

DECEMBER 2024

Illinois **Field & Bean**

A PUBLICATION OF THE ILLINOIS SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION



FISCAL YEAR '24

**YOUR SOY
CHECKOFF,
BY NUMBERS**

110

Illinois Field & Bean
articles published

200+

Blog posts published
on Field Advisor

16

Soybean
Production
research
projects
funded

22

Teams of international
soybean buyers with
which ISA engaged

61

"It's Sustainably
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FISCAL YEAR '24

YOUR SOY CHECKOFF, BY NUMBERS



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COVER: The December issue of *Illinois Field & Bean* is uncovering the countless ways the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) is at work every day on behalf of soybean farmers, and the numbers to prove it. Unique features include a visualization of the 2024 ISA projects and measurements of success, an executive summary of a recent research report on Illinois bridges, "A Farmer's Winter Checklist," and more!

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FROM THE BOARDROOM | Funded by the Illinois Soybean Checkoff



**RON KINDRED | CHAIRMAN |
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Tradition vs. Innovation?

Agriculture is deeply rooted in tradition. As farms are passed down through generations, farmers honor the practices and values instilled by their parents, grandparents and even great-grandparents. We recognize that without their dedication and perseverance, our industry would not be where it is today. This respect for the past serves as a foundation for the present and a guide for the future, ensuring that the hard work of previous generations continues to influence today's farming practices. However, as markets change and the industry continues to evolve, it's crucial that we consider new avenues to ensure our farms remain productive for the next generation.

As I reflect on my first year on the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) Board of Directors, I recall a conversation with a professor at the University of Illinois. He predicted that in 10 years, we would no longer be growing soybeans but would instead be supplying the world with corn. Contrary to that prediction, U.S. soybean production has more than doubled since that conversation in 1999, thanks to efforts in market expansion, advancements in technology, policy initiatives and robust research. As I think back on this conversation, it's clear that Illinois soy's success has come from combining the wisdom of tradition with the power of innovation.

As we continue to navigate challenging markets, climate concerns, sustainability requirements and other obstacles that might come our way, embracing new opportunities while honoring our roots will ensure the success of Illinois soybean farmers for generations to come. This balance is reflected in everything from continuing traditional practices such as crop rotation and soil conservation to adopting new innovative practices such as cover crops, no-till farming and precision agriculture. It also means maintaining strong relationships with long-standing international buyers while exploring new market opportunities in other nations. It means using our collective voice to protect our interests as decisions are made in Springfield and Washington, ensuring that policy works for us, not against us.

Looking ahead, what will soybean farming in Illinois look like in 10 years? Although I can't give a definitive answer, I'm confident that our work at ISA, along with the hard work of my fellow farmers, is securing a prosperous future for soy, Illinois agriculture and global food security. We are not just working for today—we are building a foundation for the future.

Ultimately, Illinois farmers are true examples of resilience and adaptability. By balancing tradition with innovation, we ensure that future generations can continue to create a sustainable future while respecting the legacy of those who farmed our land before us. Our efforts today are guided by the knowledge and experience of the past and fueled by the advancements of tomorrow.



Doing More With Less

At the time of this writing, the November 2024 election is just days away and this issue is due to go to print. Tensions and uncertainty are running high as we wait to discover the general direction of our nation. During times like this, my personal philosophy has always been to remain focused, resolved and deliberate in my actions.

Although this year has been challenging because of the down ag economy, Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) has worked tirelessly to keep Illinois soy strong and competitive. We are fully committed to maintaining our position as a global leader through focused projects, strategic research and impactful outreach. We continue to deliberately align our actions with available resources to right-size our work and continue to build resiliency for Illinois farmers.

Even though our Board approved 127 projects for FY25, we are further fine-tuning our work together. As is always our practice, we are evaluating where we can reduce spending and increase revenue and effectiveness. This approach reflects a commitment to “tightening our belts” and doing more with less. Our Finance Committee and Accounting Team are closely monitoring every move, working to uphold fiscal responsibility.

Our committed volunteer Board of Directors is driving these decisions, strategically considering the best use of our resources. Each member of the ISA Board knows the realities of today's economy firsthand. They face the same challenges on their own farms. As we carefully follow their direction forward, I think it's also important to reflect on our wins over the past year.

Checkoff by Numbers

In FY24, ISA's farmer leaders funded 141 projects aimed at helping all our farmer-investors succeed—including research, market expansion activities and sustainability efforts. ISA's global reach expanded in 2024, as we engaged with 22 teams of international soybean buyers both here and abroad. We built relationships that are key to developing markets and driving demand for Illinois soy. This is a continuous process ensuring that we are always evaluating opportunities to strategically market Illinois soybeans to customers around the world.

In tandem with our global market development efforts, sustainability has become an essential part of our strategy. This year, 15 companies and 61 products were certified under the ISA “It's Sustainably Soy” program. This effort showcases our farmers' dedication to environmentally friendly practices, which allows end users to source sustainably grown Illinois soybeans and promote their products as certified sustainable.

Endless Innovation

At the Soy Innovation Center, we're constantly exploring new



JOHN LUMPE | CEO |
ILLINOIS SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION

uses for soy. From renewable energy applications to bioplastics, the potential for innovation is endless. This work ensures new markets and value opportunities, allowing Illinois soy farmers to remain at the forefront as suppliers for an exhaustive list of renewable products.

Innovation also took root in the area of production research. In 2024, we supported 16 projects focused on improving quality and yields while addressing the challenges faced by Illinois farmers.

Advocacy and Engagement

Keeping farmers informed about all this work is also part of our mission, and our direct engagement with farmers continued to grow. The 2024 Soybean Summit saw 283 in-person attendees, while we hosted six Field Days across the state, giving us the chance to connect face-to-face with farmers. Our Field Advisor platform, staffed by Certified Crop Advisers, Ph.D.s, Illinois farmers and seasoned communicators published over 200 blog posts this year and provided valuable on-the-go insights on topics including soil health and fertility management, cropping systems and weed management.

Our Government Relations Team advocated for farmers at the state and national levels. Illinois Soybean Growers (ISG) hosted 20 legislative visits and engaged with dozens of growers through Town Hall meetings, ensuring they were poised and prepared to help policymakers understand the issues affecting Illinois soybean production. This year, we saw a 50 percent increase in membership for ISG, better posturing us to shape agricultural policy by growing our advocacy voice.

The Road Ahead

We know that navigating these tough times requires innovative solutions and a forward-thinking approach, and we are committed to providing the tools and resources needed to help farmers succeed. As we look toward 2025, let's remain intentional in the face of challenge. The road ahead might be demanding, but through unity and intentional stewardship, we will move forward. Although the challenges are real, so are the opportunities.

Our outlook for 2025 is built on determination but grounded in reality. We're going to be sharing that philosophy during the winter events on our schedule, beginning with the Field Advisor Forum on Jan. 16 followed by the ISG Member Dinner and Soybean Summit on Feb. 10-11. For details and registration, visit ilsoy.org.

From all of us at ISA, we wish you a peaceful holiday season. Here's to stepping into the New Year with resolve and purpose.

A Farmer's Winter Checklist

Experts share tips for equipment, marketing and sustainability



Rest is rarely on the mind of a busy Illinois soybean farmer. So when winter rolls around—that precious period between harvest and spring planting—it's a golden opportunity to catch up on slowing down.

It's also an ideal period, experts say, to tune up, reassess and plan for what's next in your business.

Those investments of time are valuable no matter how many seasons you've operated your farm. But it might be especially relevant for younger farmers as well as seasoned producers bringing the next generation back to work the land. Many haven't experienced the kind of prolonged ag economy downturn that row-crop farmers are now facing, says Matt Bennett, Illinois soybean farmer and founding partner at **AgMarket.net**.

"2020-22 were good income years, and it's enticed a lot of growers to want to grow their operation and update their equipment," Bennett explains. Yet given the breakeven or even negative returns of the past couple of years, "I think this is more of a time for balance-sheet

preservation and diversification on the farm."

To set your farm up for a successful 2025 growing season, experts advise following these tips to boost your prospects: keep your equipment operating; strengthen your financial position; and expand your sustainability investment.

Machinery Maintenance Tips

To save yourself time, money and hassle at planting, it's a good idea to winterize your equipment before a freeze event.

"Not completing these tasks before that time can add costs and reduce productivity in the spring," says Ryan Stien, Go-to-Market Manager for Digital Technology at John Deere. "It is imperative to thoroughly clean all machines to help improve on-farm productivity and efficiency."

Whatever the makeup of your fleet, Stien advises starting by performing regular maintenance as outlined in your owner's manual. Take inventory of components that get a lot of wear and tear. Make a list of parts that need to be replaced, and order those via your local dealer or

online.

You can do repairs yourself or schedule an inspection with your dealer, who can make sure hardware and software are functional and up to date.

Study Your Data

With those items checked off the list, you can take a deeper dive into your numbers for the past season, Stien says.

"Harvest is the farmer's report card, and post-harvest is the time to analyze your data and start making plans for the 2025 growing year," he says. The John Deere Operations Center platform allows farmers to set up, plan, monitor and analyze their farm.

Data-driven winter activities can include creating work plans for spring that enable you to get into the field faster. You can update records with information on clients, fields, guidance lines, products, rates and prescriptions, among other data points. Then, when planters roll into new fields in the spring, those work plans will automatically populate on the devices you use to manage field work. "The operator just needs to accept the plan, and they are ready to plant," Stien explains.

John Deere customers can use the Operations Center with a JDLink modem and a Generation 4 or 5 display to fine-tune their precision ag plans for spring. You can set up an Operations Center account online for free and access your information via the corresponding mobile app.

Evaluate Finances And Marketing

If you don't already have a diversified financial portfolio, winter 2024/25 would be a great time to evaluate your options, says Bennett, the Illinois soybean farmer and commodity marketing

adviser.

"It may be as simple as a husband or wife getting a job that allows them some flexibility to farm but also gives them benefits, particularly health insurance, which is, of course, a big cost for us in production agriculture if we don't go to town," Bennett says. "Diversification in tough economic situations—you just can't overvalue it enough. Diversification in a way that helps us with income flow is key."

If you're early in your farming career, it's also important to remember that Illinois soybean farms are often lean operations with a budget that he compares to a pie. "You can't expect someone to take a smaller piece," Bennett says. "You've got to find a way to make the farm more profitable or diversify the income enough to the point where you're not watering down what someone else on the farm has for income."

Beyond income diversification, you can evaluate your plans for selling the 2024 crop and give yourself several avenues of opportunity.

First, check your mindset and be grateful if you spot a rally in soybean and corn prices. Know your cost of production and seek to make sales that can help you stay in the black or climb into it.

"[This fall,] we were blessed with a soybean rally of over \$1 above the August lows," Bennett notes. "Unfortunately, it seemed like a lot of growers got bullish when the market rallied. I know a lot of selling has taken place, but sometimes when we get a rally in the market, we've got to be careful not to snub our nose at it."

Next, be aware of ever-changing geopolitical and regulatory conditions that can impact farm finances.

"If we don't book our input costs and we see global unrest



continue, and if some of these shipping routes get shut down—I'm talking about the Black Sea region, where a lot of fertilizer comes from—it can really impact the prices of our inputs," Bennett says.

At the time of this interview in mid-October, Bennett noted, dry fertilizer and potash costs were cheaper than year-ago levels, whereas phosphate remained very expensive. Locking in at least some of your fertilizer purchases can mitigate the risk of price increases.

Simultaneously, growers must balance fertilizer buying with enough corn and soybean sales to avoid "a major pendulum swing on their profit margins."

"We like to encourage our growers to lock in enough corn, riding an HTA [hedge-to-arrive] contract with an elevator, putting a floor under prices, buying a put option in some cases, and selling a call above the market just on the fertilizer bushels," Bennett says. "I would be OK if I had to accept \$5 for some fall corn next year versus this fertilizer price. What I can't stand is accepting \$4. Buying a put gives us a window where we know we can make money on those particular bushels."

At the time of this writing, some elevators in Illinois were closing early and, in some cases, not dumping corn unless it was contracted or sold for cash. In that environment, you can "make good use of your bins and take advantage of the basis improving significantly," Bennett points out.

Other aspects of your business merit attention, starting with an annual review, adds Jake Stahl, a Farm Business Consultant at Illinois Farm Business Farm Management (FBFM). The organization supports farmers with digital recordkeeping, financial and tax management, and more.

"An annual review process for operations both with and without employees is a good idea for those seeking consistent

growth and high retention," Stahl says.

Other winter investments Stahl advocates include:

- **Starting or updating your farm succession plan.** This equips the next generation for a smooth transition in the event you retire or are unable to continue farming.
- **Anticipating tax effects.** "Many favorable provisions of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act are set to expire at the end of 2025, which places importance on forward-thinking income-tax planning," Stahl explains.
- **Evaluating service providers.** "I am a huge proponent of at least seeing what other companies have to offer when it comes to seed, fertilizer, chemicals and equipment at least once every few years," Stahl says. Ask yourself whether you are satisfied with existing products at their current price point.

Explore Sustainability Investments

Stewardship extends from your farm finances to the sustainability practices you implement on every acre, adds Ryan Heiniger, a fourth-generation southeast Iowa corn and soybean farmer who is executive director of the Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC). The nonprofit has worked extensively with Illinois farmers including via the Indian Creek Watershed project and its Conservation In Action farm tour. CTIC champions U.S. conservation agriculture and supports farmers in implementing related practices and technologies.

"The easiest and cheapest investment you can make to ensure your farm's conservation portfolio continues to grow is seeking new information and learning about new practices or programs," Heiniger explains. Winter can be the perfect opportunity to check in and learn from a sustainability-minded

neighbor or cross-county farmer who has the expertise you need.

Like John Deere's Stien, Heiniger advises using this season to review data and make sustainability decisions in partnership with your agronomist and other advisers. Compare this year's crop to past years' crops to spot trends. Look for red zones located on the margins of fields that are underperforming and could present a conservation opportunity.

"For example, did that low area in the corner of the field hold water for too long and stress the crop, or did that 50 to 100 feet along the timber cause a significant yield drag that, when converted to net profitability, is actually below your cost of production?" Heiniger says. "From personal experience on our farm, it has made more sense to create pollinator and wildlife habitats in zones that were consistently underperforming at an economic net loss three out of five years."

Pinpointing less-than-optimal acres can actually be a good thing, especially in the current environment of sustainability funding for Illinois farmers. Congressional appropriations have grown for many traditional Farm Bill programs, and new federal and private-sector programs offer additional support for implementation of sustainability practices on farmland. For example, companies such as Fractal Agriculture provide farmers with capital "by taking passive, minority stakes in land farmer's own today," Heiniger says. "Fractal discounts the cost of capital if farmers conduct up to nine different soil health practices."

Several practices can represent excellent starting points or a Phase 2.0 for Illinois soybean farmers already investing in sustainability, Heiniger says. Among them:

- **Cover Crops:** "Winter cereal rye is one of the most common species used as a cover

crop and is easy to establish, scavenges excess nitrogen and works very well ahead of soybeans," Heiniger says. "For first-time cover crop users, I generally recommend oats simply because that eliminates the overwintering component and should increase the success on Year 1 with this proven and growing conservation practice to armor the soil and maintain a living root."

- **Reduced Tillage:** "Leaving as much residue on the soil surface should be a primary goal to minimize soil loss due to wind or water erosion along with deferring tillage passes until spring where possible," Heiniger explains.
- **Biodiversity:** "A practical translation for an Illinois farmer and field would be to plant 20 to 30-plus species of native grasses and wildflowers (forbs) and watch in amazement at the insect- and bird-life response sometime in the first year. These areas are also a great backdrop for family pictures."

Whatever your winter approach to sustainability, Heiniger affirms it will be time well spent. Be sure to include the next generation in those conversations. You can even explore ways they can pilot their sustainability ideas on the farm.

"Review results, challenge assumptions and develop a plan to explore new options," Heiniger encourages. "If you've had a conservation project you've dreamed about or applied for funding in the past but the application was never approved, then take another run at making it reality."

This winter, make time for yourself, your family—and your plans for the coming season. Reflecting on your data, tuning up your equipment and deciding on the next steps in your sustainability plan will yield meaningful traction for your farm business year-round.



ISA knows that bridges connect rural Illinois to opportunity. But a recent study found that 65 percent of the state's bridges are rated in fair or poor condition, with 12 percent classified as poor. ISA has developed a roadmap to greater efficiency for bridge investments.

Bridging the Gap

Why Investing in Illinois' Rural Bridges is Crucial for our Economy and Safety

By Todd Main, ISA Director of Market Development

Bridges are more than just physical structures connecting two points. Especially in rural Illinois, they are vital pieces of transportation infrastructure that enable commerce, support public safety and link communities to opportunity. Moreover, they are vital to the task of transporting soybeans to market.

Working with the Chicago office of WSP, one of the world's leading engineering and professional services firms, we commissioned a study by WSP's transportation planners and economists specializing in transportation infrastructure. The study, one of several over the past few years, helped us secure a better view of the conditions and importance of bridges in Illinois. The project also includes a roadmap for securing greater efficiency for public

investment in bridges as well as pinpointing the clear rationale for continued upgrades to the state's bridge infrastructure.

According to Adam Miliszewski, WSP's Lead Transportation Planner, by prioritizing maintenance and upgrades, the state can ensure that its bridges continue to support not only the agricultural industry but also the broader economy.

"With agriculture at the heart of Illinois' economic identity, the results of our work endorse ISA's position that investing in bridges is just good policy," Miliszewski said. "It's also a necessity to keep bridges operational, reliable and capable of meeting the demands of a thriving agricultural sector."

Agriculture, and soybean production in particular, play vital roles in our state's overall economy. The rural communities that form the heart of Illinois also depend on a robust infrastructure

to move goods, support local industries and maintain a high quality of life. Yet one of the most critical components of this infrastructure—our network of rural bridges—is facing a moment of truth, and the stakes are high.

The results of WSP's work show a clear connection between bridge infrastructure and local economies. Nowhere is that effect more visible than in Illinois' agricultural regions. The latest study shows that investing in our bridge infrastructure is not only necessary but also highly beneficial—economically, socially and environmentally.

A Vital Infrastructure at Risk

Illinois' transportation network consists of nearly 27,000 bridges, many of which are aging and in desperate need of repair. For this study, WSP examined noninterstate bridges and those outside the Chicago metropolitan area.

Their analysis also examined bridges for the top 13 agriculture-producing counties as well as bridges that will reach the end of their useful life benchmark within the next 16 years in all counties.

The bridges included in the study cross rivers, streams, ditches, railroads and other roadways. They are vitally important to the economy of communities statewide. According to the study, the average age of bridges in Illinois is 45 years old. The oldest bridge is 161 years old, located in Bureau County, while the oldest that still allows truck traffic is 151 years old, located in Grundy County.

In fact, the study found that 65 percent of Illinois' bridges are rated in fair or poor condition, with 12 percent classified as poor. These aren't just numbers; they represent real risks to our communities. When a bridge deteriorates to the point



of requiring weight restrictions or closures, it disrupts the flow of goods, delays emergency response times and creates safety hazards for all road users.

The agricultural sector is particularly vulnerable to these disruptions. During peak harvest season, soybean farmers rely on an efficient network of roads and bridges to transport crops to market. Any delay, even a small one, can mean significant financial losses, especially when transportation costs increase because of detours or restricted routes. For example, according to the study, a single bridge closure can add miles to a truck's route, leading to increased fuel costs and delayed deliveries. In agriculture, time is quite literally money.

The Economic Payoff of Bridge Investments

The WSP study didn't just highlight the risks. It also provided a detailed analysis of the economic benefits of investing in bridge infrastructure. The study focused on three categories of bridges and the benefit-to-cost ratios for each.

When researchers examined bridges in all counties, the benefit for each dollar invested in bridges totaled to \$4.97. To put that into perspective, this means that a \$1 million investment in bridges generates nearly \$5 million in economic returns. For bridges in the top 13 agricultural counties, the benefit for every dollar invested was \$3. That shows these investments are important in regions where agriculture plays a dominant role. For bridges nearing the end of their useful life, the return on investment was even higher, at \$3.59. These numbers make it abundantly clear that investing in our rural bridges is not just a matter of public safety—it's also a sound economic strategy.

What are these economic returns, exactly? According to the study, they come in the form of job creation, increased labor

income and overall contributions to the state's GDP. Over a 30-year period, statewide investment in bridge infrastructure is projected to create approximately 52,640 jobs (direct, indirect, and induced), generating \$2.83 billion in labor income and contributing a staggering \$5.63 billion in added value to the state's economy.

In the 13 agricultural counties alone, 5,979 jobs (direct, indirect and induced) would be created, with \$231.9 million in labor income and \$639.8 million in added economic value. For bridges approaching the end of their useful life within 16 years, the investment would generate 3,006 jobs, \$161.8 million in labor income and \$321.7 million in value added.

These figures represent more than just dollars and cents—they reflect the livelihoods of thousands of workers, the stability of local economies and the future of Illinois' agricultural industry. Without adequate infrastructure, the state's farmers and agribusinesses will face rising costs, reduced competitiveness and shrinking markets. The ripple effects will be felt across the state in both rural and urban communities.

The Safety and Environmental Imperatives

Although the economic benefits of bridge investment are significant, we cannot overlook the human and safety aspects of this issue. The WSP study stated that as bridges deteriorate, the likelihood of closures and emergency repairs increases. This could lead to longer travel routes and more fuel consumption for residents and businesses alike. This not only raises transportation costs but also contributes to higher emissions, exacerbating environmental concerns.

Additionally, deteriorating bridges pose serious safety risks and can greatly increase emergency response times in rural Illinois. When bridges are closed or restricted, ambulances, fire trucks and police vehicles might be forced to take longer routes,

delaying life-saving responses. In rural areas, where the distance between communities is already substantial, these delays can mean the difference between life and death. Investing in bridges is an investment in public safety, plain and simple.

Bridge Life Expectancy: Why Timing Matters

One of the key metrics in the study was the "remaining useful life" of bridges. The study focused on bridges expected to reach the end of their useful life within the next 16 years, aligning with government reporting cycles that occur every four years. This 16-year benchmark is critical because it gives policymakers and local governments a timeline to prioritize repairs and replacements before critical failures occur.

If we fail to invest in these bridges now, the costs will only rise in the future. Emergency repairs are far more expensive than planned maintenance, and the longer we wait, the greater the risk that more bridges will reach the point of closure or catastrophic failure. Proactive investment is not just more cost-effective, it's essential for avoiding a crisis.

The Potential of Bridge Bundling

One of the most promising strategies for maximizing the efficiency of bridge investments is a concept known as "bridge bundling." This approach, analyzed by previous WSP research, involves grouping multiple bridge projects together for repair or replacement. By bundling projects, local governments can achieve economies of scale when purchasing materials in bulk and through more efficient project management.

Bridge bundling has been successfully implemented in other states and could prove to be an ideal strategy to help government agencies in Illinois increase the efficiency of bridge investments. By bundling bridge projects, WSP has concluded, Illinois could stretch its limited infrastructure dollars further, allowing more

bridges to be repaired or replaced at a lower cost. This is particularly important given that 72 percent of the state's bridges fall under local control. Counties with municipalities and townships often struggle to find the necessary funding.

The Road Ahead: Why Action Is Needed Now

The findings of WSP's analysis make it clear that the time to invest in Illinois' bridge infrastructure is now. The economic benefits are substantial, the safety risks are real and the environmental advantages are undeniable. But perhaps most importantly, investing in our bridges is an investment in the Illinois agriculture industry and the communities that depend on it.

For more information about Illinois Soybean Association and its initiatives, visit ilsoy.org.

Key Statistics:

Illinois Bridges at a Glance

1. Total Number of Bridges: Illinois has 26,873 bridges, the second-largest number in the U.S., with 64 percent of bridges statewide in fair or worse condition.
2. Economic Impact: A statewide investment in bridge rehabilitation has a Benefit-Cost Ratio (BCR) of 4.97, meaning for every dollar invested, \$4.97 in value will be returned.
3. Bridge Ownership: 71 percent of Illinois bridges are under the jurisdiction of local governments, with townships responsible for 47 percent of these bridges statewide. That places a heavy financial burden on local entities.
4. Job Creation: The bridge rehabilitation investment is estimated to support 52,640 job-years, with direct, indirect and induced employment impacts across the state.
5. Freight Cost Savings: The investment will save approximately \$8.8 billion in truck travel time and vehicle operating costs over a 30-year period. That will benefit industries such as agriculture that rely heavily on freight movement.



Aquaculture Opportunities Abound

Why feed buyers love U.S. soy — and how to keep orders coming

By Dr. Dominique Bureau, Stephen Gunther and Dr. Flavia M. Damasceno

Shrimp, grass carp and Nile tilapia round out the top three most-produced species in the booming global aquaculture industry. So who can claim the title of No. 1 soy meal supplier to these hungry protein providers? You guessed it—you and your fellow U.S. soybean farmers.

Yet there's growing competition from soybean producers in South America and beyond. Now is the time for U.S. soy to keep building relationships with the aquaculture industry to maintain an edge and market access, experts say.

"Aquaculture is the fastest-growing food production system globally, with an annual growth rate exceeding those of the poultry, pork, dairy and beef industries," explains Dr. Flavia Damasceno, Feed Formulation and Research and Development Specialist, Wittaya Aqua.

For the past four years, her and her colleagues at Wittaya Aqua have worked with the U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC) to deliver technical presentations, provide technical support to feed mills and aquaculture farms, optimize feed formulations for USSEC demonstration trials and train hundreds of feed formulators.

"Between 1990 and 2020, total world aquaculture production expanded by 609 percent, with an average annual growth rate

of 6.7 percent," Damasceno continues. "Aquaculture represents a crucial means of meeting the increasing demand for food while addressing nutritional deficiencies and having a lower environmental impact than many other animal-based food sources."

Read on to discover how your work as an Illinois soybean farmer translates to a product that's the darling of the global aquaculture industry. Then, learn how you and the U.S. soybean industry can double down on attributes such as quality and sustainability to strengthen buyer relationships for the next decade.

Water-Fed World

Protein raised with aquaculture is diverse and includes fish, crustaceans, mollusks and aquatic plants. Staple species account for a majority of global production and include Pacific whiteleg shrimp (6.82 million tons produced annually), grass carp (6.15 million tons) and Nile tilapia (5.3 million tons), according to Damasceno, referencing 2024 research from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. Other top species are silver carp, common carp, Indian major carps including Catla and Rohu, Atlantic salmon, pangasid catfishes and rainbow trout.

All that protein totals to 130.9 million tons annually

valued at \$313 billion as of 2022, FAO reports.

Asia accounts for nearly 90 percent of aquaculture production worldwide, Damasceno says. China ranks No. 1 followed by countries such as India, Indonesia and Vietnam.

"Aquaculture has thrived in tropical and subtropical regions due to favorable environmental conditions, availability of a variety of species with farming potential and the socio-economic conditions in the region allowing for low-cost labor," Damasceno explains.

Although global seafood production is expected to slow compared to the past decade, the sector is still on target to grow by 12 percent in the next 10 years, she says. That deceleration reflects the reality that more countries are passing policies that require sustainable fishery practices.

U.S. Soy Earns High Marks

There are several reasons feed buyers find U.S. soy meal so attractive. But at a high level, it boils down to physical traits, chemical composition, quality and nutritional value, economic value and sustainability.

When buyers examine soy's **physical traits**, they're especially interested in the absence of foreign material and damage to the beans, Damasceno points out.

"As Aquaculture Feed Specialists at USSEC, we regularly visit feed mills

that source soy products from various origins," she says. "During these visits, our team observed notable differences in the physical characteristics of soybeans from the U.S. to other regions. U.S. soybeans typically exhibit a bright yellow uniform color, minimal foreign material contamination and reduced levels of bean damage relative to soy from different origins."

In the area of **chemical composition**, buyers seek to procure soy with high crude protein (CP) content levels. U.S. soy meal typically has higher CP content compared to Argentine meal, though Brazilian soy often exceeds both, Damasceno says, referencing research.

"Variability in CP is influenced by factors such as seed genotype, planting region, environmental conditions and processing methods, particularly hull removal," she explains. Other factors working in favor of U.S. soy include its higher sucrose and lower raffinose concentrations, which make feed easier for animals to digest.

Amino acids also work in U.S. soy's favor, Damasceno says. U.S. and Argentine soy meal tends to have higher levels of lysine, sulphur and threonine per unit of protein compared to meal originating from Brazil and India.

Research also suggests the **quality and nutritional value** of U.S. soy boosts fish production. An unpublished 2021 study found that "fish fed U.S. soy had the highest fillet yield compared to those fed Argentinian or Brazilian soybean meal," she says. These attributes also create cost savings: High-quality beans mean aquaculture farmers don't need expensive additives to supplement soy meal.

Cost-benefit analysis underscores the **economic value** of U.S. soy, helping aquaculture farmers meet all nutritional requirements throughout various species' life cycles at the lowest possible cost. This can be

attributed to the "superior balance of digestible amino acids" in U.S. soy, Damasceno says.

As for **sustainability**, U.S. soybean farmers' balance of production and conservation puts meal originating from the country in the top class.

"U.S. soy is often considered more environmentally friendly due to its lower carbon emissions related to reduced impacts attributed to land use change (LUC) compared to soybeans from other origins where lands are changed to create cropland for farming soy," she explains.

Maintaining An Edge

Just because U.S. soybean farmers maintain a competitive edge on multiple fronts doesn't mean that standing is guaranteed. Damasceno points to several steps Illinois farmers can take to strengthen their position in the global aquaculture market.

First, consider how to optimize soy quality.

"Farmers of U.S. soy should continue to implement and maintain stringent quality controls during harvest and storage of beans that maintain the physical quality of the beans delivered to the crushing plants," she advises.

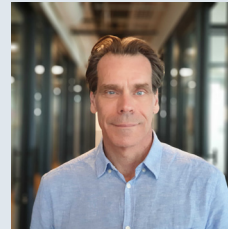
Second, continue to advocate for and implement sustainability practices. As more countries require these practices, U.S. competitive advantage could slip. "While U.S. soy remains the most consistent sustainable source today, other countries are under pressure to reduce impacts from land-use change, the major contributor to carbon footprint, and will improve the sustainability of their soy," Damasceno says.

Competition also will emerge from places with the ability to cheaply transport soy to buyers in Asia and other aquaculture hubs.

"Emerging soy suppliers are looking to increase their soy production and export capabilities," she points out.

(See Aquaculture Opportunities
Abound, page 12)

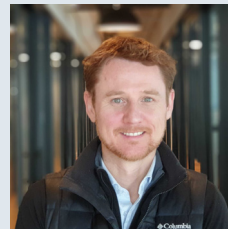
Meet The Aquaculture Experts Serving U.S. Soy



Dr. Dominique Bureau (CSO & co-founder)

Dominique has been the head of the University of Guelph's Fish Nutrition Research Laboratory since 2001. He is a leading aquaculture nutrition scientist with over 30 years of experience (academic, industry) in aquaculture, animal nutrition, feed ingredient evaluation, feed formulation and development of mathematical

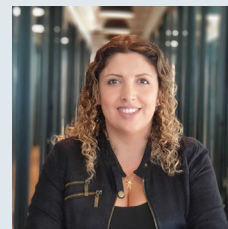
models for aquaculture production, nutrition and environmental management.



Stephen Gunther (Director - Consulting and Applied Sciences)

Stephen is an entrepreneur and business owner with almost 20 years working in and consulting for the animal nutrition and aquaculture industries. He has worked as a nutritionist and technical in the Chilean salmon industry, in technical sales and

owner/operator roles in the feed additive and premix industry, and as technical director for one of the leading aquafeed manufacturing companies. Stephen has a post-graduate degree in Animal Nutrition and throughout his career has gained experience in: development and optimization of nutritional strategies in production animals, management of premix plants, management of quality control systems, leading scientific investigations at academic and industrial scale, statistical analysis, publications in peer-reviewed journals, direction of multidisciplinary work teams, development of technical procedures, negotiation with suppliers and administration of budgets.



Dr. Flavia M. Damasceno (Feed Formulation and R&D Specialist)

Flavia is an Animal Nutritionist with 14 years of experience in aquaculture nutrition, feed formulation, aquaculture management, data analysis and mathematical modeling, acquired as a graduate student and aquaculture

nutritionist at Wittaya Aqua. Her experience also includes economical valuation of feed ingredients, nutritive value and limitations of common and novel animal feed ingredients, and determination of nutrient requirements of different species. As Feed Formulation and R&D Specialist at Wittaya Aqua, Flavia is proficient in formulating diets for commercially important aquaculture species, whether cold water, warm water, carnivorous or omnivorous, coordinating and leading projects, and contributing to the provision of services to customers, notably related to ingredient quality.

Aquaculture Opportunities Abound

(continued from page 11)

Additionally, the European feed market increasingly wants to source soy domestically rather than importing it to reduce its footprint and improve economic and environmental sustainability.

Meanwhile, Illinois soybean farmers should recognize that aquaculture is exploring a spectrum of feed options. "Alternative protein sources are being introduced to the market every day. These alternatives may offer a good amino acid profile with competitive pricing to animal feed producers, making them attractive substitutes for traditional ingredients such as soy-based products," Damasceno says.

Some of those alternatives aren't yet economically viable, she

adds, so it's important for U.S. soy to:

- Stay engaged in the global aquaculture marketplace.
- Conduct research and development into "value-added strategies to enhance the competitiveness of U.S. soy in the aquaculture feed market." For example, feed with functional benefits is a growing priority. Anything U.S. soy can do to demonstrate the crop's capacity for improved animal immunity, boosted animal health or heightened final product quality and yield will remain attractive for years to come.
- Illustrate environmental sustainability benefits made possible through U.S. soy's higher nutrient digestibility. This "may significantly reduce the water pollution caused

by aquaculture practices and make them more sustainable."

Although the future of U.S. soy in global aquaculture isn't guaranteed, the crop remains a vital resource and has tremendous potential with the right strategy.

"Continued collaboration of U.S. suppliers with academic and industry research and development stakeholders to demonstrate the superior value of U.S. soy will ensure the continued success of your industry," Damasceno advises.



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INFINITE

Number of new uses for soy being explored by the Soy Innovation Center

50

"As your In-house Agronomy Team, hosting six Field Days in regions across the state was important to us as it brought us face-to-face with our Illinois farmers, resulting in better connection and a deeper understanding of the issues they faced over the 2024 growing season."

Abigail Peterson, CCA, Director of Agronomy

15

"It's Sustainably Soy" Certified companies

6

Field Days hosted

141

ISA funded projects

20

Blog posts on Field Days

FISCAL YEAR '24

YOUR SOY CHECKOFF, BY NUMBERS

We count our success by numbers,
SO THAT THE WORLD CAN COUNT ON YOU.

"Engaging with international soybean buyers either domestically or abroad is essential to the Market Development Team's mission of driving demand for Illinois soy. We start by supporting our in-country partner organizations in building relationships and cultivating leaders. We then assess the market for potential further investment. This is a continuous process ensuring that we are always evaluating opportunities to strategically develop overseas markets."

Todd Main, Director of Market Development

"Every farmer sees the world. Our Communications Team is focused on connecting Illinois soybean farmers across the state through the Fast Five Weekly Update, market news, and market opportunities. We work with experts. The data collected from our growers, so they get what they need."

Michael Whitmer, Director of Communications



Fast 5 Weekly E-Newsletters
sent to Illinois farmers

20

Legislative
visits hosted

"ISA has been actively engaging with educational efforts for both legislators and Illinois farmers. It is a priority of ISA's mission to connect with farmers and tell their stories to legislators to ensure the needs of agriculture are considered by our policymakers in Springfield and Washington. This year, your ISA Government Relations Team traveled the state, from the north shore of Chicago to the southern edge of Illinois, to achieve this critical mission."

Andrew Larson,
*Director of Government
Relations & Strategy*

16

Soybean
Production
research
projects
funded

50%

Percentage
increase of
ISG Members

110

Illinois Field
& Bean articles
published

100+

Articles published
by ISA's
Advisor

58,000

Users that visited the ISA website

22

Teams of international
soybean buyers with
which ISA engaged

43

Corporate
partners
obtained by
end of 2024

283

IN PERSON

2024 Soybean
Summit attendees

61

"It's Sustainably Soy"
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world from a unique perspective, and the ISA Marketing Team focused on bringing those viewpoints to light for the benefit of the state. Through important communication tools like Field & Bean, the IL Soy.org, and many others, ISA shares farmers' lessons-learned, helpful resources, and to bridge the communication gap so farmers can learn from both their peers and industry. Feedback from these tools helps us sharpen the delivery of important lessons and critical information to farmers when they need it."

Director of Marketing Communications





Soy Connex 2024

By Erin Worrell, Communications Manager, U.S. Soybean Export Council

In Illinois, the 2024 soybean crop was estimated at about 709.5 million bushels, contributing to an expected U.S. soy crop of 4.6 billion bushels, according to the USDA's August Crop Production Report. The corresponding World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates Report from USDA projects soy supply up 11 percent over last year.

Against the backdrop of this strong crop, the U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC) hosted Soy Connex 2024, the Global U.S. Soy Summit, from Aug. 19-21 in San Francisco. Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) was among the sponsors.

The summit convened more than 400 international soy customers from 62 countries including Bangladesh, China, Egypt, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico and more to learn and network.

Of those customers, 40 percent attended their first Soy Connex. Many of these customers participated in a trade team tour, visiting farms and soy supply chain partners specific to their

business before or after Soy Connex.

"Illinois exports 60 percent of our soybeans, so we have to have markets for them to go to," says Scott Gaffner, who farms near Greenville, Ill., and serves as a Board Director for ISA and the World Initiative of Soy in Human Health (WISHH). "USSEC is so important to the relationships with our export markets. They know the buyers and have credibility for our exports to be successful."

David Wessel farms near Chandlerville, Ill., and serves as a Board Director for ISA and United Soybean Board. He agrees with Gaffner and adds, "I live on the Illinois River, so 100 percent of my soybeans go that route. That river access opens a lot of avenues and new markets for farmers in our state, so connecting with customers at events is critical."

Both Gaffner and Wessel attended Soy Connex 2024.

Throughout Soy Connex, USSEC tackled tough questions and shared data to elevate a preference for U.S. soy products among

global customers. Speakers and sessions aimed to differentiate the quality and value of U.S. soy from other nutrition and vegetable oil products. Compared to those in recent years, current prices allow international customers to benefit from the many advantages of U.S. soy.

Although soybeans are sold as a commodity oilseed, research continues to show that U.S. soy is a premium product that increases operational efficiencies for livestock farms, feed mills and oil crushers. It also introduces better flavor profiles in the soy foods sector. And U.S. soy has the lowest carbon footprint compared to soy of other origins thanks to on-farm stewardship and conservation efforts of Illinois soybean farmers and others throughout the U.S.

"In my conversations with buyers from China during breakfast, we did a deep dive into farming and what this year's crop looks like," Wessel reports. "They love our quality

and say it is easier to work with U.S. soy compared to soybeans of other origins. Exceptional quality is our selling point."

One Soy Connex session on the value of adding U.S. soy to animal and aqua feeds shared modeling data that quantifies the value of the nutritional package delivered by U.S. soy as a feed ingredient. Based on current prices, the model showed that U.S. soy adds \$51 per metric ton in nutrient value to fish feed in Indonesia. In Ecuador, the model showed U.S. soy could add \$76 per metric ton in nutrient value to shrimp feed.



As it relates to sustainability, the Global Feed LCA Institute's database indicates that when meal used in feed is made with 100 percent U.S. soybeans, the feed's carbon footprint can be reduced approximately 20 percent. During the session on animal and aqua feed, data modeling clearly showed lower greenhouse gas emissions from U.S. soy compared to soy of other origins.

USSEC developed one of the first sustainability verification schemes, known as the U.S. Soy Sustainability Assurance Protocol (SSAP), and about 70 percent of U.S. soy exports now carry SSAP certification. As of mid-August, international U.S. soy customers can request that carbon footprint be included on their SSAP certificates. This data, sourced from the Global Feed LCA Institute database, offers a calculation based on the quantity of soy purchased and can be used in their carbon accounting.

Global U.S. soy customers and supply chain leaders appreciate the knowledge shared at Soy Connex, but they value the unparalleled networking even more. They enjoy connecting with farmers, visiting farms and seeing firsthand the logistics that make U.S. soy incredibly reliable.

"I hosted a trade team from South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa on my farm including two important influencers I had met on previous trade missions to India and Vietnam," Gaffner says. "The team loved hearing about our family farming heritage and the care we take to ensure a high-quality crop. The technology we used to be efficient and sustainable impressed them, and the size of our equipment made a huge impression. They learned how we produce a large crop with few people."

"The conversations continued here at Soy Connex," he continues. "Those relationships transcend into developing trust, and they are an integral part of developing export markets. They will open doors for trade in the future."

Through Soy Connex 2024, USSEC encouraged international customers to look beyond the status quo to the data that better demonstrates the value of U.S. soy to learn how to unlock the profit potential it offers. Illinois farmers can expect that to translate to growing export demand in the 2024/25 marketing year and beyond for U.S. soybeans and soybean meal.



Before Soy Connex, Illinois farmers witnessed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between USSEC's Soy Excellence Center in India and Karnataka Poultry Farmers & Breeders Association to accelerate workforce training and capacity building for India's rapidly growing poultry industry.





ISG is sounding the alarm because biofuel producers are turning away from conventional crop-based feedstocks such as soybean oil in favor of waste feedstocks.

U.S. Soybean Oil Market Threatened by Imported Feedstocks

By David Kubik, ISA Biofuels
& Trade Policy Manager

Imported feedstocks such as used cooking oil are threatening the demand for U.S. soybean oil in the biodiesel industry. Biofuel producers are turning away from conventional crop-based feedstocks such as soybean oil in favor of waste feedstocks, which have been

assessed by state and federal regulators as producing fewer life-cycle emissions. The non-scientific models they use to make that assessment factor in an assumed increase in soybean acres needed to supply demand for fuel production. The result of this strike against soybeans is that waste feedstocks receive larger low-car-

bon fuel standard (LCFS) credits in the production of biofuel while making soybean oil feedstocks unprofitable for fuel production.

In 2022 the Clean Fuel Production Credit (45Z) passed as part of the federal Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). It will generate more subsidy for fuels that produce fewer greenhouse gas emissions using

the same assessment factors starting in 2025 when the current tax credits expire.

Illinois Soybean Growers (ISG) took the lead to sound the alarm in the agricultural community about how 45Z will negatively impact the price of soybean oil. This provision dramatically reduces the incentive biofuel producers receive

for soy biomass-based diesel from \$1 per gallon to a mere 35 cents per gallon.

In addition, this policy would cost the average Illinois farmer over \$3,300 per year and put our soy-based biodiesel producers at risk of shutting down, according to a recent study commissioned by Illinois Soybean Association (ISA). In fact, two soy biodiesel refiners recently closed in anticipation of this policy going into effect.

Since the IRA passed, overseas used cooking oil (UCO) has become a more dominant player in the biomass-based diesel industry. The U.S. has seen an increase of over half a billion gallons, which displaces soybean oil because California favors UCO in its LCFS. Unfortunately, the most recent data shows that soybean oil makes up only 13.4 percent (Q1 2024) of the biomass-based diesel market. In 2022, soybean oil made up 19.3 percent of the market, and in 2023 it was 17.2 percent of the California market. That decline in market share is expected to continue after the 45Z credit goes into effect.

Also of note is that at the time of this writing, soybean oil prices had fallen over 50 percent from a high of 89 cents per pound the month the IRA passed in August 2022 to only 43 cents per pound in October 2024.

On the positive side, ISG has made headway to mitigate

the impact of this detrimental policy on farmers:

- ISG pushed for passage of the first-in-the-nation Illinois Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) purchasing incentive, which will disallow imported feedstocks after 2028.

- Minnesota quickly followed using identical language remove ISG negotiated with policymakers to ban foreign feedstocks from their SAF credits.

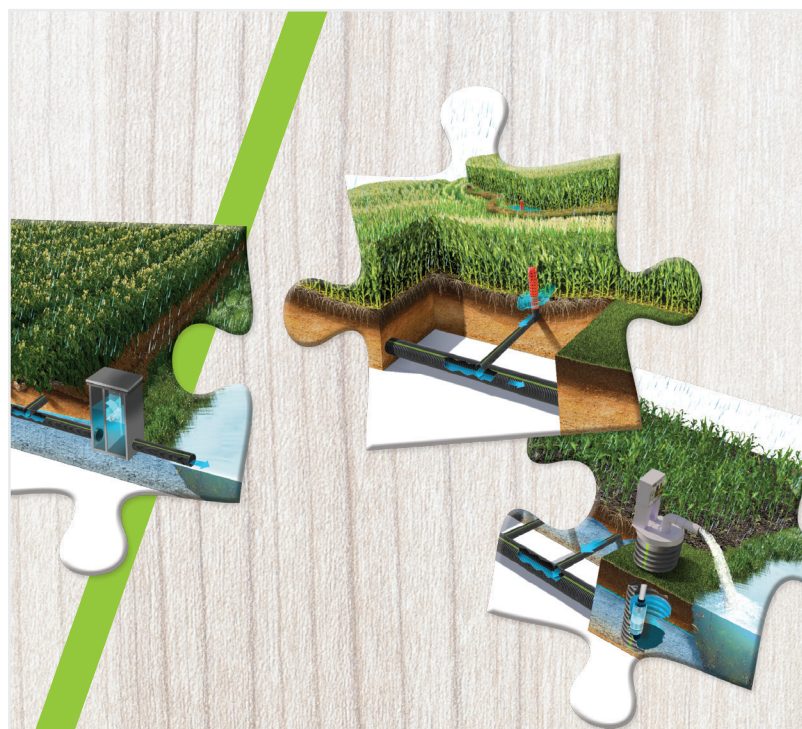
- ISG encouraged 16 U.S. senators (including Senators Duckworth and Durbin) to sign a letter to the U.S. Treasury stating they believe only domestic feedstocks should be eligible for credits funded with U.S. taxpayer dollars.

- In September 2024, 41 U.S. representatives signed a similar letter, including four from the Illinois delegation with whom ISG worked.

- In October 2024, with support from ISG, Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) filed bipartisan legislation to codify domestic feedstocks into law.

At the end of the day, ISG believes American tax dollars should be invested in domestic industries that use domestic feedstocks such as Illinois-grown soybeans to ensure our energy independence.

Please join ISG in this critical fight. Sign your name to the petition by scanning the QR code below and implore your legislators to protect farmers by protecting the U.S. soybean oil market.



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Through This Farm Girl Cooks, Deanne Frieders shares easy-to-make, family-friendly meals using common grocery store ingredients perfect for the busy farm family.

This Farm Girl Cooks - and She'll Transform Your Holidays!

Deanne Frieders wasn't born a suburbanite. She wasn't born a farm girl either, even though her hometown only had 750 people, and her grandparents were farmers. No, she was determined to get out and be as urban as she could be.

She did, of course, heading to the Windy City for the corporate job she'd always dreamed of. Thrilled with her accomplishments and riding on

dreams, she settled in to take the suburbs by storm.

Fate and her farm-boy husband had other plans, however. Two dates in, she did, too.

Flash forward, and the corporate job was in the dust behind the combine; she and her two kids headed down the dirt road to farm life, and soon two new babies joined the family. She was supposed to feed the family, drive a tractor and also deliver field meals - whatever those were.

Always a culinary lover, she gamely jumped in - and quickly drowned in her own creativity. (Have you ever tried to eat a pork chop with a plastic knife bumping along in a tractor?)

All that to say, that's how This Farm Girl Cooks was born - and today, she really is a farm girl; she still cooks, and she also inspires thousands to do the same.

Driven by the tenet that not just field meals but family

meals don't have to be complex or perplexing, she's now a beacon for those looking for food with wheels that still appeals. (And now she even drives the auger cart!)

Here are some of her top tips to feed the farm:

Shelf Life

"Remember, the key to field meals is that they can't always eat them when they're prepared. The equipment breaks

down; it's going to rain; they're finishing a row or moving fields. So keep it to something that has a little shelf life."

Family Friendly

"I like to keep my meals family friendly. I take old-school Midwestern food and update it for now. I keep it simple and realistic, make it a little healthier by adding some vegetables or whole grains. One of my favorites is stir-fry—it has everything you need in one bowl."

Healthy But Good

"I've always been interested in nutrition, and I have enough knowledge to know what would make a meal one step better for you. It still has to taste good. It can fuel your body, not just feed your belly."



On her website, Deanne offers simple and delicious recipes for field meals, perfect for farmers or families on the go.

Easy Peasy

"I love lasagna, but it's so time-consuming. So I started experimenting with lasagna made into individual portions in muffin cups. It's a full meal but no knife

required. It takes a fragment of the time to prepare, and it's one of my most popular dishes."

Holidays On The Farm

"By the time the holidays roll

around, hopefully we'll have the machinery cleaned up and in the barn. We have a handful of beef cattle we still have to feed and finish, but we'll be in

(See This Farm Girl Cooks, page 22)

Cranberry Goat Cheese Appetizer

Ingredients:

- 4 ounce goat cheese log
- ¼ cup pecans, chopped finely
- ¼ cup dried cranberries, chopped
- 1 tablespoon fresh rosemary leaves, chopped
- 3 tablespoons honey, divided

Instructions:

Step 1: Combine the chopped

pecans, rosemary leaves and chopped dried cranberries in a small bowl. Set aside.

Step 2: Set the goat cheese log on a plate. Drizzle with 2 tablespoons honey, using the back of a spoon or clean fingers to spread the honey all over. (It will act as the glue.)

Step 3: Sprinkle the chopped pecan mixture on all sides of the goat cheese log, pressing the ingredients into

the cheese to adhere. Don't forget the bottom and the ends!

Step 4: Drizzle remaining tablespoon of honey on your serving plate or tray. It will keep the goat cheese from moving around. Plate the coated goat cheese directly on top of the honey. Garnish with any remaining pecan/cranberry mixture. Serve with crackers, fruit slices or veggies.



Easy Peppermint Fudge

Ingredients:

- 14-ounce can sweetened condensed milk
- 18 ounces semi-sweet chocolate chips
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1.5 teaspoons peppermint extract
- 6 peppermint candy canes, crushed

Instructions:

Step 1: Line an 8-inch square baking pan with parchment paper. Leave some paper hanging over the edges to help you remove the fudge later on.

Step 2: Fill a small saucepan with a couple of inches of water and bring to a boil, then turn down to a simmer.

Step 3: Put the condensed milk, chocolate chips and butter into a heatproof bowl, then place it on top of the saucepan. Make sure the bottom of the bowl doesn't touch the water.

Leave the ingredients to melt, stirring occasionally.

Step 4: Once melted, remove from the heat. Pour in the peppermint extract and mix to combine.

Step 5: Pour the fudge mixture into the prepared pan. Use the back of a spoon to spread it into an even layer.

Scatter over the crushed candy canes.

Step 6: Put the pan into the fridge for a couple of hours so the fudge can set.

Once set, remove from the fridge. Use the parchment paper to lift the fudge out of the pan.

Use a sharp knife to cut the fudge into 1-inch squares.

This Farm Girl Cooks

(continued from page 21)

that awkward transition period where we're re-establishing what our family routine looks like. We want to be together, and I don't want to spend all my time in the kitchen.

"One of my favorite time-saving tricks: ready-to-cook cookie dough, already portioned out. You just pull it out of the freezer and pop it on the cookie sheet.

"Our table will always include my mom's cheesy corn casserole—she called it 'corn

souffle,' and the stuffing my grandma used to make—an old church recipe. (Those cookbooks are goldmines you can update.)"

"I like to include festive appetizers but put my own spin on it using seasonal spices and ingredients. My Cranberry Pecan Goat Cheese appetizer uses only five ingredients and comes together in under 15 minutes!

"The most important thing to remember is there's no right way to feed your family. If you're feeding your family in any way, shape or form, then you're showing love. Food is the ultimate gift of love."



Jiffy Cheesy Corn Casserole

Ingredients:

- Creamed corn - for a variety of texture and also added moisture
- Corn kernels - because it is corn casserole, after all. You can use fresh corn or frozen corn, if you'd like.
- Jiffy Corn Muffin Mix - adds another layer of corn flavor, plus a touch of sweetness.
- Sour cream - adds richness and creaminess
- Eggs - act as a binder and help hold the casserole together
- Cheddar cheese - because who doesn't love a little cheese in their life???

How to make corn casserole:

Step 1: Preheat your oven to 350 degrees and grease a medium-sized casserole dish or baking dish.

I like to use a 9- x 9- or 8- x 8-inch casserole dish.

Step 2: In a large bowl, whisk the eggs. Add creamed corn, corn kernels and sour cream. Mix and add one package of Jiffy Corn Muffin Mix.

Stir well to combine ingredients, then pour into your casserole dish.

Step 3: Bake for 30 minutes, then add shredded cheddar cheese to the top and cook until melted.

Allow the corn casserole to cool slightly before serving.



Non-Alcoholic Christmas Punch

Ingredients:

- 50 ounces sparkling apple-cranberry juice equivalent to two 25.4-ounce bottles
- 1 liter ginger ale
- 6 ounces pineapple juice
- 1 cup fresh or frozen cranberries
- 1 orange, sliced
- 3-4 cups ice

• Optional: Rosemary springs for garnish
Instructions:

Step 1: Combine the apple-cranberry juice, ginger ale, pineapple, cranberries and orange slices in a punch bowl or pitcher.

Step 2: Serve the punch in glasses filled with ice. Top with fruit and a sprig of rosemary, if desired.

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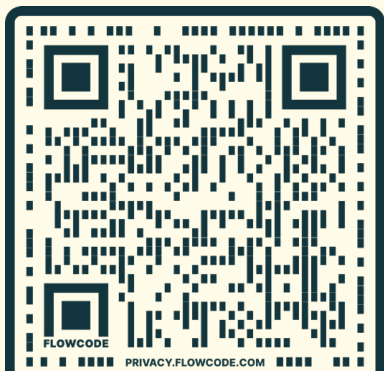
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Join Us at the Field Advisor Forum!

By Stephanie Porter, CCA, ISA Outreach Agronomist

December is a unique time to reflect on the past growing season and begin planning for the next. With winter meeting season in full swing, you're likely seeing a flood of event invitations. But how do you choose which ones are worth your time? I recommend adding the Field Advisor Forum to your calendar—a day dedicated to learning how your Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) checkoff dollars are funding impactful agronomic research in Illinois and providing data-driven solutions for your farm.

The Field Advisor Forum will be held on Jan. 16, 2025, at Memorial Stadium in Champaign, Ill. The day will focus on demonstrating the value of your checkoff investment. Researchers will present and provide practical, research-driven takeaways that you can implement on your farm. Registration is now open on **FieldAdvisor.org**. Simply visit the "Attend" tab and click on "Field Advisor Forum" to sign up. This event is funded by the Illinois Soybean checkoff program and open to anyone to attend.

We have a great lineup in the morning. Dr. Fred Below from the University of Illinois Crop Physiology program will kick off the event celebrating 60 years of soybean production, coinciding with ISA's 60th anniversary. Following his presentation titled, "Soybean Success, No Longer a Secret," Dr. Connor Sible will join him to share data from the first year of their ISA checkoff-funded project. This presentation is titled "Taking Tissue Testing to the Whole Plant Level." Together, they will share how the project is exploring the optimal timing for conducting tissue tests during soybean growth stages to better understand nutrient needs for maximizing yield.

Next, Dr. Scott H. Irwin, the Laurence J. Norton Chair of Agricultural Marketing at the University of Illinois, will deliver an in-depth agricultural marketing outlook. As a leading expert in agricultural economics, Dr. Irwin will share his perspective on what to anticipate in the coming months and offer practical guidance on how farmers can navigate a volatile market.

Following Irwin's presentation, a panel of independent crop consultants will take the stage to share their firsthand observations from the 2024 growing season. The discussion will cover challenges and successes and also focus on what farmers can and can't control. Panelists will also highlight agronomic and management strategies that are unbiased, unfiltered and based on proven on proven agronomy research, not marketing. This session promises to challenge the status quo with an open and frank discussion about agronomy and crop production that is free from sales pitches to guide your decisions for the upcoming season.

And it doesn't stop there. Join us for an afternoon of breakout sessions focused on ISA checkoff-funded and partner research. After lunch, presentations will explore critical topics affecting soybean production. Key sessions will cover insect management. You will learn how to identify pests and determine thresholds for insecticide use. Other

sessions will spotlight weed management and herbicide resistance. You'll also learn more about practices that improve soil health and water quality. And you'll discover ways to benefit from ecosystem markets such as carbon-credit programs.

Additionally, panels will feature the results of the University of Illinois' breeding and variety-testing programs, updates on soybean cyst nematode management and effective cover-crop management. A dedicated room will offer resources on data-driven solutions from Science for Success, the Crop Protection Network and GROW (Getting Rid of Weeds).

Get ready for an information-packed day at Memorial Stadium! Although we know this venue might not be the most convenient for everyone, we're excited to bring this event to such an iconic location. To make sure you don't miss any of the valuable presentations, we'll be recording each session, and the videos will be available post-event on Field Advisor's YouTube channel. We look forward to seeing you there!

January 16, 2025
Memorial Stadium • Champaign, Illinois



Agenda

8:30 AM: Registration/Continental Breakfast

9:00 AM: Welcome

9:15 AM: Dr. Fred Below,
Professor of Crop Physiology in the Department of Crop Sciences, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

10:00 AM: Dr. Connor Sible,
Research Assistant Professor, in the Department of Crop Sciences, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

10:30 AM: Break

10:45 AM: Dr. Scott H. Irwin,
Professor and Laurence J. Norton Chair of Agricultural Marketing in the Department of Agricultural & Consumer Economics, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

11:15 AM: Independent Crop Consultants Panel – Kyle Stull, CCA, Stull Agronomy; Karen Corrigan, CCA, McGillicuddy Corrigan Agronomics; and Kelly Robertson, CCA, Precision Crop Services, LLC

12:00 PM: Lunch and Field Advisor Award Ceremony – Honoring Jeremy Wilson, Master Adviser Award Recipient, and Brandon Hall, Dave Rahe Excellence in Soils Consulting Recipient.

1:00 PM: Breakout Sessions

- **Assessing Insect Pests Effects on Yield and ROI of Pest Control Inputs:** Dr. Nick Seiter, Assistant Professor and Illinois Extension Field Crops Entomologist, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
- **University of Illinois Breeding and Variety Trial Panel:** Dr. Jessica Rutkoski, Small Grains Breeder, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and Dr. Eliana Monteverde, Assistant Professor of Plant Breeding and Genetics, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Moderator: Jennifer Jones, CCA, ISA Research Specialist
- **Better Together Resource: GROW (Getting Rid of Weeds) and Take Action: Herbicide-Resistance Management,** Dr. Michael Flessner, Associate Professor and Extension Weed Science Specialist, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

2:00 PM: Breakout Sessions:

- **Soil-Residual Herbicide Injury Potential to Very Early Planting Soybeans and Documenting Group 15 Herbicide Resistance of Waterhemp:** Dr. Aaron Hager, Professor and Faculty Extension Specialist of Weed Science, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
- **Cover Crop Management Panel:** Dan Schaefer, Director of Nutrient Stewardship at Illinois Fertilizer & Chemical Association and Jim Isermann, Independent Agronomist, Moderator: Abigail Peterson, CCA, ISA Director of Agronomy
- **Better Together Resource: “Crop Protection Network: 10 Years of Extension”:** Dr. Daren Mueller, Professor and Extension Plant Pathologist, Iowa State University

3:00 PM: Breakout Sessions:

- **Soil Health and Water Quality:** Dr. Andrew Margenot, Associate Professor of Soil Science, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
- **Soybean Cyst Nematode Management Panel:** Dr. Jason Bond, Professor of Crops, Soil and Environmental Management, Southern Illinois University; Dr. Nathan Schroeder, Associate Professor of Crop Sciences, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign; and Dr. Matthew Hudson, Professor of Crop Sciences, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Moderator: Stephanie Porter, CCA, ISA Outreach Agronomist
- **Better Together Resource: Science for Success: “Bringing Soybean Research to Light:”** Dr. Giovanni Preza Fontes, Assistant Professor and Field Crops Extension Agronomist, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign



Illinois Soybean Growers: It's Not Just Politics, It's Personal



ANDREW LARSON | DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS
& STRATEGY | ILLINOIS SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION

As we look to close out another year and with the transition in power in Washington, we are reminded again of the need to be an active participant in our political process. Political decisions lead to policy decisions. As agriculture continues to be represented by fewer and fewer voices, we must redouble our efforts to be loud and active advocates for our farms. Throughout this year, Illinois Soybean Growers (ISG) and our members have been incredibly active as voices for agriculture. We've met with every one of our members of Congress. We have educated and lobbied several dozen state legislators. In every meeting, our goal first and foremost is to make sure that they understand the impact policy is having and could have on Illinois farmers. We use these meetings as one tool to share the voice of Illinois farmers directly with their elected officials on key issues. We also use tools such as the Illinois Soybean Growers Political Action Committee (ISGPAC) to place attention on the relationships that we have with our legislators. In **Field & Bean** this year you have heard directly from a few of the key legislators that we rely on day in and day out who are true friends of the Illinois soybean farmer.

As we look ahead into 2025 and a new administration in Washington, we will work to ensure that key voices are in positions of power and leadership who have connections to our farmers. We look at positions including those at the Risk Management Agency (RMA), Farm Services Agency (FSA), USDA at large, U.S. EPA and many other lesser-known positions. Additionally, there are several legislative matters that are still outstanding this year. Most notably at the federal level is the passage of a Farm Bill. The Farm Bill expired at the end of September, and Congress either needs to extend the 2018 Farm Bill once more or enact a new piece of legislation. ISG and American Soybean Association urge Congress pass a new Farm Bill that considers the current needs of Illinois and American soybean farmers. This includes ensuring protection for crop insurance as well as improving commodity support for soybean farmers. If Congress does not act by the end of this year, permanent law will be in place for many federal commodity programs. This outcome would be extremely disadvantageous and would lead to consumers and farmers both losing. Our organization will remain committed to engaging with our congressional delegation to pass a Farm Bill that meets the needs of Illinois soybean farmers.

At a higher level, before the Biden administration leaves office, it is expected that a rule will be re-

leased on the 45Z tax credit that implements portions of the new Clean Fuel Production Tax Credit as included in the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) passed in the summer of 2022. This transition replacing the Blenders Tax Credit that applied to biodiesel blends will have major impacts on the industry. Without clear guidance of how the new 45Z credit will work, challenges will be faced by both the biofuels industry as well as by farmers, who could benefit via their production practices under the new rule. Soybeans will be disadvantaged by losing over 60 cents per gallon of B100 produced under the new tax credit. We estimate that this will have at least a \$3,300 impact on every Illinois farmer.

ISG will be at the table, loudly and regularly advocating for solutions to these challenges that work in the favor of Illinois soybean farmers. We will also be engaged in a few other issues that you will hear more about in the months to come. That includes efforts to pass a low carbon fuel standard in Illinois and next steps on our newly passed carbon capture and sequestration legislation. We encourage you to participate in the annual ISG membership dinner and Soybean Summit events, where you'll be able to learn more about these key issues that are impacting the profitability of soybean farmers in Illinois. For more information, visit ilsoy.org.





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2025 EVENTS

Field Advisor Forum
January 16, 2025

ISG Member Dinner
February 10, 2025

Soybean Summit
February 10-11, 2025

Commodity Classic
March 2-4, 2025

ISG Town Halls
August 2025 (TBD)

Farm Progress Show
August 26-28, 2025

Impact Awards Banquet
December 2, 2025

SEE YOU NEXT YEAR!

To stay updated on Illinois Soybean Association events, please visit ilsoy.org/events