawrence Seaway and Mississippi River Basin. Six railroads’ facilities access the district within 12 miles of six major interstates.

“We can transload bulk commodities or containers between trucks, trains, barges and ships, with onsite storage to manage market volatility,” he says. “Multimodal terminals like ours offer opportunities to move soybeans at different rates of speed. The ability to receive and ship via different transportation systems provides access to more suppliers and end markets.”

IIPD is just one of the multimodal terminals in Illinois, including 19 public ports, that received funding as part of the Illinois capital bill this year.

“Most of these ports, including IIPD, are prioritizing capital investments that improve access and efficiencies for railways,” Harris explains. “One reason is that using trains where possible can reduce truck traffic, which has environmental advantages.”

The funding program committed to a planned 2021 groundbreaking for a multimodal Alexander County, Cairo Port terminal, which will create a new shipping hub for ag commodities, containers and more for Southern Illinois. Harris believes digitalization, or gathering, using and disseminating data, will be key to continued improvements at multimodal terminals.

“Data about arrivals, loading and unloading time provide information to adjust scheduling between modes to better manage movement for every mode coming into the terminal,” he says. “Digitalization can make multimodal terminals more efficient to move commodities through.”

Harris is working to figure out where IIPD can fit in the soybean supply chain. “The economics and logistics at terminals are like putting together a 3-D puzzle. I want to learn where we could be inserted to help move soybeans from Illinois to customers around the world,” he says. ●
Infrastructure needs maintenance. Illinois farmers know this well, especially when looking at the condition of bridges statewide. So, to make more improvements while maximizing available dollars, the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) checkoff program is engaged in a “bridge bundling” effort with other state stakeholders. The intent is to contract multiple state bridge repairs together as a package versus issuing single contracts to pay for single bridge repairs.

In this issue of Soy Perspectives, we catch up with Scott Sigman, transportation expert, to discuss how bridge bundling impacts Illinois soybean farmers.
MISSOURI SUCCESS STORY

According to the Federal Highway Administration, Missouri’s Safe & Sound Bridges program maintained 554 bridges in just 3.5 years at a total cost of $685 million. A nod to the bundling effort’s efficiency, the project finished 18 months ahead of timeline.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Let’s keep the conversation going. Illinois soybean farmers, please send us your input on bridge bundling and the state of bridge repairs in your area. Help us continue to raise awareness about the need for preventative bridge maintenance, rehabilitation and replacement across the state. Email ISA at ilsoy@ilsoy.org.

SP: WHAT GOES INTO PLANNING A RURAL ROADWORK PROJECT?

SS: A big part of county road work is planning and sequencing about how to get the job done. Engineers have to consider many variables—like the approach of the bridge, if there’s a crest at the center needed for drainage, if there’s road grading that’s needed, if there are bumps or holes that could impact traffic and safety, or even how close it’s located to rail tracks, intersections or traffic signals. Each bridge project has its own unique variables that require planning. County boards generally have transportation subcommittees that rely on input from townships, state and even federal groups at times to ensure the right groups are involved and how to prioritize the project relative to other infrastructure needs that exist.

SP: WHO IS HELPING ADVANCE THE BRIDGE BUNDLING EFFORT IN ILLINOIS?

SS: The Illinois ag groups are engaged and participating in a working group on this, namely ISA along with Illinois Farm Bureau and the Illinois Corn Marketing Board. We want to serve as a catalyst to enable bridge bundling to begin in Illinois. We know that the ag community will benefit from multiple jurisdictions being able to work together more easily to get bridge projects funded and started. We have also been meeting with the Illinois Department of Transportation staff, county engineers, township road commissioners and various community groups related to Rebuild Illinois work. Rebuild Illinois is a capital plan that has earmarked $45 billion for state infrastructure investments - including roads, bridges and railroads (see page 5).

SP: WHY IS INFRASTRUCTURE SO CRITICAL TO THE SOYBEAN FARMER?

SS: I have always said that soybeans aren’t worth anything when they remain on the farm. They have to be delivered in a timely fashion for the farmer to get paid. Efficiency is necessary to be competitive. Logistics operations and transportation infrastructure get soybeans from the farm to end customer. And bridge bundling is just part of that supply chain that starts with the producer.

“"As we approach the harvest season, some farmers will continue to be inconvenienced by inadequate bridges on their routes, some traveling miles out of the way just to get their crops to the elevator. Not only does this inconvenience take more time, it’s also more fuel,” says Paul Rasmussen, retiring ISA District 1 director. “In my time on the board, I always advocated for checkoff programs like infrastructure improvements because those are investments that can mean both time and money to the farmer. Bridge bundling is a good example of positive work being done that ultimately makes it easier to get our soybeans to market.”

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A THRIVE, Not Just Survive MINDSET

ILLINOIS OPPORTUNITIES ARE RIPE FOR SPECIALTY SOYBEAN MARKETS

> BY BARB BAYLOR ANDERSON

If Ken Dallmier’s son was just getting started in farming, his fatherly advice would be to raise primarily specialty, or identity preserved, crops. He says it’s a thrive, not just survive mentality.

“When you set up your operation to focus on quality, you can make a better net profit per acre,” says Dallmier, president and chief operating officer for Clarkson Grain. “Adopting that mindset, instead of relying on more bushels per acre, gives beginning farmers a better shot at success.”

Dallmier has had plenty of experience in watching the specialty soybean strategy work. Clarkson Grain is a long-time participant in the market and has increased its contracted soybean volume considerably in recent years. Clarkson’s Mattoon, Illinois, facility is dedicated to specialty production, housing 110 grain bins to segregate various soybeans for buyers and capitalizing on Illinois’ strong reputation for supplying high-quality soy among international customers.

“We essentially have 110 pockets to isolate organic and non-GMO soybeans by variety, quality, farmer and even down to specific fields,” says Dallmier. “It is about quality maintenance for our Japanese customers. We can trace from our facility all the way to every customer’s cooker. We meet food-grade specifications and no additional cleaning is needed after delivery, either.”

Clarkson Grain has been able to grow by nurturing relationships with customers but also maintaining a core group of farmers. Soybean production volume is contracted before any planter enters a field. Farmers agree up front to growing specifications, market price and premium each season.

“It takes a different mindset to set up for non-GMO and organic production. You have to meet quality standards to receive the premium,” says Dallmier. “We get calls from prospective growers when prices are low, not when they are high. And we have found that farmers who focus on price first are not the farmers who are most willing to set up their operation for quality.”

The next step in the process also is quality focused. Once soybeans are delivered to the facility, they are cleaned, color-sorted and placed into bins according to customer contracts.

This is where the next Illinois advantage comes into play. Infrastructure. Specialty soybeans are generally shipped in containers to food-grade customers in Asia and Illinois has plenty. “Illinois infrastructure is so strong and that provides economic benefits. We can take advantage at every level of the supply chain,” says Eric Woodie, Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) trade analyst. “ISA helps promote container use by creating relationships with buyers for the long term. And with efficient shipping comes better value all the way back to the farmer.”

Dallmier agrees. “We can load bulk beans into containers or fill one metric ton totes and then load the totes into 20- or 40-foot shipping containers,” he says. “That has been especially useful this year. We have been able to remain open and available to customers during the pandemic because Illinois is in the middle of everything. We are never without containers.”

In fact, Illinois has fared much better than other regions that containerize soybeans, a competitive edge that has allowed Clarkson to ship to the East Coast and Gulf of Mexico this year, not just to the West Coast where most of their Asian market is serviced.
Clarkson loads containers onto trucks and transports them to Channahon, Illinois, where they are railed to the coasts for shipping. Trucks can make two roundtrips a day to the container facility.

“There is a market for containers going in and out of Chicago. That and five rail companies going through Illinois provides a huge advantage for us. We can acquire containers at reasonable rates and easily secure rail transit. It allows us to be a reliable supplier,” says Dallmier.

However, Illinois transportation infrastructure is not without some challenges. Clarkson finds there are times when not enough qualified truck drivers are available. That affects timeliness.

Local road conditions also present challenges for getting containers delivered efficiently. “When roads are closed, drivers have to find alternate routes. That affects reliability and cost,” says Dallmier. “Similarly, farmers bringing product into our facility don’t always have the ability to travel roads rated for 80,000 pounds. It emphasizes the ongoing need for investment in local roads and bridges. We work with road commissioners on our routes because unfortunately local roads are left out of the financial discussion when interstate and rail issues are addressed.”

Tazewell County Engineer Craig Fink shares Dallmier’s concerns. He is responsible for a county highway system of 204 miles and township roads that add up to another 870 miles.

“The number one thing we are trying to do is recover 20 years of neglect on road maintenance because we have not had enough funding,” says Fink. “(The new) Restore Illinois provides money for us to sealcoat and preserve the road base, which is welcome funding, but we need to be able to do more than just reduce the deterioration. Bridges have received no increase in funding, so repairs remain well behind and that is a huge need for farmers and others in Illinois.”

While some downtime with rail cars and barges out of Beardstown, Illinois, can also create hiccups in transportation, Dallmier says the situations have not been insurmountable. He believes overall infrastructure will need to remain at the top of the agenda to maintain Illinois’ reputation for being a top specialty soybean state that allows farmers to thrive into the future. •
Businesses today need reliable, fast broadband connectivity to thrive. Yet, a 2019 study commissioned by the United Soybean Board (USB) revealed 60 percent of U.S. farmers say they do not have enough connectivity to run their businesses.

Data from USDA’s Economic Research Service indicate farming contributes nearly $133 billion of the country’s gross domestic product. And based on the USB survey, lack of connectivity negatively affects farmers responsible for $80 billion of gross domestic product. Other findings in the study revealed:

- 78 percent of farmers have no choice of internet service providers
- 60 percent of farmers say their internet service is slow
- 40 percent of farmers have a fixed internet connection, while others rely on satellite connections
- More than half of those surveyed are hindered from incorporating more technology into their operations because of poor connectivity.

HELP IS ON THE WAY

As broadband providers statewide race to meet the demand for quality, high-speed connectivity, federal and state governments are offering help. As part of a USDA loan program to help providers build, expand and improve broadband services, Montrose Mutual Telephone company in Dietrich, Illinois, was awarded funds to convert its legacy copper system to a fiber-to-the-premises (FTTP) network.

Connect Illinois is the state’s largest-ever broadband expansion with public and private funds totaling $115 million. The initiative intends to bring universal access to all communities by 2024, especially the ag sector. It kicked off in June with the goal of delivering high-speed internet access to more than 26,000 homes, businesses, farms and community institutions.

Based on applications received, Connect Illinois provided grants to 18 internet service providers, rural phone co-ops and local governments. In addition, 28 projects were funded to get high-speed internet to multiple communities. A second round of grants is expected later this year.

“Now more than ever, broadband is a necessity,” Nimrick says. “We’ve seen an increase in broadband use during the COVID-19 pandemic. And, quality broadband, whether it be here or elsewhere in Illinois, allows people to work from home, students to complete coursework online, rural residents to video conference with medical professionals and farmers to submit acreage reports to USDA and crop insurance companies as a few examples of many.”

Management at Madison Communications Company in Staunton, Illinois agrees. Len Schwartz, vice president of operations, has seen the company grow from 1,500 lines to 11,000 homes.

“The opportunities for rural broadband to provide voice, video and high-speed internet data are practically endless right now, he says. “This grant, along with our ongoing capital investments, helps us expand product offerings to additional served and underserved locations.”

SERVE LOCALLY, COMPETE GLOBALLY

When completing its application for the Connect Illinois grant, Madison stayed true to its roots and included input from ag industry sources who would benefit from its buildout strategy.

“Our farmers are focused on precision ag and all it encompasses,” Mary Westerhold, chief financial officer, says. “They need the ability to manage tasks remotely, whether that be a grain bin or grain drying. Even in livestock and dairy segments, we have producers using remote technology for surveillance.”

Kim Harber, Madison senior vice president, adds this approach is critical to other sectors of the community, as well.

“Illinois is an ag-based economy and it drives virtually every economic sustainability model you can produce,” he says. “We also work closely with our partners in healthcare and education to develop the broadband connectivity they need, not the broadband we sell. This helps develop the social fabric with online access for initiatives we could only dream of when we first started, such as telehealth, clinical research and patient access to remote diagnostic testing. "When you couple this with distance learning and advanced workforce development, all of which support agriculture, we can provide needed training in rural areas,” Harber adds. “In turn, these investments help our farmers reach a global customer base.”
STAY CONNECTED TO CUSTOMERS

The importance of global connectivity can’t be overstated, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC) is the checkoff-funded organization that helps build preference and demand for U.S. soybeans and soy products worldwide. Its teams acted quickly and aggressively to stay connected with customers in multiple countries when it became apparent in-person events were no longer possible.

USSEC personnel created the virtual Global Digital Conference and Situation Report that took place in mid-April. The event provided global U.S. soy customers with the latest information about supply and demand during the pandemic, its implications for the global soy marketplace and the ability of U.S. soy to meet export demand.

“USSEC was one of the first groups to determine which online platforms and formats would work for its customers,” Amy Roady, director of outreach for Illinois Soybean Association (ISA), says. “An interesting approach they took with this event was to offer sessions at 8:00 a.m. Central time and again at 8:00 p.m. Central time for two days to allow participants from time zones worldwide to participate. The programming featured a combination of prerecorded sessions and live panels, which worked well.

“I was impressed with the formatting and how the program delivered valuable information,” Roady adds. “It was a bit harder to engage people during the virtual trade show, but we found ways to interact quite well.”

The success of the event motivated the ISA trade and export team, which also includes Andrew Larson, Eric Woodie and David Headley, to participate with a virtual trade show booth during the Pan-Asia Soy Foods Summit and Asia Trade Exchange 2020 in June. Working alongside USSEC staff, the virtual events allowed ISA to reach customers in Southeast Asia and Oceania. ISA staff and contractors also participated in the Asia Trade Exchange in June.

“Based on our experiences and USSEC feedback, we’re reaching more people and connecting with those we didn’t have time to meet during previous events,” Roady says. “The virtual events are allowing USSEC and ISA to broaden our network of contacts, so that when we resume in-person events, we’ll know more about our customers.”

From Dietrich to Oceania to Oneida to Staunton and all points in between, reliable digital connectivity is key to strengthening communities of all kinds.

“Further access to broadband will give residents, students, farmers, ranchers and businesses the chance to compete with those in urban areas, even worldwide,” Nimrick says. “It’s one reason rural service providers will continue to invest in rural America.”

For more information, visit broadbandnow.com/Illinois.
The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) is in the midst of the most challenging, most exciting time in its history. Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit the country this spring, IDOT has kept its focus on keeping the state’s infrastructure in good, safe condition. Under the leadership of Gov. JB Pritzker, we have not wavered in that responsibility. We have been open for business at all times, with special focus on maintaining a reliable transportation system while putting in place safety precautions for employees, contractors and the public.

Our roads and bridges have remained open and will stay open. Maintenance and operations staff have stayed on duty throughout the state. Projects have continued uninterrupted. We have streamlined permitting requirements, raised weight limits and eliminated certain fees to support the movement of essential goods. Our rest areas have been open and undergo frequent cleanings, continuing to provide a vital resource for the trucking industry.

I have never been prouder of the way our team has stepped up. During this unprecedented time, we continue doing great things that will impact Illinois for generations to come.

In July, IDOT released its new multiyear plan for roads and bridges, an ambitious blueprint fueled by Gov. Pritzker’s historic, bipartisan Rebuild Illinois capital program. We are going to be busy, looking to improve more than 3,300 miles of road and 8 million square feet of bridges. More importantly, we are creating and supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs for hardworking Illinoisans across our state, including those in agriculture.

Efficient freight movement—a crucial element to any farm—remains an IDOT priority. We created the state’s first freight plan and Illinois State Freight Advisory Council to hear from stakeholders. Staff have been added for freight planning work. Significant investments have been made in technology to make the permit process smoother and more accessible. We continue to look at innovative ways to support freight movement within and through the state.

Illinois is the transportation hub of the nation. With that distinction comes a huge responsibility that IDOT is prepared to meet while providing the essential services you need every day. ■

Omer Osman was appointed Illinois Transportation Secretary by Gov. JB Pritzker in 2019. His role as secretary reflects three decades of experience at the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) in engineering and management. His vast experience in transportation includes management and advancement of complex projects and assessment of current resources to inform funding and programmatic needs to create a multimodal system for the 21st century.

Omer Osman, IDOT Secretary

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Whether shipping by river, road or rail, the soy checkoff is committed to ensuring America’s infrastructure is a significant advantage for U.S. soybean farmers. We’re looking inside the bean, beyond the bushel and around the world to keep preference for U.S. soy strong. And it’s helping make a valuable impact for soybean farmers like you.

See more ways the soy checkoff is maximizing profit opportunities for soybean farmers at [unitedsoybean.org](http://unitedsoybean.org)
ASA Celebrates 100th Anniversary Where it All Began

The American Soybean Association (ASA) celebrated a century of soybean advocacy last month with a return to the site where it all began. ASA was formed when brothers Taylor, Noah and Finis Fouts hosted the first Corn Belt Soybean Field Day at their Soyland Farms operation in Camden, Indiana, on Sept. 3, 1920. The National Soybean Growers’ Association, which was later renamed ASA, was formed that day. The celebration took place Aug. 4, and included a historical site marker dedication, speakers, tours and a luncheon. Attendees viewed a video history of Fouts Family and Soyland Farm and special musical performance of Growing Soybeans to Get Along, a song written by Taylor Fouts sung at the first soybean event in 1920.

IAA Celebrates 100th Anniversary Where it All Began

ISA Establishes Inland Waterways Facebook Group

ISA has established a closed Facebook group to educate and inform key Chicagoland audiences about the impact of inland waterways. The overall goal is to build partnerships with these stakeholders, share details about deteriorating waterways and the impact they have on Illinois communities. Additionally, ISA wants to identify and capture the attention of a previously untapped cause-minded audience that supports the inland waterways. The group format encourages discussion and connection among its members, while providing exclusive content about the waterways that is tailored to this specific audience. Learn more and join at Facebook.com/Ilsoy/groups.

Partnership Releases Climate Impact on Illinois Ag Webinar

Members of the Illinois Sustainable Ag Partnership, including ISA, produced a three-part webinar series this summer about climate impact on Illinois agriculture. The risk management series, Bridging the Gaps, covers climate risk and adaptations needed for farm production, increasing working capital with soil health management systems, and an exploration of how companies across the ag supply chain are responding to consumer and market demand for sustainable products. Visit the ISAP website, www.ilsustainableag.org, for more information.

USB Issues 2019 Soybean Meal Demand Assessment Report

The United Soybean Board (USB) has released its 2019 Soybean Meal Demand Assessment, which breaks down the volume of soybean meal fed in animal agriculture during the 2017-18 marketing year. The goal of the research, conducted by Decision Innovation Solutions, is to provide a better understanding of how soybean meal compares to competing feed substitutes.

The report also estimates value of the industry. In the U.S. during 2018, animal agriculture’s support of the national economy included $348.7 billion in economic output, 1,843,789 jobs, $75.3 billion in earnings, $18.2 billion in income taxes and $9.4 billion in property taxes. In Illinois, animal agriculture contributed $4.7 billion in economic output, 20,446 jobs, $1 billion in earnings, $250.3 million in income taxes and $431.6 million in property taxes. The largest soybean meal demand in the state comes from the hog and poultry sectors. The report is available via USB’s website at www.unitedsoybean.org.

Meet the New USFRA, “U.S. Farmers & Ranchers in Action”

Since farmers and ranchers do remarkable things to ensure a sustainable food supply, the U.S. Farmers & Ranchers Alliance (USFRA) has changed its name as part of a rebrand to show that. The new name, U.S. Farmers & Ranchers in Action, not only allows the organization to keep its well-known acronym, but also emphasizes the organization’s belief that farmers and ranchers are crucial to building sustainable food systems. Learn more at www.usfarmersandranchers.org.

Illinois Farm Families Shares New Video Highlighting Pollinators

Illinois Farm Families, an organization made up of Illinois farm groups including ISA, recently released a new video in its “Innovation Grows Here” series. The video highlights how Illinois farmers use pollinators, and features insights from Carmi, Illinois, farmer Don Duvall and conservation specialist Jason Bleich from Pheasants Forever & Quail Forever of Illinois. The pair share how a cooperative effort to plant pollinator habitats is bringing back monarch butterfly populations in the state. The video can be viewed on Illinois Farm Families’ Youtube channel.

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Sudden death syndrome, stink bugs, soybean cyst nematodes and many other yield-robbing pests and diseases. It’s a rough world out there, costing soybean farmers billions of dollars every year. Fortunately, your state soybean checkoff is on the job with research projects to develop effective traits and practices to get back as much of your yield as possible.

The Soybean Research & Information Network provides you with information to work smarter and more efficiently. Visit soybeanresearchinfo.com and check out the hard work behind your hard work.
Broadband connectivity is the underpinning of competitiveness and attracting and retaining talent, resilience and vitality. It also strengthens basic services such as telemedicine and education. Better connectivity provides opportunity for access and stability for these resources in the community. We also see this issue as an important reminder of the shared destiny between rural and urban America. A safe and affordable food supply is a pillar of national security.

What have you done to help improve rural broadband access?

Through our American Connection Project, we advocate for full internet accessibility. We have raised awareness, gained advocates and increasingly are taking action. When the pandemic first hit, Land O’Lakes, many of our rurally located retail-owners and coalition partners offered free and open Wi-Fi access to rural residents. We built a coalition that is more than 80 members strong, including the American Soybean Association (ASA). We’re thrilled to work with ASA. This coalition, spanning multiple industries, has aligned to push for a robust federal investment in broadband infrastructure, support strong coordination at the federal level to deploy these resources in coordination with states, and support improved broadband mapping.

What still needs to be done to give rural residents the access they need?

Congress needs to pass a robust federal investment in broadband infrastructure. Last year, USDA issued a report, citing Deloitte data, that estimated it would require “between $130 and $150 billion over the next five to seven years, to adequately support rural coverage and 5G wireless densification.” It comes down to greater federal funding, better mapping to identify where broadband coverage is needed, and increased coordination between federal and state agencies.

Farmers and rural residents must engage with policymakers to push for these priorities and help raise awareness of the issues. Our collective voice is stronger and more likely to be heard. ■

What do you consider primary challenges to rural broadband access?

Lack of adequate broadband access in rural communities jeopardizes basic services like health care and education and short- and long-term economic competitiveness. Better connectivity is critical for our future, especially in the context of this pandemic. It is a fundamental right. But we won’t fix the problem purely based on economics or data. Underserved locations are spread out, solutions are costly and federal broadband coverage maps are inaccurate and unreliable.

The United Soybean Board found 60 percent of U.S. farmers lack sufficient connectivity. Many times, this is a result of no broadband infrastructure present or exorbitant costs associated with expanding service. A USDA study in 2019 estimated the total economic impact in agriculture could exceed $18 billion per year if broadband infrastructure enabled the deployment of next generation precision agriculture. That’s why Land O’Lakes and others are calling for significant federal investment to help bridge the digital divide for both infrastructure buildout and investing for long-term sustainability. This is the 1930s rural electrification of our time. As momentum builds, it’s encouraging for agriculture and communities where farmers live and work.

Why did Land O’Lakes take on this issue?

Land O’Lakes is a farmer-owned cooperative that touches 10,000 rural communities, 25 percent of growers nationwide and half the harvested acres. Our members, producers and employees live and work in these communities, so their protection and promotion are foundational to everything we do. Their success matters to me and our organization and is tied to future collective success.

Beth Ford is president and CEO for Land O’Lakes, Inc., a Fortune 200 food production and agribusiness company that is also a nearly 100-year-old farmer-owned cooperative. Since joining Land O’Lakes in 2011, she has held roles leading the farmer-to-fork business offerings.
From promoting the profitability of using high-quality soybean meal in India to training animal producers on nutrition in Colombia, the soy checkoff is working behind the scenes to develop more market opportunities for U.S. soy. We’re looking inside the bean, beyond the bushel and around the world to keep preference for U.S. soy strong. And it’s helping make a valuable impact for soybean farmers like you.

See more ways the soy checkoff is maximizing profit opportunities for soybean farmers at unitedsoybean.org
A soybean like this helped yield 79 Bu/A on Joe Bullerman's farm last year. Not bad, but we think it can do 80. That next bushel might be in its genetics. Maybe in its next generation. Maybe somewhere else. Wherever it is, we’ll find it. Then we’ll find the next one.

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