

MAY 2025

Illinois Field & Bean

A PUBLICATION OF THE ILLINOIS SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION

WHAT'S MY SOY CHECKOFF DONE FOR ME LATELY?

- ✓ MARKET DEVELOPMENT
- ✓ GOVERNMENT RELATIONS
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Visit us online at
www.ilsoy.org/newsroom/illinois-field-bean/



COVER: Learn how the ISA checkoff program is actively supporting you through updates on policy education, market development and soybean production. Plus, find out more about key checkoff programs that directly benefit your farm and bottom line.



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FROM THE BOARDROOM | Funded by the Illinois Soybean Checkoff

Specialty Soy for a Global Market



**BRYAN SEVERS | SOYBEAN PRODUCTION
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN | ILLINOIS
SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION**

While most of us are aware of our state's standing as the nation's No. 1 producer of soybeans, a much lesser-known fact is that Illinois is also the largest producer of non-GMO and identity preserved (IP) soybeans in the U.S. This, combined with our advantages in transportation, efficiency and quality, makes Illinois soy that much more competitive in the global marketplace.

Supporting specialty markets, the Specialty Soya and Grains Alliance (SSGA) is on the ground working to deliver traceable, high-quality and variety-specific field crops to markets around the world. As the business alliance for IP agriculture stakeholders in the U.S., SSGA is the leading voice for the specialty soy industry, and its members include producers, processors, suppliers and transportation allies whose work ensures integrity throughout the supply chain. SSGA is also supported by several state soybean checkoffs, including the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA), Michigan Soybean Committee, Minnesota Soybean Research & Promotion Council, Missouri Soybean Merchandising Council, North Dakota Soybean Council, Ohio Soybean Council, South Dakota Soybean Research & Promotion Council and Wisconsin Soybean Marketing Board.

As the newly elected Chairman of SSGA, I'm excited to bring my own experience growing 100% non-GMO soybeans to the table while representing my fellow specialty farmers and bringing more awareness to the benefits of IP commodities. The demand for high-quality, traceable products is on the rise, and it's more important than ever to showcase the advantages of U.S. specialty crops in meeting those needs.

Identity preservation ensures a specific crop is kept separate from others throughout its entire journey—from seed selection and planting to harvest, storage, transportation, processing and distribution. The goal is to maintain the crop's quality or traits as required by the end market, which not only guarantees customer satisfaction but also enhances the marketability of our products.

However, the key to IP is traceability, or the ability to track a crop's origin and handling with certainty. This traceability aspect is essential for ensuring the quality, consistency and safety of a commodity by verifying its source. Along with non-GMO varieties, IP commodities are gaining popularity in the global market as consumers and manufacturers demand greater transparency in food production.

As Illinois farmers, specialty or not, we supply the food, fuel and fiber that support communities at home and oceans away. And as consumer preferences shift—whether toward non-GMO, sustainably produced or traceable products—it's our responsibility to adapt, innovate and ensure we meet those needs. By investing in identity preservation, sustainable practices and supply chain management, Illinois farmers not only enhance our reputation as global leaders in agriculture but also open new markets, strengthen economic opportunities and ensure a resilient future for the next generation.

Your Voice, Your Investment, Your Future



JOHN LUMPE | CEO |
ILLINOIS SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION

Today's business-minded farmers watch every dollar, every day. Inputs, equipment, labor—it all comes down to making smart investments, expecting bigger returns. No matter the size of your farm, your Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) checkoff program is focused on creating value you can see and feel.

You trust us with something valuable—not just your checkoff dollars, but your belief that we'll put those dollars to work in ways that actually help you. That's why one of the most important things we do each year is ask what matters most to you in our annual Producer Sentiment Survey.

We want to know: What challenges are keeping you up at night? What's giving you hope? Where do you see opportunity? And most importantly—are we doing right by you?

This year, your answers told us a powerful story.

More than half of farmers surveyed said ISA adds value to their operation. That means we're on the right track, that our market-building, agronomic research, and our education and promotion efforts are connecting with farmers where it counts: in your soybean fields and in real-world conditions.

Biodiesel is one great example. More than 56% of farmers identified biofuels as the most promising soybean market. That tells us ISA's push to grow biodiesel demand is not just a smart bet, it's a direct response to farmer priorities. Whether it's securing infrastructure funding, providing research and information that advances policy or bringing partners to the table, we're making sure soy-based fuels will continue to drive our nation's energy future.

Here's what else we heard loud and clear:

- Market growth and export support remain top priorities. That tracks with what we're seeing globally. ISA is staying on the front lines, promoting Illinois soybeans abroad, protecting access to key markets and pushing for smart trade policy that benefits your farm.
- 61% of farmers say they're innovators or early adopters of technology. That's a clear signal that you're ready to embrace new tools as long as they're practical and profitable. So we're focused on solutions that don't just check a box but actually help you run your farm even better.
- 87% of you identified market volatility and input costs as top concerns. We hear you. These are challenging times, and ISA is doubling down on our educational outreach efforts in pursuit of common-sense regulation, cost-saving opportunities and protections that guard your bottom line.

We want you to know that your input doesn't sit on a shelf. It drives everything we do. Because at the end of the day, you've made an investment, and we will keep earning it.

We'll stay responsive, keeping your priorities front and center.

We'll stay proactive, seeking out the next opportunity before it becomes the next challenge.

And we'll stay focused, working every day to deliver outcomes that move this industry forward.

And while this year's survey numbers are encouraging, they're not a finish line. They're a reminder that we're on the right path, but there's still more to do. We will continue to grow more innovative and even more aligned with the realities you face every day. With your voice guiding us, we're building a future that's stronger, smarter and more resilient for every soybean farmer in Illinois.

It's important to note that members of our Government Relations team remain vital to our overall effort. Their work on issue education, and outreach keeps farmers informed about regulatory and policy matters that can impact the bottom line just as much as production. It's a partnership of purpose always focused on compliance—checkoff programs drive research and innovation, while Government Relations educates around policy implications. Look for more on this in our August "Regulatory Issue" of *Illinois Field & Bean*.



THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP

Illinois is the No. 1 producer of non-GMO, identity preserved and commodity soybeans in the U.S. Through a partnership with the Specialty Soya Grains Alliance, ISA ensures Illinois farmers continue to meet the rising global demand for specialty soy.



What's My Soy Checkoff Done For Me Lately?

By Eileen Pabst, International Markets Manager, and Emma Peters, International Markets Coordinator

Identifying genes for useful traits helps breeders develop improved varieties. Better tools pave the way for better decisions, and rapidly developing technology delivers new ways to raise our crops while sustaining the natural environment.

But what is the secret? How do the most successful soybean seeds go from lab to field?

Global demand for specialty and non-GMO soybeans is

on the rise in places such as Japan, South Korea and the European Union. Thanks to a longtime partnership between Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) and Specialty Soya and Grains Alliance (SSGA), Illinois soybean farmers—the top producers of specialty soy in the U.S.—are well positioned to grow their share of supply to this growing market.

ISA's collaboration began six years ago when SSGA was formed. The group brings together grain and oilseed producers, processors, suppliers and allies in transportation to build, grow and sustain a reliable system for soy and other

grains around the world. SSGA also receives support from the soybean checkoffs of Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin.

This year, the partnership is focused on three key areas:

- Continuing to differentiate specialty Illinois soybeans via SSGA's U.S. Identity Preserved (IP) Assurance Plan for premium prices and to counter-balance tariffs or economic challenges
- Engaging with more international customers to keep growing demand abroad
- Building out domestic transportation systems that

provide the backbone to trade

Illinois soybean farmers will benefit from SSGA's partnership thanks to the team's extensive expertise in global trade and international demand. They also serve as the voice of shippers and farmers, providing them and collaborators such as ISA with access to key markets.

IP Soybean Boom

Several factors are driving continued strong demand for IP and specialty soybeans. Collectively, they reflect a market

(See The Power of Partnership, page 8)



The Power of Partnership

(continued from page 7)

that's become more focused on product quality, more stringent in its documentation and reporting requirements, and more receptive to paying top dollar for sustainable soy.

Here's a closer look at some of the biggest trends lifting non-GMO and IP soybeans in the U.S. and abroad:

- **Premium Prices:** Farmers can often get a higher price for specialty soy compared to conventional commodity soy. That profitability depends on carefully segregating their crop to avoid commingling with

other grain and on managing logistics efficiently.

- **Contract Buying:** We encourage customers to consider forward contracting versus spot purchasing to ensure they are getting the product they request. This also allows farmers to be more strategic about planting.

- **Supply Chain Shifts:** There's increasing discussion

about ways to build and protect dedicated supply chains for specialty soy to avoid commingling from storage to transportation.

- **Sustainability and Traceability:** Today, more buyers are looking to purchase soybeans that come with sustainability certifications and verifiable traceability. And while climate policies and carbon footprint considerations might push some buyers to source soy closer to home, programs such as the U.S. Soy Sustainability Assurance Protocol (SSAP) ensure American farmers are meeting the expectation of sustainability.

- **Policy and Trade:** Regulations are constantly evolving, meaning farmers should stay engaged with organizations such as ISA, which monitors trade agreements, labeling laws and sustainability requirements to help farmers stay ahead of potential shifts.

With multiple layers and nuances adding complexity to the marketplace, ISA's partnership with SSGA is invaluable for helping farmers understand these dynamics more deeply and ride the demand curve.

IP Focus Improves Quality

ISA's work with SSGA means Illinois soybean farmers are increasingly positioned to serve a wider range of customer needs. Among the most pressing differentiators is soy quality.

Exporters and associations can differentiate soybeans produced in the U.S. by participating in the U.S. IP Assurance Plan, which SSGA created and manages. The program identifies and traces soy throughout the value chain to deliver the high-quality soybeans customers desire. It also provides documentation, ensuring customers get single-origin products from the U.S. within the specifications they request.

Identity preserved crops can



also be delivered in smaller shipments, a benefit to customers unable to handle a full bulk vessel.

Engage Future Markets

Illinois farmers export 60% of their soybeans to global markets. Yet producing only a single product—such as conventional GM soybeans alone—could be risky if the demand picture changes.

But because Illinois is the top-producing state of non-GMO and specialty soy in the U.S., farmers can meet the demand of diverse buyers and plug into those global channels with a variety of products to offer. ISA's investments in building and maintaining relationships with mature and developing markets also means that if economic headwinds emerge in one market, supplies can be re-directed to other markets where those conditions aren't present.

It's also important to remember that today's buyer portfolio is always subject to change. For example, a growing roster of emerging-market customers in Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia are likely to play an increasingly important role in the purchase of U.S. soy.

Illinois farmers interested in studying these and other dynamics are encouraged to follow along with ISA's Market Development department, which provides regular updates on global market conditions, its SSGA partnership and much more.

To learn about recent international travels, check out project highlights and catch up on the team's latest activities, head over to the Bean There Blog. Then, sign up for the Market Development team's monthly email for market insights, trends and farmer updates. For details on how to sign up, email ISA Communications Manager Olivia Key at olivia.key@ilsoy.org.

Farmers can also take this a step further and explore ways to grow specialty and non-GMO soybeans, either for the first time or in an expanded capacity. Get



SPECIALTY SOYA AND GRAINS ALLIANCE

Fast Facts About SSGA

Who: Specialty Soya and Grains Alliance (SSGA)

What: The business alliance of identity-preserved (IP) U.S. agriculture

When: Founded in 2019 via the merger of Midwest Shippers Association and Northern Food Grade Soybean Association

Where: Headquartered in Mankato, Minn., and

supported by Illinois Soybean Association and the soy checkoffs of Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin.

Why: The organization facilitates efforts to "build, grow and sustain a reliable supply chain that ensures integrity of the end product, with a commitment to quality, stewardship and innovation."

Learn More: soyagrainsalliance.org.



started by attending SSGA meetings, contacting local merchandisers about specialty and non-GMO contracts, or reaching out to ISA Market Development staff.

We live in a dynamic world in which commodity markets are constantly changing. But one

thing is certain: As consumer preferences change, buyers will seek value-enhanced crops to market their products at a premium. Identity preservation separates U.S. soybeans at large—and Illinois soybeans in particular—from their competitors, signifying

the premium quality our farmers are committed to producing.

Here at ISA, we'll continue working with SSGA and other partners to expand these markets and forge new buying relationships that can secure a bright future for Illinois farmers.



2025 Soybean Summit Replay

By Olivia Key, Illinois Field & Bean Assistant Editor
Photos by Lexi Schweigert, ISA Communications Specialist

The 2025 Soybean Summit was bigger and better than ever. Once a one-day agronomic event, Soybean Summit has developed into a two-day, cross-departmental experience packed with invaluable insights for soybean farmers.

With a dynamic lineup of industry experts, engaging breakout

and keynote sessions and an interactive trade show, this year's Summit reflected all aspects of ISA's work. Whether learning about biofuels, the current agricultural economy, global soy demand, the farm bill and policy or the latest in farm machinery, attendees left with a fresh perspective to navigate the year ahead.

In this photo recap, you'll find key moments from the Summit highlighting some of the speakers, sessions and connections that made this year's event one to remember.





ISA Chairman Ron Kindred (left) and CEO John Lumpe (right) took the stage to address attendees, sharing their insights and engaging with participants on the future of Illinois soybean farming.



LEFT: Attendees engage in keynote and breakout presentations by asking questions and making comments. RIGHT: Illinois Soybean Growers (ISG) hosted its second annual member dinner and auction, featuring Rob “The Shark Farmer” Sharkey and Mary Kay Thatcher of Syngenta.

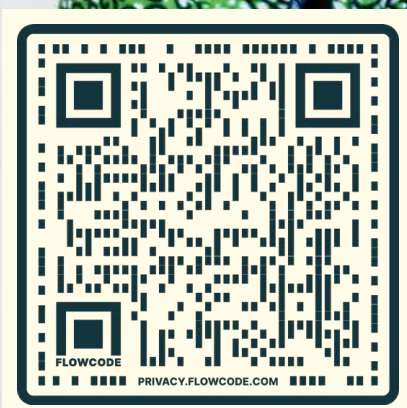


LEFT: Brianna Metts of the U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC) speaks with ISA staff members following her keynote presentation with colleague Ryan Olson. The session focused on strengthening the preference for U.S. soy amid rising global demand. RIGHT: The trade show featured exhibitors such as Aztoic, Pinion Global, Beck’s Hybrids, University of Illinois Center for Digital Agriculture, ISA’s LEAD Program and more.

Held each year at the I Hotel and Conference Center in Champaign, Ill., the Soybean Summit is an event you don’t want to miss. Stay tuned for more information on the 2026 Soybean Summit. For more information or to watch presentation recordings, visit ilsoy.org/soybean-summit.



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Your Checkoff, Your Payoff

How ISA Agronomy Delivers Results in Your Fields

*By Kelsey Litchfield, Agronomic
Outreach Manager, Illinois Soybean
Association*

Illinois farmers invest in the soybean checkoff, but what do those dollars really do for you? The Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) Agronomy team is focused on providing farmers with independent, research-backed resources and services that drive profitability, stewardship and high yields. Through on-farm trials, digital tools, farmer education and agronomic research, ISA checkoff investments are making a direct impact across the state.

In this article, members of the ISA Agronomy team, located throughout the state, share how they are using checkoff funding to support farmers with practical information, new

research and hands-on assistance.

**Abigail Peterson, CCA,
Director of Agronomy,
Northern Illinois**

"My priority is to ensure checkoff dollars work for Illinois farmers by strengthening agronomic research and addressing unmet needs in soybean production. Each year, I challenge our funded programs to provide solutions for farmers statewide.

When I started at ISA, we aligned our goals to investigate the science behind key issues related to carbon sequestration, conservation within soybean systems management and targeted integrated pest management threats. With our farmer-driven strategic plan, we meet regional needs, support conservation to reduce

nutrient loss and engage farmers with checkoff-funded research for operational improvements.

For the 2026 proposals, my efforts are to challenge the team, farmers and industry to develop the next round of checkoff funds to make the difference needed for advancing soybean production systems."

**Stephanie Porter, CCA,
Outreach Agronomist, South
Central Illinois**

"The 2024 planting season included several planting windows and some replanting. After heavy midseason rains, I received calls about sparse soybean stands in certain fields. If it wasn't hail, slugs, herbicide or human error, what else could be causing it? I often visit fields across Illinois to provide an

unbiased, 'boots on the ground' assessment.

In this case, the seed was initially described as poor quality, which could have contributed to the stand issues. However, closer inspection revealed scattered dead plants of a particular soybean variety. Some plants showed signs of *Phytophthora* root rot, including a curled top and a dark canker at the stem base. You can always send samples to a diagnostic clinic for confirmation. I shared my analysis from this visit, along with management recommendations, in the Field Advisor Field Notes Blog and Crop Report. We will continue conducting these 'boots on the ground' assessments during the 2025

(See Your Checkoff,
Your Payoff, page 14)

Your Checkoff, Your Payoff

(continued from page 13)

growing season. Follow along at ***FieldAdvisor.org***."

Stacy Zuber, Ph.D., Research Data Scientist, East Central Illinois

"Farmers make an incredible number of management decisions before, during and after every growing season. One key question is whether applying sulfur can improve soybean yields. Other factors must also be considered: How much is needed to make a difference? What is the return on investment?"

The ISA On-Farm Trial Network aims to answer these questions and support farmers in their decision-making. For

2025, a protocol was developed to test whether soybean yields respond to sulfur fertilization and, if so, under what conditions. Collaboration with researchers ensured the protocol addressed the right questions without duplicating previous studies.

This year, 18 on-farm sites across Illinois will implement the sulfur protocol and treatment. By winter, the results are expected to provide farmers with valuable insights into the effectiveness of sulfur applications and their potential benefits for soybean production."

Connie Copley, Agronomy Team Coordinator, Central Illinois

"As agronomy team coordinator, my biggest takeaways on 'what has the checkoff done' for farmers lately include engage-

ment, communications, outreach and education.

As part of the newly formed ISA Agronomy team, I plan and execute activities that increase engagement. I use various communication channels to address statewide questions and report back to farmers through our platforms.

Our website was recently refreshed, rebranded and filled with information. ***FieldAdvisor.org*** is a primary tool, housing field day schedules, research, podcasts, crop reports and blogs.

I also help produce educational resources like webinars and brochures while supporting youth education at statewide events."

Deanna Burkhart, Producer and Field Services Administrator, Central Illinois

"Illinois farmers have an opportunity to collaborate directly with

ISA to address field-related questions and drive on-farm research. The ISA On-Farm Trial Network is a project funded by the checkoff that allows Illinois farmers to engage with ISA Agronomy Team members and university researchers. We are working together to implement on-farm trials that are intended to support critical agronomic decisions. Current trials explore soybean sulfur fertilization, cover crop impacts on soil health, the return on investment for insecticide seed treatments and foliar insecticide applications.

Farmers who participate have the opportunity to provide their input on future research priorities in small groups and one-to-one conversations. This collaboration reinforces that the work funded by the checkoff directly benefits soybean growers.

Illinois farmers interested in more information about the ISA





On-Farm Trial Network should sign up at fieldadvisor.org/on-farm-trial-network/ to be among the first to hear about research results and on-farm trial opportunities."

Jennifer Jones, CCA, Research Specialist, Southeast Illinois

"The ISA Agronomy Team ensures checkoff-funded research is driven by input from Illinois farmers and advisers. Each year, we administer an anonymous Soybean Production Concerns Survey to gather research questions from farmers. This year, over 150 people completed the survey. We use the results to guide research through the ISA On-Farm Trial Network and share them with trusted university partners for unbiased studies. Researchers applying for checkoff funding are encouraged to use the survey results to align trials with farmer interests.

If you haven't taken the survey yet, it is open year-round at [FieldAdvisor.org/current-projects](https://fieldadvisor.org/current-projects). Scroll to the bottom and click 'Take our survey.' While you're

there, take a minute to check out the current research projects funded by the Illinois checkoff. I hope you'll be excited to see the research your checkoff has been doing for you lately."

Lauran Hill, Agronomic Outreach Coordinator, Northern Illinois

"As the agronomic outreach coordinator on the ISA Agronomy team, I help ensure that checkoff funds are reinvested into valuable services, support, information and advancements in future technologies for farmers. My role in this mission focuses on marketing, design, promotion and content creation.

We conduct research, compile valuable data and share them with our farmer audience. From designing flyers, postcards and signs that showcase our services and research findings to hosting field days that highlight researchers and their results, as well as attending local dealer field nights to distribute and circulate this

information, we serve as an essential, unbiased information hub for farmers. Our goal is to provide accessible, actionable information that supports farmers' success, incorporating feedback and experiences from local producers."

Kelsey Litchfield, Agronomic Outreach Manager, West Central Illinois

"As a farmer, you need independent, research-backed information to make the best decisions for your operation. That's where your checkoff comes in. Funded by the ISA checkoff program, [FieldAdvisor.org](https://fieldadvisor.org) delivers unbiased agronomic information across digital platforms. Every day, I share data-driven content from our ISA Agronomy team and expert contributors—including blogs, daily social media updates, monthly webinars and weekly podcast episodes—to keep you informed. I manage this platform so you have timely, research-backed information at your fingertips, helping you make the best decisions for your farm.

Backed by your checkoff dollars, this resource delivers expert perspectives on crop production, soil health, pest management, conservation practices and more—all designed to help you improve yields and profitability. No sales pitches, just trusted, practical information tailored to your farm's success. Your checkoff dollars work for you, ensuring you have access to the knowledge you need, when and where you need it."

Your Illinois soybean checkoff dollars are working for you, providing research-driven information, on-farm trials and agronomic expertise to help improve your operation. Don't miss out on these valuable resources. Visit [FieldAdvisor.org](https://fieldadvisor.org) to explore current research, sign up for updates and take part in upcoming trials and educational opportunities.

Let us know what challenges you're facing—your feedback helps shape future research and ensures checkoff investments continue to deliver results for Illinois farmers.

An aerial photograph showing a long, straight dirt road that stretches from the foreground into the distance, bisecting vast, green soybean fields. The fields are planted in neat, parallel rows, creating a strong sense of perspective. In the far distance, a line of trees and some small buildings are visible under a cloudy sky.

The Impact of Federal and Illinois Estate Taxes on Illinois Soybean Farmers

By Collin Cisco, Farm Policy Manager, Illinois Soybean Association

Estate taxes play a crucial role in Illinois soybean farmers' financial planning. As the spring legislative session in Springfield enters its final weeks, key provisions of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) are approaching their expiration at the end of 2025. This article explores how federal and Illinois state estate tax laws affect soybean farmers and what the expiration of TCJA provisions means for the future of family-owned farms.

Illinois State Estate Tax

In addition to federal estate taxes, Illinois imposes its own estate tax with an exemption threshold of \$4 million, substantially lower than the current

federal exemption. Unlike the federal estate tax, which applies only to the portion exceeding the exemption, the Illinois tax applies to the entire estate value once it surpasses \$4 million. As a result, even smaller farms that might not be subject to federal estate tax could still face substantial state-level estate taxes. Illinois soybean farmers often have landholdings and assets exceeding this exemption, making them particularly vulnerable. The state's estate tax structure includes 20 different tax brackets ranging from 0.8% to 16%. When combined with federal estate taxes, the financial burden on heirs can be significant, further complicating succession planning.

Federal Estate Tax and the TCJA Expiration

Illinois farmers must pay not only the federal estate tax but

also the Illinois estate tax with an exemption stands at approximately \$13.99 million per individual (\$27.98 million for married couples). However, unless Congress extends this provision, the exemption will revert to pre-TCJA levels in 2026, estimated to be around \$7 million per individual, adjusted for inflation. For Illinois soybean farmers, this reduction could lead to substantial tax liabilities. Farmland values in Illinois are among the highest in the Midwest, with prime cropland averaging over \$10,000 per acre. Many farm estates, including land, equipment and other assets, could easily surpass the reduced exemption threshold, making them subject to federal estate tax rates of up to 40% on the excess value.

Challenges for Farm Succession and Family-Owned Farms

The combination of a low-

er federal exemption and the already-stringent Illinois estate tax presents several challenges for Illinois soybean farmers. More farm estates will become taxable at both the federal and state levels, increasing financial liabilities for heirs. Families might be forced to sell farmland to cover estate taxes, disrupting multigenerational farm operations. More farm families will need to invest in estate planning services, including legal and financial advisory fees, to navigate the complex tax landscape. Smaller family farms could struggle to absorb the financial impact, leading to consolidation and increased ownership by larger corporate entities.

(See The Impact of Federal and Illinois Estate Taxes on Illinois Soybean Farmers, page 14)



The Impact of Federal and Illinois Estate Taxes on Illinois Soybean Farmers

(continued from page 17)

What ISG is Doing

Addressing Illinois estate tax law has been a top priority for Illinois Soybean Growers (ISG). Over the past few years, ISG has worked diligently to build relationships with legislators, both in D.C. and Springfield, to push for estate tax reforms that lessen the financial burden

on soybean producers and facilitate generational farm transfers. ISG has collaborated with state agencies and the General Assembly to introduce legislation aimed at reducing tax liabilities for family farms and simplifying the estate tax process.

One key reform ISG has championed is restructuring the Illinois estate tax to ensure the \$4 million exemption is a true exemption, meaning estates would only be taxed on the value exceeding \$4 million rather than the entire estate value once the threshold is crossed. Additionally, ISG has advocated for reducing

the current 20 tax brackets to just four, implementing a progressive-flat tax structure to simplify estate planning and tax compliance. The proposed new tax brackets are:

- 5% for estates between \$4 million and \$10 million
- 10% for estates between \$10 million and \$20 million
- 16% for estates between \$20 million and \$25 million
- 22% for estates over \$25 million

This structure would lessen tax liabilities on the lower end while increasing tax rates for the highest-value estates. Importantly, this legislation impacts all estates, not just

agricultural ones. Additionally, ISG has focused on simplifying the estate tax process, as current complexities and the loss of attorneys specializing in estate tax law have made it increasingly difficult for farmers to maximize their estate planning and effectively pass down their farms.

Legislative Outlook

One of the major challenges facing the Illinois General Assembly is the state's significant budget crisis, with a projected \$1.7 billion deficit for fiscal year 2026. The Committee on Government Forecasting and Accountability has forecasted



an even larger shortfall. With legislators emphasizing the need to balance the budget, any new legislation must be revenue-neutral to have a realistic chance of passing. Understanding these fiscal constraints, ISG has worked to craft an estate tax bill that does not add to the budget deficit while still providing relief to farm families. With the spring legislative session scheduled to wrap up by May 31, ISG remains hopeful that these reforms can be included in legislative negotiations, ensuring that family farms are better preserved for future generations.

At the federal level, the House is aiming to pass a reconciliation bill that includes extensions of the TCJA provisions, including estate tax relief, stepped-up basis and other generational tax benefits. ISG has been actively engaging with members of the Illinois delegation, particularly those on the House Ways and Means Committee, to voice strong support for renewing the current estate tax laws. However, the outcome remains uncertain, as some estimates suggest that extending all TCJA provisions could add over \$4 trillion to the national debt over the next decade. Fiscal

conservatives in Congress are likely to demand further debate before any action is taken. On the Senate side, Majority Leader John Thune (R-SD) has indicated that tax issues might be deferred until later in the year, adding another layer of uncertainty to the process.

Conclusion

The impending expiration of TCJA estate tax provisions and Illinois' restrictive estate tax laws pose significant challenges for soybean farmers seeking to preserve their family legacies. Without legislative action, higher tax burdens could force land sales, disrupt generation-

al farm transfers and increase financial strain on Illinois farm families. ISG remains committed to advocating for tax reforms that protect farm estates, reduce financial burdens and ensure a smoother transition for the next generation of soybean farmers. By working with legislators at both the state and federal levels, ISG aims to create a more favorable estate tax structure that allows family farms to thrive for years to come. As the legislative process unfolds, ISG will continue to play a key role in shaping policies that support Illinois agriculture and preserve the livelihoods of farm families across the state.





SpringBoard 2025 Opens the Door to Innovation, New In-State Markets

April Event United Stakeholders to Innovate, Diversify Illinois Soybean Market Opportunities

By IL Field & Bean Team

Illinois soybean farmers produced 688 million bushels in 2024, giving the state a competitive market advantage in both quantity and quality. As a result, Illinois soybeans are paving a stronger path forward for the state's economy, especially in the rural communities that farmers and their families call home.

Connecting Illinois soybeans—and the farmers who produce them—with the inno-

vators driven to find new uses for the crop was the main goal of the Soy Innovation Center SpringBoard 2025 event held April 15-16 at Distillery Labs in Peoria. The event brought together the state's top soybean farmers, public and private researchers, companies developing new uses for the state's soybeans and venture capitalists who can provide funding to make it all happen.

The event, co-hosted by the Illinois Innovation Network, the Soy Innovation Center (SIC)

and the Institute for Work & the Economy, focused on how all parties can work together on market-moving innovations that can yield both short- and long-term financial gains for farmers and their communities. The lasting impact of the event—also made possible by the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA)—will extend well beyond the state's soybean fields.

The SpringBoard event is a key platform for sharing valuable research findings, best management practices and

market insights. SpringBoard provided Illinois soybean farmers, researchers and companies the knowledge and connections they need to innovate, collaborate and succeed.

Topics included the latest advancements in soybean-based materials for manufactured goods, sustainable agriculture practices and emerging markets for bio-based products. The lineup featured farmers and other experts in agricultural technology and commercialization.

Presenters included: ISA CEO John Lumpe; Jeannette Tamayo, Interim Executive Director of the Illinois Innovation Network; Doug Cruitt, Executive Director of Distillery Labs; CLO of Airable Research Labs Barry McGraw; ISA Director of Market Development Todd Main; and ISA At-Large Director Scott Gaffner.

"With the SpringBoard event, we're capitalizing on the assets that exist in Illinois beyond what the farmers produce," said Main. "We have world-class research facilities and researchers, financial mechanisms and firms that can support innovation, and the ability to put it all together to create new opportunities and good jobs in our rural communities. We wanted to plant a flag so the research community knows we're focused on creating an ecosystem to advance new market opportunities for Illinois soybean farmers, innovators and rural communities across the state."

Participants learned about cutting-edge research, explored potential new revenue streams, and connected with industry stakeholders shaping the future of agriculture. The event was geared to highlight new demand streams for Illinois soybeans and create market-based results to build rural economic vitality and opportunity.

In addition to headlining speakers, roundtables on the first day featured:

- The state of R&D and innovation
- Industry interests, opportunities and problems to be solved
- The state of affairs at Illinois research institutions

Day two topics included views from the venture capital investment community, the Central Illinois Innovation Corridor, the Soy Innovation Center's Springboard Challenge and ways to build a sustainable innovation ecosystem for agricultural product innovation.

The event also included a tour of the USDA-ARS National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research in Peoria.

Given the resources in the state from the soybean field to the consumer, it's a market development model unique to Illinois that Main and others are intent on growing throughout the state's economy. As soybean farmers continue to push the crop yield threshold higher, the industry needs to keep pace with market development. That's where the soybean checkoff enters the equation.

According to ISA District 2 Director Steve Pitstick, who farms near Maple Park, SpringBoard 2025 was about directing as much energy toward new uses within state lines as is directed toward developing markets overseas. Just as Pitstick and other farmers work to maximize soybean yields, so too must checkoff-funded market development activities work to expand the number of ways the crop is utilized in the broad marketplace.

"As farmers, we're trying to raise more soybeans every year as the industry brings us higher-yielding varieties," Pitstick said. "With the check-off, we're trying to match that pace by finding that next buyer through new uses, like in the industrial sector where we can replace petroleum products. The SpringBoard event was a sort of cross-pollination where we brought together farmers, researchers, scientists and industry members to find the next way we can collaborate to build new demand."

Although building new demand for Illinois soybeans is fundamental, SpringBoard did much more than that. The event served as an early step in the process of building an entrepreneurial ecosystem to generate new ideas, build new businesses and provide the resources those businesses need to succeed.

Event Highlighted Promise for Rural Illinois

According to Peter Creticos, Executive Director of the Institute for Work & the Economy, a workforce and economic development policy collaborative, that process needs to include everyone from initial innovators and soybean farmers to venture capitalists who can breathe life into the new businesses and demand drivers through funding.

"We want to encourage both established and new businesses rooted in innovation to invest in the farming communities many of them already call home," Creticos said. "That effort can create new vitality in those communities through economic returns on investment for the businesses themselves as well as opportunities for residents. It all starts with people coming forward with their new ideas."

But it's not just about new businesses. Given the competitive advantages in the state, Creticos said, SpringBoard and similar events are important in launching innovations that not only create new economic opportunity but do so where Illinois soybean farmers and their families call home.

"When a company is located 60 miles away and members of a community have to pick up, drive 60 miles to work and 60 miles back, it can really be disruptive to the culture of a community," Creticos said. "We are working with all stakeholders

to weave innovative businesses into the fabric of our communities in ways that improve the quality of life for farm families."

Multiplying the Value of the Soybean Checkoff

Key agronomic advances to evolve soybean production and overseas market development work are two big pieces of the foundation of the soybean checkoff's value to farmers. The SpringBoard event represented the convergence of Illinois farmers' advanced capabilities to grow the increasingly valuable crop and similar market development, within the state's borders. The event will help keep crop revenue at home and bolster the communities dotting rural Illinois that are so important to the success and vitality of thousands of farm families.

"Checkoff programs spend a lot of energy and money on the agronomy side, with new farming technologies and ways to improve crop yields," Creticos said. "This is one of the ways that spending touches a new way to diversify markets for the crop. ISA is really looking at the full equation—what's pulling prices and what's 'moving the pile of soybeans.' There will be long-term benefits for soybean farmers, but these efforts also will show benefits fairly quickly, too. It's exciting to see how much of a positive impact such an event can have for rural economic development in our state."





See for Yourself

By Johnathan Griffel,
2024 20 Under 40 Farmer

As farmers, we have a lot of jobs. We must be accountants, agronomists, repairmen and marketing experts, on top of being parents, siblings, and sons and daughters. We are incredibly involved in all the steps of producing a crop and marketing it to our local elevator, processor or terminal. We can't

possibly have the bandwidth to foster relationships in foreign markets and governments to create outlets for our grain to be sold. Luckily, this is where checkoffs step in. Checkoffs build the relationships necessary to continue to expand our market share around the world and keep our farms profitable. It is something I hadn't even considered, but after participating in See for Yourself 2025 to Guatemala and Honduras,

I have a terrific appreciation for all of the tremendous work being done on our behalf.

We started out by visiting Zamarano University, the premier agricultural university in Central America. Zamarano is a work-study university where the students start school at 6 a.m., and spend the morning in class. In the afternoon, they go get hands-on practice in their fields for 11 months out of the year for four years. These students are

incredibly dedicated and motivated to learn all they can and not only advance themselves but also their families.

While at Zamarano, we took some time to learn about U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC) and World Initiative for Soy in Human Health (WISHH). These are programs that are funded through the United Soybean Board (USB). WISHH serves as the catalyst for

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See for Yourself

(continued from page 23)

trade by identifying and fostering relationships in developing markets. WISHH has been in Guatemala for decades, and one of the projects they were working on there was a soy milk crusher for a rural school. This benefits the students by providing them with much-needed protein while creating a preference for U.S. soy

products. Once the market reaches a certain point, it moves onto USSEC, which develops strategic business relationships and works to provide educational resources that inform buyers of the advantages of using U.S. soy products.

We met with many commercial buyers of U.S. soy during our mission, including the tilapia supplier for Costco stores in the U.S. We also visited Comayma, one of the largest animal-feed producers, the

largest processed food manufacturer and one of the largest poultry and egg producers in the nation. There were two common themes in our visits with these buyers. The first was that they have a strong preference for U.S. soy products because of the higher feed quality and because of the sustainability we can provide. The second was that all of them have utilized Soy Excellence Center (SEC) trainings for their workforce

development and to headhunt for management.

It was incredible to see this long-term strategy of investing in education and relationships come to fruition. It wasn't a one-sided deal where we looked to win at the expense of others. Rather, it reflected the style of business I learned on my farm. Both sides worked together and benefited. An educated buyer base will value U.S. soy products, which helps



create a larger market share for us in a growing economy while the students going through the training are able to grow themselves and change the economic outlook for their family while making a difference in their home country. We had the opportunity to meet many Zamarano graduates throughout our tours and the honor of being guests at an SEC graduation ceremony. It was incredible to meet all of these ambitious and driven individuals who were so incredibly thankful for the investment that was made in their education. The graduates of this program will go forth and be managers, CEOs and even entrepreneurs in the agricultural industry, and we will have a

strong relationship going forward with them. I believe the future is bright in Central America both as a market and region, and USB's investment in people is a large reason why.

The other key takeaway I had from this mission was infrastructure. I will never complain about waiting at a terminal again, (although I suspect I will have a short memory on this vow). The boats at the port we visited sometimes wait 30 to 60 days to unload. The line of semis waiting to enter the port was more than two miles long. This wait time doesn't only affect the people in Guatemala and Honduras, it affects us as farmers. When boats

are forced to wait at port, it increases the cost of corn and soybeans by 50 cents per bushel and can lead to spoilage that makes our grain more expensive. As a result, our soybeans become less competitive. We felt the full force of this infrastructure issue while we were traveling. It would take two-plus plus hours to travel 30 miles, which is unfathomable for a farmer who is used to covering 30 miles in 30 minutes with limited obstructions. There are plans in place to solve some of these infrastructure issues, but it takes time and capital, something which is in short supply at times.

I am honored to have been able to participate in See for Yourself. I

was able to see incredible sights, learn a vast amount about what happens to our soybeans once they leave the farm, and most of all meet terrific people. It was incredible to see the scale of the operations that USB, WISHH and USEEC staff and board members are executing on a daily basis that advances U.S. soy and creates new markets for us. I have always felt like my local farming community and business were built on relationships. Although that's not always how the rest of the world works, it is how it works in agriculture around the world. USB is building markets, forging relationships and changing lives all around the world.



Partner Perspective: Practical Guide to Meet Runoff Mitigation Point Requirements Under EPA's Strategy

Christopher Hassinger,
Exposure Modeling Scientist, BASF

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) developed its Herbicide Strategy to protect endangered and threatened species and their habitats from potential impacts of herbicides. Based on the properties of the pesticide, target crops and directions for use, the Herbicide Strategy determines the necessary spray drift and runoff/erosion mitigations for product use. Spray drift mitigations include drift buffers, which are influenced by nozzle selection, release (boom) height and adjuvants (DRAs). To address off-target movement via runoff/erosion, EPA established a mitigation point system in which the number of points required is based on the pesticide's potential for moving off-target to areas of potential endangered species habitat. Eventually, all herbicide products will be assessed using the Herbicide Strategy and will be assigned mitigation point requirements.

Pesticide products that have been assessed using the Herbicide Strategy will generally have between three to nine runoff mitigation points. For example, Liberty® ULTRA Herbicide requires three points, indicating it has a low runoff vulnerability. There are multiple ways to obtain points, starting with "baseline" points (as described below) and then assessing points in a sequential manner. The information and approach outlined in this article demonstrates that most Illinois soybean growers should be able to obtain nine points.

To assist growers in achieving points, EPA developed a "reduced

runoff vulnerability map," which groups counties into the following categories based on runoff vulnerability categories of high, medium, low or very low (the number in parenthesis indicates the number of Illinois counties):

- High: Counties receive zero mitigation points (11)
- Medium: Counties receive two mitigation points (89)
- Low: Counties receive three mitigation points (2)
- Very low: Counties receive six mitigation points (0)

These points are available for all agricultural fields within a given county with no action needed from the grower. In addition, one mitigation point is available for documenting that the mitigation point requirement has been met for the field. For example, for a low runoff vulnerability county (e.g., Piatt County), three points are given based on the runoff classification of the county and, provided that proper documentation of mitigation points is maintained,

four total points are available.

After identifying baseline mitigation points, additional points are available for field characteristics, cropping practices and active participation in runoff reduction and soil conservation programs. These points give credit for inherent properties of the fields and practices that growers have already implemented or can implement. Figure 1 shows a recommended process that growers could adopt to check for all available field points. First, the county map of Illinois, which reflects the runoff vulnerability classification from EPA, should be used to identify the county in which the application is being made. Then, for this color category and beginning with "Baseline Mitigation Points," work down the table and begin adding up points for relevant point categories. The table provides a partial list of the most common mitigation measures for Illinois growers. Figure 1 also provides an example of a low,

medium and high runoff vulnerability county and potential points based on common practices in these counties. Please note that these are provided as examples and do not necessarily apply for your fields. To track points on a field-by-field basis, EPA's mitigation calculator should be used. Once completed, the calculator can be printed or stored electronically for documentation.

The process outlined in Figure 1 must be done on a field-by-field basis. Only after all mitigation points have been counted for existing processes and documented should the grower consider adopting new mitigation practices (using the picklist) if additional points are needed for a specific field. If the number of points for a specific field does not meet the required points for product use, EPA's mitigation option picklist should be consulted.

For additional details and resources, go to www.ilsoy.org/illinois-field-bean.

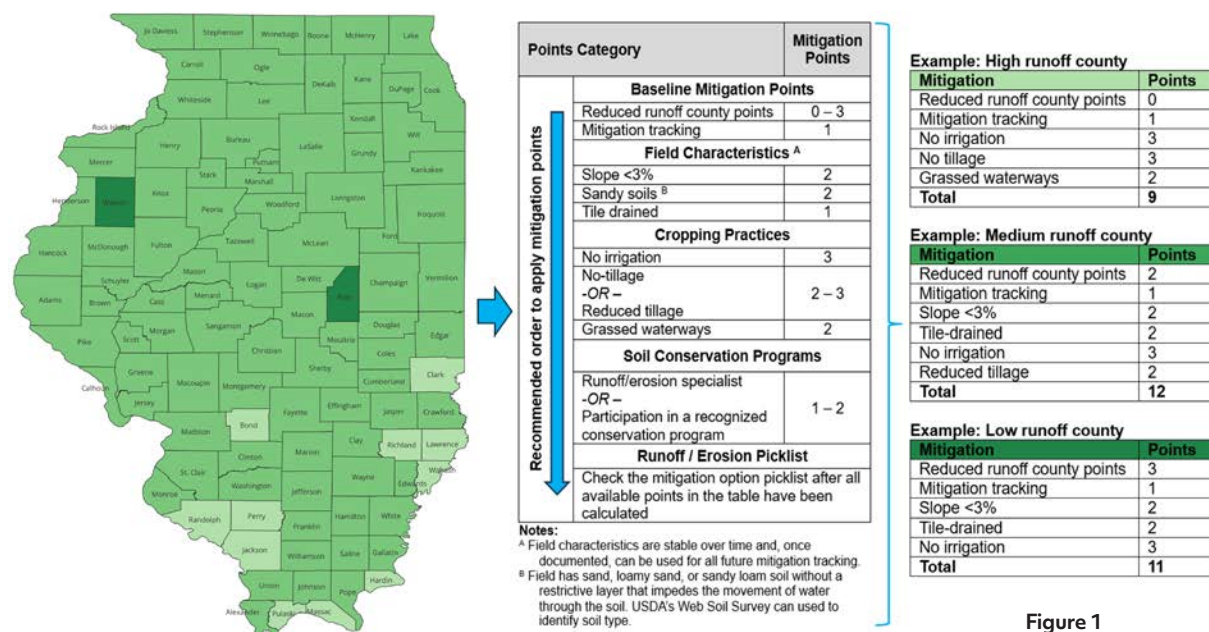


Figure 1



FROM INVESTMENT



TO PRODUCTIVITY

The Soy Checkoff invests in research to increase farm productivity, earning a nearly \$6-to-\$1 return¹ on that investment. This translates to increased yields, improved quality, and enhanced global competitiveness.



Learn more at unitedsoybean.org/bettertogether

¹ ROI: Kaiser, H.M. 2024. An Economic Analysis of the United Soybean Board and Qualified State Soybean Boards' Demand- and Supply-Enhancing Programs. Cornell University. © 2025 United Soybean Board

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