

NOVEMBER 2025

Illinois Field & Bean

A PUBLICATION OF THE ILLINOIS SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION

THE FUTURE IS IN THE FIELD

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COVER: This issue of *Illinois Field & Bean* showcases how the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) is driving innovation in soybean production by investing in farmer-led research and equipping growers with tools for the future. From the new ISA Agronomy Farm to advancements in on-farm trials, conservation-focused research projects and nematode management, explore insights into the cutting-edge work shaping Illinois agriculture.



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On the Farm and Online



**HEATH HOUCK | SOYBEAN PRODUCTION
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN |
ILLINOIS SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION**

As the recently elected Soybean Production Committee Chairman, I'm excited to use my first *Illinois Field & Bean* column to highlight the expansive efforts of the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) Agronomy team.

Farming looks different across Illinois, and this 10-person, all-female team is dedicated to providing soybean farmers with the tools and resources needed to enhance on-farm profitability and manage crop production risks. Spread across nearly every corner of our state, each team member brings the unique insights and experiences that reflect the real needs of Illinois farmers.

Every farmer who grows corn, soybeans or wheat in Illinois can discover valuable insights for their operation on **FieldAdvisor.org**. From region-specific updates during the growing season and results from ISA-funded research to frequent weather updates and tailored agronomic advice, Field Advisor delivers practical, timely information - all the time, right at our fingertips.

In the last issue of *Illinois Field & Bean*, "Soy Around the World," you not only read about ISA's forward-looking international market development efforts, but you also might've caught the Soybean Production Committee's list of farmer-driven, check-off-funded research happening in fiscal year 2026. Each of these projects has been chosen carefully based on science and the real needs of Illinois farmers. With multiple current and past projects covering pest management, conservation practices and in-season agronomy, you can follow updates and findings year-round at **FieldAdvisor.org**.

Also on **FieldAdvisor.org**, you'll find information about how to participate in the On-Farm Trial Network (OFTN), a program designed to function as the bridge between Illinois farms and university and industry research. Through OFTN, the team facilitates field-scale crop trials across a wide range of weather, soils and locations throughout Illinois, further enhancing the validity of research results.

At the ISA Agronomy Farm in Heyworth, Ill., the team conducts trials that complement ongoing, checkoff-funded university research to create applicable results for Illinois farmers. It also serves as a dedicated and centralized location to demonstrate trials for soybeans, corn and wheat, as well as cover crops, pollinator habitats and nutrient management practices to our policymakers and visiting trade delegations.

The ISA Agronomy team is working on behalf of every Illinois soybean farmer, whether it's digitally through **FieldAdvisor.org**, statewide on-farm trials or demonstrations at the ISA Agronomy Farm. Combined, these efforts ensure farmers have access to reliable, applicable and field-tested information that strengthens our operations. As your Soybean Production Committee Chairman, I encourage you to take advantage of these resources, stay connected through Field Advisor, and consider getting involved in future on-farm trials. Together, we're making sure checkoff investments deliver results where they matter most: on Illinois farms.



The Future Is in Your Field

The title of this issue of *Illinois Field & Bean Magazine*, "The Future is in the Field," is a statement your team at the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) takes seriously. The future of Illinois farming is literally growing in your fields; it's built on your informed decisions, and it's shaped by the work you put in, from pre-plant to harvest and beyond.

This has been a tough year for Illinois farmers. Between unpredictable weather and tight margins from higher input costs and lower market prices, it's in seasons such as this when the value of your ISA check-off and membership programs really shows up. Our volunteer Board of Directors ensures that we continue to invest in research, innovation and market diversification to help you succeed, one year at a time.

A Farm Built for Farmers

Just before the Farm Progress Show this year, we officially introduced the ISA Agronomy Farm—a nearly 100-acre site focused 100% on farmer-led research. It's located right here in central Illinois and is dedicated to solving real-world production challenges you face in your fields.

This initiative will lead to practical, field-level insights. We're testing practices, tools and ideas that can make your farm more profitable, more economically sustainable and better prepared for what's ahead.

Our farmer Board Directors had the vision to make this farm a reality. Now we have a testing ground where we can provide demonstrations and education. We can pressure-test agronomic innovations before you put them into practice. Our farmers can't afford big risks right now, and the ISA Agronomy Farm is one more way ISA will arm you with science-backed data to help you make the most informed management decisions.

On-Farm Trials: Research Where It Counts

You'll also read in this issue about our On-Farm Trial Network. This program connects university research with real farmers. We're bringing trials to your fields at scale.

Why? Because what works in a test plot doesn't always work in the real world. That's why we're giving farmers such as you the tools and support to test out new practices on your own acres—and sharing what we learn with everyone.

I encourage you to sign up for an on-farm trial or reach out to our Agronomy team for support.

Conservation That Pays

Another big focus of our FY26 work is conservation. More than half of our agronomic research projects selected by your ISA Board of Directors will zero in on cover crops, double cropping and better residue



JOHN LUMPE | CEO |
ILLINOIS SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION

management. These practices are good for the soil, and when implemented right, they can help your bottom line, too.

Here's even better news: There's funding available to help you try these practices. Our team is working to make sure farmers understand how to tap into U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) from agencies such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). If you're already doing some of these practices, or just thinking about it, we offer strategies to help find money to get it done.

Investing in Innovation

Earlier this fall, we announced our SpringBoard Seed Challenge winners at the Illinois Innovation Network's Research Conference. The research contracts were awarded to innovative groups looking to develop new tools and new markets for soybeans in the areas of bioplastics, bio lubricants, PFAS substitutes and rare-earth minerals. We are committed to diversifying our global customer base, and these initiatives help ensure the long-term viability of Illinois soy markets.

We've also just launched the Soy New Uses International Commercialization Initiative. The goal of this new initiative is to develop a framework for packaging soy-based products and distributing them globally to companies around the world. We look forward to sharing more details as this program gets underway.

You Lead the Way

Although we know our work at ISA is vital, the true future of Illinois soybeans rests with you, Illinois soybean farmers, in your fields. You are the boots on the ground, and the backbone of our great nation. You take the risks. Our job is to make sure you're doing it with support, knowledge and the resources you need.

As I'm writing this, I'm enjoying getting texts and emails from our farmer leaders across the state with updates on Harvest '25. Although our team can't be there with you all to help harvest the crops that will feed and fuel the world, know that we have your back and work every day to ensure there will be market demand for your soybeans.

Your success is our end goal.



ISA Unveils Agronomy Farm for Farmer-Led Research

By Abigail Peterson, CCA,
Director of Agronomy,
Illinois Soybean Association

The Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) broke new ground—literally—during the recent Farm Progress Show with the launch of its Agronomy Farm. The nearly 98-acre site is designed to turn checkoff-funded research into practical, field-ready insights for soybean farmers statewide.

Located just south of Heyworth, the farm began its first full year of research trials during the 2025 growing season. It marks a major milestone in our commitment to connect science, strategy and soil all in one place.

We envision it as a place where research isn't just theoretical, it's something farmers can see, walk through and

apply at home.

Here's a look at how the farm came to be, what we'll be doing there in support of your soybean crop and how your farmer Board Directors are thinking about the value and long-term opportunities of the Agronomy Farm.

Strategically Placed, Farmer-Focused

The location of the Agronomy Farm wasn't chosen by accident. It's situated just off Route 51, about 20 minutes away from the ISA office in Bloomington, offering convenience, accessibility and visibility for visiting researchers, board members and farmers alike.

The land represents what many growers see on their own acres, including some tile, some slope and real variability.

The site allows ISA to host stakeholders who might only have a single day in Illinois, providing a one-stop opportunity to visit the office, meet with staff and see agronomic research in action, all within a few miles.

From Concept to Reality

Once the farm was purchased in early 2024, ISA's Production department immediately got to work. Coordinating logistics, planning plot layouts and engaging both researchers and farmer collaborators became the foundation of the farm's first growing season.

We have developed a true farmer-agronomist partnership. Our collaborators at the Agronomy Farm don't just follow instructions. They also contribute valuable ideas.

Agronomist Jim Isermann plays a key role in daily execu-

tion, ensuring the farm operates smoothly and efficiently across planting, spraying, harvesting and data collection. Local farmers also support the work, adding real-world perspectives and hands-on know-how.

Big Plots, Bigger Purpose

Unlike many small-scale research sites, the Agronomy Farm is set up for visibility and real-world transferability. With 10-acre plot sizes, the farm is designed for scale, allowing farmers to see agronomic practices play out across multiple soil types just like they do at home. That scale matters for visualizing what works.

Initial trials for 2025 include:

- Double-crop soybeans following wheat

(See The Future Is in the Field, page 8)



The Future Is in the Field

(continued from page 7)

- Pollinator plots established in partnership with Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever

- Cover crop management demonstrations

- Foliar feeding and fungicide timing tests

- Biological product efficacy trials

- Sulfur and micronutrient application studies

- Soybean Cyst Nematode (SCN) testing

- Checkoff-funded rotation and ROI analysis

We want checkoff research to come alive so farmers can

see it in the field, not just read about it in a report.

Why Farmers Back It

For ISA Board Directors such as Ron Kindred and Heath Houck, the farm represents a long-awaited opportunity to run independent research designed by and for Illinois soybean farmers.

"This farm can take a deep dive into nutrient management that could potentially drive increased productivity while also decreasing nutrient loss," says Kindred, Immediate Past Chairman of the ISA Board.

The focus on insights farmers can put to work right away will be a game-changer.

"The biggest benefit to farmers is the fact that this farm

provides actionable information that can directly improve yields and operational efficiency," explains Houck, District 13 Director and current Production Committee Chair.

Kindred is particularly interested in trials on biologicals, sulfur application, micronutrient testing and double-crop soybeans, especially since the farm is just 12 miles from his own acreage.

Houck sees value not only for growers but also for legislators and global visitors.

"The cover-crop plots stand out to me this year and will be very beneficial to educate different groups or even legislators to what farmers are talking about when discussing cover crops," he says.

Unbiased By Design

At ISA, our goal is to deliver reliable, farmer-directed data that complements—but doesn't replicate—what's already available from corporate trials or university research.

We're not promoting any product. Instead, our job is to answer agronomic questions based on science and let the results speak for themselves.

Kindred agrees.

"This farm fills a critical gap left by reduced Extension funding. It's about bringing back farmer-focused, independent research," he says.

ISA collaborates closely with university researchers, particularly those conducting checkoff-funded projects, and



works to elevate their insights by showcasing them in action.

In the months and years ahead, we will continue working with all of our university partners. This investment is designed to help them get their good work on display and connect farmers directly to research that matters.

What's Next

As the farm matures, we at ISA expect to deepen the facility's research portfolio, host more field days and enhance educational opportunities.

"We're already thinking about how we can expand educational efforts for everyone from growers to policymakers," Houck says.

The farm also will provide a centralized platform for gathering multi-year data on soybean rotations, conservation practices and productivity strategies. We're hopeful that this long-term approach will help inform a wide range of activities, including planting decisions and environmental planning.

The goal is to improve ROI, operational efficiency and environmental outcomes and to do it all with data that starts right here in Illinois.

A Farm Built for You

This isn't ISA's Agronomy Farm—it's yours. Every trial conducted here is approved by your farmer Board and funded by soybean checkoff dollars. The farm reflects your priorities, your questions and your need for clear, actionable information.

At the end of the day, it exists to produce insights that lead to real-world soybean production results. We're here to help you make smarter decisions and drive success across the state.

For more Agronomy Farm updates, field reports and opportunities to get involved, visit FieldAdvisor.org or contact your ISA District Director.

We hope to see you at the Agronomy Farm soon.

Fast Facts: ISA Agronomy Farm

Here are a few key details to know about the new Illinois Soybean Association farm.

Location & Size: Nearly 98 acres just south of Heyworth off Route 51. It's in a central location that's easy to access and contains a variety of representative Illinois soils.

Plot Scale: 10-acre trials mirror real-world conditions so farmers can see practices at operational scale.

Farmer-Led: Research is guided by ISA's farmer Board and funded with Soy Checkoff dollars to ensure insights are independent and unbiased.

2025 Trials: Double-crop soybeans after wheat, cover crops, foliar feeding and fungicide timing, biological products, sulfur/micronutrients, SCN testing and ROI-focused crop rotation studies.

Hands-On Leadership: Agronomist Jim Isermann manages daily operations with support from local farmers.

Educational Value: Field days, plot tours and digital updates through FieldAdvisor.org connect farmers directly to results.

Big Picture: Long-term data collection and analysis will inform nutrient management, conservation and profitability strategies statewide.

How to Engage: Watch for event announcements or contact your ISA District Director to get involved.

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Conservation Funding for Your Farm

What You Need to Know

By Byron Hendrix, CCA, IL Soy Envoy

Over the past six months, I've been working on a project with the Council of Producers and Distributors of Agrotechnology (CPDA) in Washington to learn how familiar farmers and their retail salespeople are with opportunities for federal funding through USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Specifically, I looked at two programs: the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). This project was driven by new regulations on pesticide labels tied to the Endangered Species Act. Compliance with those new labels is critical, and these conservation programs can help.

What I Found

My findings showed a gap: there isn't enough information or education reaching farmers about CSP and EQIP. Many don't know how these programs work or that their trusted certified crop advisers (CCAs) can play a role.

Through the American Society of Agronomy and USDA, CCAs can become technical service providers (TSPs). That means once a contract is funded, your local office handles the setup, and your CCA/TSP manages the paperwork and follow-through over the five-year span of the agreement.

Why This Matters

I grew up in ag retail, and many of my friends and colleagues work in retail or consulting. They wear a lot of hats, including seed, fertilizer and chemical sales. Here's the

common thread: they know their customers' operations well.

Especially in today's tough economic climate, it's worth remembering that funding exists for practices farmers are already using on their farm or would like to add. Farmers are, and always have been, protectors of our land and have practiced sustainability for many generations. My goal is to help spread the word that funding is available through five-year farm bills, extensions of farm bills or through reconciliation, as we saw in the recent One Big Beautiful Bill.

Practices That Qualify

Here are four practices in Illinois corn and soybean systems that NRCS programs can help support:

- Conservation tillage (NRCS 329 and 345): No-till or re-

duced-till practices that conserve soil and water.

- Cover crops (NRCS 340): Providing soil health benefits while also suppressing weeds such as my arch-nemesis, waterhemp.

- Nutrient management (NRCS 590): Practices such as grid sampling and variable-rate application to apply more nutrients more precisely.

- Pest management (NRCS 595): An area I've followed since graduate school. Although adoption peaked years ago, new tools such as drift-control adjuvants, AIM Command and ExactApply sprayer systems, and See & Spray technology are making it possible to reduce pesticide use and target weeds more effectively.

How to Apply

You already visit the Farm Service Agency office for several

tasks. While there, seek out NRCS in the same building and have a conversation with your local conservationist. You are eligible if you can answer yes to four questions:

1. Do you own or rent and actively manage the acres you want to enroll?
2. Is your land in compliance with wetland and highly erodible land requirements?
3. Is your annual adjusted gross income (AGI) less than \$900,000?
4. Are your records with the FSA up to date?

From there, NRCS will review your entire farm and identify resource concerns. Additional concerns specific to your area might also be eligible for funding. An application form (NRCS-CPA-1200) will be filled out, which you can complete before your visit if you prefer.

Expect additional conversations with the NRCS staff or your TSP to create a plan that suits your operation. Do what makes sense to you. Please keep in mind that only a certain amount of financial assistance applications will be funded, and it can be a competitive process. Priority for funding typically goes to plans that address the greatest number of resource concerns. Applications are accepted year-round, but NRCS deadlines vary by geography, so be sure to check locally.

If your conservation plan is selected, you'll work with the NRCS office or your local TSP. Follow the guidelines provided. You will pay expenses up front but will receive the financial assistance payments after completion each year. Payment rates vary by state for each practice.

Payments can be as high as \$40,000 per year or up to \$200,000 over a five-year contract, depending on the size of the operation and the practices selected. NRCS has identified 17 primary resource concerns, and by law each state must focus on at least five of these each year.

Moving Forward

Still, funding alone isn't enough to guarantee adoption. That's why Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) recently partnered with the Illinois NRCS to improve farmers' awareness, understanding and perceptions of NRCS programs and the conservation practices they promote. The partnership aims to close two critical knowledge gaps: limited awareness of federal financial and technical assistance, and a lack of practical guidance on how to successfully implement conservation practices. By working together, ISA and NRCS share a common goal of providing farmers with the information and resources needed to support the long-term productivity and resilience of Illinois agriculture. ISA will focus on encouraging adoption of conservation practices across the state's primary land use: farmland.

ISA provides agricultural insights, supports knowledge advancement and extends research and education to more than 43,000 soybean farmers in Illinois through events, field days and platforms such as Field Advisor. This network positions ISA to connect directly with farmers, promote sustainable management and raise awareness of

NRCS programs as a valuable resource. Financial assistance is often essential when farmers consider management changes that could impact productivity, and NRCS programs such as CSP and EQIP help offset the costs of adopting new practices, making conservation more feasible and less risky for farmers. As an organization, ISA supports any resource that benefits farmers, and NRCS programs fall within that category.

Although it's a step in the right direction, simply promoting available practices or funding is not enough. Reduced tillage and cover crops require careful planning and proper management to maintain or improve crop productivity. For programs such as EQIP and CSP to achieve their purpose of helping farmers conserve natural resources while keeping agriculture productive and sustainable, farmers must have access to the tools and knowledge needed to permanently integrate these practices into their systems. ISA's role in this partnership is to equip farmers with that practical support and serve as a resource where knowledge gaps or limited information exist.

To advance this effort, ISA is developing educational materials, conducting surveys and expand-

ing outreach at farmer-focused events. The association is also collaborating with university researchers and farmers through its On-Farm Trial Network to generate practical, unbiased data on conservation practices. These results, along with expert insights, will be shared on ISA platforms and highlighted at ISA-hosted events. As a reflection of these efforts, ISA recently partnered with Nathan Johanning, Commercial Agriculture Educator at University of Illinois Extension, to host a field day on improving cover crop management. More events will be hosted across various regions of the state over the next few years, with the next scheduled for this winter focusing on soil fertility and nutrient management. Farmers and NRCS employees are encouraged to attend and take advantage of these valuable opportunities to share knowledge, improve practices and advance sustainable agriculture.

Through these combined efforts, ISA will help farmers adopt conservation practices with confidence while strengthening engagement with NRCS programs as tools for long-term success. If you're interested in learning more about ISA's upcoming events in collaboration with NRCS, please email agronomy-team@ilsoy.org.





Conservation in Focus

By Ashley Rice-Haddon, Lead Writer,
Illinois Field & Bean Magazine

More than 45 research proposals were submitted to the Illinois Soybean Association's (ISA's) Soybean Production Committee for fiscal year 2026 funding. After a rigorous review process, ISA's farmer-led committee selected 20 projects.

These investments are made possible with support from the Illinois Soybean Checkoff Program. Although the Soybean Production Committee ultimately makes the final decision on which projects to fund, that is not the only feedback considered.

To ensure that ISA's research continues to address the most important production issues, the Agronomy team solicits

anonymous farmer feedback from across the state each year in its Soybean Production Concerns Survey.

Input from both the Illinois Soybean Board and the Production Concerns Survey shows one priority remains consistent: conservation.

This priority is reflected in many of the 20 research projects selected for FY26. Those projects will study practices including carbon sequestration, residue management, cover crops, weed management and double cropping. Many of these projects are multiyear, allowing researchers to dig deep into long-term solutions to critical challenges faced by soybean growers.

One such project, *Measuring Soil Health, Water Quality and Climate Impact on Illinois*

Soybeans, is being led by Associate Professor Andrew Margenot, Ph.D., and his research team at the University of Illinois.

This project is studying soil health indicators, nutrient loss through leaching, soil carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas emissions response to different combinations of cover cropping and tillage practices. The research is being conducted in three regions: southern, central and northwestern Illinois. A conventional corn-soybean rotation is in place at all three sites, while a double-crop wheat-soybean-corn rotation is also being studied in southern and central Illinois.

"In FY26 – wrapping up the harvest of the third field season and starting in on the fourth and final season – we

will round out the last leg of the two separate two-year rotations," explained Margenot. "This year will let us provide hard answers to the questions on how long and how much conservation practices provide trade-offs for yields, soil health, carbon credits and nutrient losses – the full package."

Preliminary results from the project, which started in 2023, show that water-quality improvements might be seen more quickly when implementing conservation practices compared to soil health and carbon improvements.

"As any farmer knows, and hopefully more policymakers realize, farming is messy, and every subregion of a state such

(See Conservation in Focus, page 13)



Conservation in Focus

(continued from page 13)

as Illinois is different,” said Margenot. “The combination of the counterfactuals and multiple outcomes is difficult or expensive, if not impossible for an individual farmer or company to test, but can provide answers. This is why we intentionally placed three fully replicated sites totaling 300 research plots across northwest, central and southern Illinois. We can give hard answers to farmers and crop consultants on which soil health tests reflect changes after how many years for your region, what a realistic carbon credit may be for which combinations of conservation practices depending on your region, and what nutrient loss outcomes may look like.”

Another project, *Refining Cover Crop Recommendations for Corn-Soybean Rotations Based on Species and Timing*, is led by Nathan Johanning, an Extension Educator at the University of Illinois.

“Cover crops are a management tool for any farmer to use, and we want to have the information to help farmers pick the best species to complement their cash crop and know what level of performance to expect based on their planting date and seeding rate,” said Johanning. “Seed is a significant expense, and if we can find ways to reduce seeding rates or even know when to drop out or change species based on the planting date, that can save farmers money and make cover crop use more effective.”

This project is located at three sites in southern and western Illinois with the goal of comparing how different cover crop species and mixtures, combined with two termination timings, affect corn and soybean performance in rotation to help refine regional recommendations for farmers and advisers.

“From our previous cover crop research, we have learned that cereal rye planting date has more of an effect of how much spring cover you get than the seeding rate,” said Johanning. “The earlier you plant, the more tillering and growth

you get and the less seed you need. Thirty pounds of cereal rye per acre seeded (drilled) by late October can provide good cover, and we have not seen much benefit to seeding more than 60 pounds of cereal rye, regardless of the planting date.”

Although past work has focused on individual species, seeding rates and planting dates, in 2026 this project will expand to species combinations and two termination timings (i.e., two weeks before planting and at planting).

“Additionally, my best recommendation on when to terminate is to look at the weather, given that the cover crop is pulling moisture from the soil, and determine whether that is a good or bad thing based on soil moisture and the long-range forecast. Also, look at your equipment and the amount of residue you feel you can comfortably plant through and still do a good job planting and placing the seed.”

Another study being conducted, *Enhancing the Profitability of Wheat-Soybean Double Cropping*, is led by Associate Professor Jessica

Rutkoski, Ph.D., University of Illinois. Located at four sites throughout Illinois, the project aims to characterize and develop new high-yielding winter wheat varieties with early maturity—an important trait that enables earlier planting of double-crop soybeans to maximize yield potential.

“We expect this will help make soybean double-cropping economically viable for more farmers in Illinois, including in more northern latitudes of the state,” said Rutkoski. “This will, in turn, enhance Illinois soybean production in the near- and long-term.”

At the end of the day, the Illinois Soybean Board prioritizes conservation through supporting research, asking critical questions and engaging with partners.

“Overall, the ISA Soybean Production Committee wants to see conservation-related research continue to be funded so farmers can make the best short- and long-term agonomic, financial and marketing decisions for their operations,” said Heath Houck, Soybean Production Committee Chairman.



THE POWER OF YOUR SOY INVESTMENT



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in U.S.
employment
income

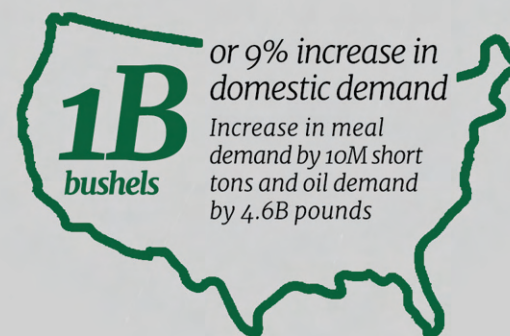


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exports by 3.4B pounds



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*Export initiatives supported by United Soybean Board, Qualified State Soybean Boards, the U.S. Soybean Export Council and USDA Foreign Agricultural Service. Source: Kaiser, H.M. 2024. An Economic Analysis of the United Soybean Board and Qualified State Soybean Boards' Demand- and Supply-Enhancing Programs. Cornell University.



SpringBoard 2025 advances projects to build soybean demand through new uses

Illinois soybean farmers are world leaders in raising bumper crops. Making sure there's demand for the crop - at home and abroad - is a multifaceted effort ranging from meeting basic demand needs for feed, fuel and food to creating novel uses for the crop to open new, sustainable demand channels. The latter effort depends on a checkoff-funded Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) initiative that calls on the state's innovators to step forward with a range of new industrial uses. These emerging soy applications can ultimately contribute to Illinois soybean farmers' bottom lines. Put simply, it's a high-tech way to ensure strong soybean demand well into the future.

The SpringBoard Seed Funding Challenge kicked off in April 2025, when researchers, industry leaders and investors gathered to kick off the process of identifying the most practical, feasible innovations. With the right support, they could evolve

into new soybean demand-drivers. That was Step 1. Then, ISA leaders, innovators and other experts at the ISA Soy Innovation Center put their heads together to evaluate proposed new soybean-based products for advancement through the process that culminated in late September, when a few projects were selected for checkoff funding as part of ISA's charter to develop new soybean uses.

"We had a panel of scientific experts screen initial proposals that we received earlier in the year," said ISA Market Development Director Todd Main. "Then, we went back, issued feedback and had a select group create fleshed-out proposals. Then, we went through a second screening process and ended up with eight candidates from universities and the private sector. Our objective was to generate new ideas, not recreate products others have already developed. We want to establish new, original intellectual property that can

make a difference for soybean farmers. The projects had to have market relevance, so we're not just doing research for the sake of research."

Ensuring commercial viability of new soybean uses

At the Illinois Innovation Network (IIN) Sustainability and Social Innovation Research Conference in late September at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, that panel of experts announced checkoff support for four new-use projects that Main and the ISA team expect to create new demand for Illinois soybeans. A large part of the selection criteria stretched beyond the innovations themselves to their commercial viability.

"Commercialization is really the focus. That's where most new ideas die," Main said. "So that's what we wanted to do: reduce the risk of 'early death' with these innovations by supporting the ones who have the

clearest pathways to commercialization. They also have to be scalable because at the end of the day, this effort is all about moving the pile of soybeans Illinois farmers produce."

SpringBoard 2025 funding recipients

Projects that received checkoff funding support for their potential for new soybean uses as part of SpringBoard 2025 were:

- **Self-healing polymers from soybean oil.** A Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) research team is developing self-healing polymers derived from modified soybean oil as a sustainable, bio-based alternative to traditional toxic isocyanate-based coatings. This innovative material is designed to automatically repair small cracks and scratches, effectively stopping the spread of damage and helping extend product life, reduce maintenance costs and lower equipment downtime. Self-repairable polymers also hold

significant promise for applications as biomaterials and in flexible electronics.

- **Soybealon: Chemo-bio hybrid manufacturing of advanced biodegradable polyester amides (PEAs) from waste soy meal and hulls.** SIUC researchers are addressing soybean meal and hull waste by developing a new class of high-growth bioplastics called Polyester Amides (PEAs). This innovative project proposes a chemo-bio hybrid process to upcycle soy waste into a durable and degradable bioplastic called Soybealon. It offers a cost-efficient, sustainable alternative to fossil fuel-based materials.

- **Low-carbon specialty lipids for liquefied soybean hulls.** A Purdue University team is

tackling the significant carbon footprint and toxicity of the over 95% of lubricants currently derived from crude oil by developing high-value biolubricants from renewable sources that are naturally biodegradable and have low toxicity. The project focuses on an integrated process that uses soybean hulls as the primary feedstock to create these sustainable alternatives, an innovation that establishes a new market for soybean producers that can be seamlessly adopted by existing corn ethanol plants because of the established logistics of the raw material supply chain.

- **Novel method of separation, concentration and extraction of rare-earth elements using soybean oil and three-dimensional nanoporous micro-ribbons.** Southern Illinois University

Carbondale (SIUC) researchers are developing a cleaner, more efficient solution for the extraction of Rare Earth Elements (REEs) from coal ash, replacing current methods that pose environmental and health risks. Their novel, single-step process utilizes a unique gel formed by a combination of soybean oil and specialized nanoporous micro-ribbons (MRs) to effectively separate, concentrate and extract the REEs. This innovative approach promises to be a significantly more cost-effective, time-saving and environmentally friendly way to secure these essential elements.

A 'clear path forward' for new soybean uses

Moving forward, Main said the projects recognized and funded in SpringBoard 2025

will advance through commercialization. The ultimate goal with the newly funded companies will be the creation and expansion of new and existing sustainable, soy-based products that will raise demand and, ultimately, prices for Illinois soybean farmers.

"We have a pretty clear path forward. It's easy to have meetings and talk about all of this stuff, but at the end of the day, you have to deliver new soybean uses that make sense, attract investment and help move the soybean pile," Main said. "With the Soy Innovation Center and soybean checkoff supporting these projects, we're going to advance these technology solutions that scale into meaningful demand-drivers for Illinois soybeans."





Turn Your Acres into Answers

Join the 2026 ISA On-Farm Trial Network

By Darby Danzl, Regional Technical Agronomist, and Stacy Zuber, Ph.D., Research Data Scientist, Illinois Soybean Association

Farming involves hundreds or thousands of decisions. How early should we start planting soybeans? How much fertilizer should we apply? Which herbicides

should we use? Are fungicides cost-effective? How can I reduce input costs? Those questions and many more pop up every growing season. Sometimes, farmers rely on advice from industry work or university research, but there are limits to how applicable those results are to real-world conditions.

On-farm research is key to testing how management decisions affect productivity and profitability. There's a long history of performing research on the farm. Many farmers utilize check-strips or test management decisions on small acreage before jumping all the way in when they change direction. As

important as these small trials are to helping drive farmer decisions, they rarely provide much guidance beyond that operation and maybe a neighboring farm.

The Illinois Soybean Association's (ISA's) On-Farm Trial Network (OFTN) is an initiative to do on-farm research with farmers around the state. The

primary objectives are to ask reasonable, feasible and pressing questions and to evaluate them across many different environments, weather conditions and soils. OFTN research trials fall within two main categories: Action Trials and Legacy Trials.

Action Trials focus on agroeconomic issues and are generally short-term. Legacy Trials have more of a conservation focus and are designed to evaluate the long-term effect of cover crops and minimum tillage on soil health properties. Ultimately, the aim of these checkoff-funded trials is to provide more information back to growers and help guide recommendations to farmers across Illinois.

One issue we are working to address through on-farm research is herbicide-resistant weed species. In our annual Soybean Production Concerns Survey, Illinois farmers ranked weed management as their No. 1 research priority, with waterhemp identified as the top pest of concern. This call to action aligns with findings from one of

our current ISA checkoff-funded research projects, led by Dr. Aaron Hager at the University of Illinois, which has documented the widespread and increasing severity of waterhemp resistance to multiple herbicide groups in Illinois. Knowing how quickly aggressive weeds adapt to existing control methods, we are exploring the potential of overwintering cover crops to help suppress weeds through our Cover Crop Biomass and Weed Suppression Action Trial.

In this new Action Trial, we are evaluating cereal rye and winter barley as tools for weed control. Both species can physically suppress weeds by competing for space, water, nutrients and sunlight. They might also reduce germination and early development of certain weeds through allelopathy. Although the potential of these cover crops has been recognized in university research across the U.S., we see the need to test them on real Illinois farm fields. Our goal is to provide farmers with results that are directly relevant and applica-

ble to their own operations here in the state.

For many farmers, weeds aren't the only unwelcomed guests in their fields, as insect pressures, and the growing costs to control them, are becoming just as concerning. To address this, we are collaborating with Dr. Nick Seiter, Assistant Professor and Field Crops Entomologist at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, on our next two OFTN Action Trials. These projects extend his work on measuring the cost-effectiveness of insecticidal seed treatments and foliar sprays beyond university plots, bringing that research onto Illinois farmers' fields.

The first Action Trial, Insecticide Seed Treatments in Conservation Systems, will examine how seed treatments perform in high-residue systems, specifically when soybeans are planted into cover crops. Cover crop usage is becoming more common, and their presence can attract different pests than conventional corn-soybean systems, including slugs. In these situations,

seed treatments might also kill beneficial insects that would otherwise help control slugs. Our goal is to identify both the impacts and the tradeoffs of insecticide use in conservation management systems.

The second insecticide Action Trial, Return on Investment of Soybean Foliar Insecticides, will look at foliar treatments applied to soybeans at the R3 or R5 growth stages compared to a no-insecticide control. These foliar products are often applied with fungicides during the reproductive stages for late-season protection, but it's often difficult to know which insects are causing the damage and whether insect feeding levels justify an application. Through insect monitoring, plant-injury assessments and yield collection, we aim to better understand when insecticide applications truly pay for themselves in soybean yield protection.

We conducted these insecti-

(See Turn Your Acres into Answers, page 20)



Turn Your Acres into Answers

(continued from page 19)

cide trials in the 2025 growing season alongside a sulfur trial on soybeans, where we evaluated the impact of applying 30 pounds of sulfur as either ammonium thiosulfate (ATS) or ammonium sulfate (AMS)

on yields. For the 2026 season, we again are enrolling growers interested in testing ATS, AMS and/or gypsum as part of our Sulfur 2.0 Action Trial. Previous work by Dr. Shaun Casteel, Professor of Agronomy at Purdue University, has shown promising soybean yield responses to sulfur applications, and many Illinois farmers are wondering if they might see the same results. By collecting multiple years of data, we aim to better evaluate treatment responses and determine whether sulfur applications

can have a consistent, meaningful impact on soybean yields in Illinois.

Our final Action Trial for the 2026 growing season will focus on a soybean cropping system working its way up the state: double crop. As more farmers explore a double-crop system, which involves planting wheat in the fall after corn harvest and then following wheat with soybeans, we receive a lot of questions about agronomic management basics for the economic viability of this practice.

For this reason, we have developed the Double-Crop Soybean Management – Planting Population Action Trial. We will compare three soybean planting populations: 180,000, 220,000 and 260,000 seeds per acre. By tracking yields and seed costs, we aim to identify which population offers the best economic return for growers.

Although we recruit for Action Trials annually, we also are looking for farmers interested in participating in Legacy Trials in place for multiple growing





seasons. Beyond tracking soil changes resulting from conservation practices, the goals of Legacy Trials include providing guidance and feedback for adopting those practices. In 2026, we hope to add two new Legacy Trial sites, ideally in central or southern Illinois. These sites will remain in place for a minimum of five years with replicated comparison strips of cover crops and strips without cover crops. Our team will work with farmer participants on developing a plan that works best for them while still providing us with good comparison data.

We are actively recruiting farmers to participate in these Action and Legacy trials across the state. Requirements vary by trial, so visit fieldadvisor.org/on-farm-trial-network/ to see the full protocols and specific requirements. However, all trials require that farmers have a calibrated yield monitor and a minimum of 40 acres enrolled.

Participants will receive results from all collected trial data such as soil sample results, and a summary of their yield monitor data by plot and soil type. In addition, qualified farmers participating in ISA's OFTN might be eligible for stipend payments. Program eligibility and payment amounts will vary based on trial type and other guidelines.

Farmers interested in these trials should visit the OFTN page on FieldAdvisor.org. There, you can find the OFTN interest form to indicate your interest in enrolling. The next step will be enrollment calls with interested farmers to collect pertinent information about their operation and research interests. Once farmers have been enrolled and decisions collectively made about the trial type and treatments, we will develop the plot map and help provide guidance on best practices. OFTN team members will coordinate soil sampling and conduct field scouting throughout the growing season. We will

work with you to obtain your yield monitor as soon as possible after harvest so we can analyze and provide results back to the farmer participants. We look forward to highlighting research results at future ISA events, including the Field Advisor Forum, Soybean Summit,

online on FieldAdvisor.org and in this magazine.

If you have questions about any of these trials, contact Deanna Burkhardt, Producer and Field Services Administrator, at deanna.burkhardt@ilsoy.org or 309-307-9366.



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Thank you, Illinois soybean farmers, for the work you do every day. At NOPA, our members are proud to turn your harvest into the feed, food, and fuels that power America.

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Learn more about how NOPA advocates for soy growers like you at www.nopa.org.



Calcium Clarified: Why Calcium is Vital for Your Soybeans



As growers continue to push the envelope to increase yields and improve ROI on soybean acres, a shift is underway in how the crop is managed, particularly with crop nutrition. The quest for higher yields is no longer just about nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. It's about a balanced crop nutrition program that includes often-overlooked secondary nutrients like calcium. While calcium may not be considered a primary driver of yield, this essential nutrient plays a crucial role in growing a healthy and productive soybean crop.

The Role of Calcium in Soybeans

Calcium is an important player in numerous physiological processes within the soybean plant. Calcium helps soybeans form healthy nodules on their roots, which are needed to turn nitrogen into a form the plants can use. It helps facilitate cell division and elongation to ensure proper growth from the root to the top of the plant. Calcium also contributes to cell wall strength, which is essential for the plant's structural integrity and its ability to withstand environmental stress. Beyond its structural contributions, adequate calcium levels help the plant manage abiotic stress and improve disease resistance. In addition, calcium helps promote better soil structure, which drives nutrient availability and uptake, and increased microbial activity to foster an environment for vigorous plant growth.

Addressing the Calcium Needs of Soybeans

Today's high-yielding soybeans require more calcium than ever before. However, even when soil tests indicate high calcium levels, it does not guarantee optimal plant availability of the essential nutrient. In most cases, less than 5% of measured calcium shown on a traditional soil test result is plant-available. Therefore, it is often necessary to provide soybeans with a supplemental calcium source to meet the crop's nutrient needs. Supplemental calcium sources can also vary in plant availability. Choosing a plant-available calcium source helps ensure nutrient uptake is maximized during crucial periods of growth and development, in turn delivering a stronger ROI on the fertilizer application.

Get More from Every Acre with SUL4R-PLUS

SUL4R-PLUS granular calcium-sulfate fertilizer is an excellent choice for helping crops meet their calcium needs. In fact, a recent trial demonstrated that an application of SUL4R-PLUS resulted in a 0.34 increase in percent tissue calcium content in soybeans, compared to the untreated check (Figure 1). Plants treated with SUL4R-PLUS also showed increased tissue content of sulfur, boron and zinc.

% Tissue Ca

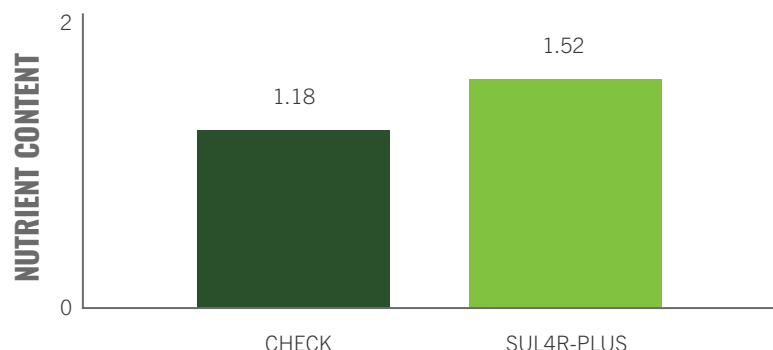


Figure 1.

With a controlled-release, water-soluble formulation, SUL4R-PLUS provides immediate availability and season-long uptake of calcium and sulfur to help crops maximize yield potential. Recent trial data demonstrates SUL4R-PLUS can increase soybean yields up to 12.2 bu/ac, depending on application rate, compared to the untreated check (Figure 2).

Grain Yield

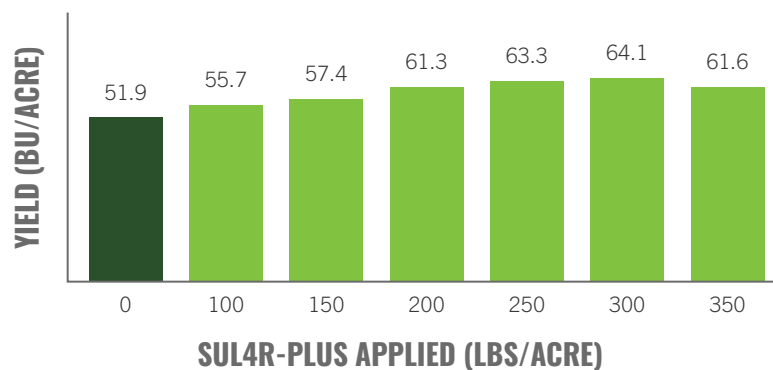


Figure 2.

Secure SUL4R-PLUS from HELM

HELM, a leading name in agricultural logistics and distribution, is the exclusive distribution partner of SUL4R-PLUS to ensure efficient delivery to growers across North America. Together, HELM and SUL4R-PLUS are committed to offering innovative solutions that boost productivity and contribute to soil health and sustainability.

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For more information about SUL4R-PLUS, visit sul4r-plus.com.

Phantom of the Field

Soil tests key to managing elusive soybean cyst nematode

By Nathan Schroeder, Associate Professor,
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Soybean cyst nematode (SCN) is the No. 1 production-damaging pest of soybeans in the Midwest. Known as the “silent yield robber,” it reduces yields without leaving obvious above-ground symptoms. Many farmers know SCN exists, but few realize how much it might be cutting into their bottom line.

The challenge is that SCN lives below ground. Yield loss often occurs with no yellowing, stunting or other visual symptoms you’d normally associate with a problem. Unlike foliar diseases or weeds, you can’t just walk your fields and spot SCN. The only reliable way to detect it is with a soil test.

For decades, resistant soybean varieties have been one of the best tools for managing SCN. But almost all those varieties are based on a single source of resistance, known as PI 88788. For many years, this source worked well. Over time, though, repeated use has allowed SCN populations to adapt.

Today, in much of Illinois and across the Midwest, PI 88788 no longer provides the highest level of protection. Although it’s still better than planting a fully susceptible variety, SCN numbers are creeping up even in resistant fields. That means relying on resistance alone is no longer enough to keep SCN in check.

Because SCN is hard to diagnose visually and resistance is slipping, regular soil testing has become essential. To make testing easier, my lab has partnered with the Illinois Soybean Association to offer free SCN testing for Illinois farmers.

Farmers can email freeSCNtesting@illinois.edu or visit <https://publish.illinois.edu/freescntesting/> for step-by-step instructions on how to collect soil samples and where to send them. Once submitted, our lab processes each sample for SCN egg counts and returns results along with management recommendations tailored to that field.

This program is now in its third year and has been very successful. So far, we have processed 2,808 samples from 75 of Illinois’ 102 counties. The average egg count has been about 1,100 eggs per 100 cm³ of soil. However, the numbers vary widely—from zero to as high as 48,000 eggs.

So what’s a “bad” number? Unfortunately, there’s no single agreed-upon threshold for SCN across all fields. That’s why the SCN Coalition, supported by the United Soybean Board, developed the SCN Profit Checker Tool (<https://www.thescncoalition.com/profit-checker/>). By entering your SCN egg count and yield data, you can get an estimate of the yield loss you might expect.

For example, the average egg count in Illinois—about 1,100 eggs per 100 cm³ of soil—corresponds to a 3% to 4% yield loss. At higher egg counts, the losses grow much more severe.



When I talk with farmers who are skeptical about the need for SCN testing, I often compare it to checking cholesterol. My doctor can’t look at me and know whether my cholesterol is high. I need a blood test to find out. If my number is low, that’s great—I can keep doing what I’m doing. If it is high, then it’s time to look at options to bring it back down.

SCN is no different. You can’t tell if you have a problem without testing. If the numbers are low, you gain peace of mind for now and can wait a few years before testing again. If they’re high, you can take steps to protect yield—such as rotating to non-host crops, choosing soybean varieties with a different source of resistance if available and considering seed treatments.

The key is knowing your numbers. Soil testing is simple, free through our program and gives you the information you need to make smart management decisions. Don’t wait until SCN silently robs more of your yield—get your fields tested!



2025: Year of Extreme Weather, Corn Disease and Worry in Illinois

By Stephanie Porter, CCA, Outreach Agronomist, Illinois Soybean Association

An abnormal March brought soil conditions that were just too good to pass up, and a few farmers were able to sneak in some field work and plant. The next

window of opportunity came in mid-April. But this time, winds like we'd not experienced before hindered burndown applications, while other fieldwork continued. For the most part, many in northern, eastern, western and central Illinois were able to get planted in April and wrap up early to mid-May. Closer to

Route 16 and further south into Illinois, extreme amounts of rain fell, and another window of planting opportunity near Route 16 did not come until mid-May. Those further south were just starting some fieldwork and did not get a good start at planting until the end of May. In some cases, planting was not completed until June, just in time for wheat harvest and planting of double-crop soybeans. Some southern Illinois counties had a significant number of prevent plant acres.

Cool conditions persisted early in the season with some heavy rains that caused drowned-out spots. There were some concerns about soybean stands because of poor seed germination. After a dry spell, crusting became a concern in

some areas in Illinois as both corn and soybeans emerged. A few replants occurred and overall final soybean stands were on the lower end, and this provided opportunity for weeds to emerge and sometimes break through pre-emerge chemistry before canopy. More wind caused not just dust storms but also some wind-whipped crops. A high number of cutworm moths were trapped across the state, which brought concerns of cutting in May and early June, but we managed to escape major injury. Cool and wet conditions caused crops to be yellow or stunted until temperatures began to warm in June.

The June heat caused crop development to drastically speed up, but then rainfall



stopped in many areas. Fields started to show signs of heat stress, and smoke filled the air due to Canadian wildfires. There were reports of grape colaspis feeding on roots in the central part of the state. Tornadoes touched down in parts of Illinois, and heavy winds damaged corn before pollination. Flattened, later-planted corn was able to recover but was elbowed. The earlier-planted corn might have experienced some greensnap. As always, Japanese beetles made their debut in soybeans and later at corn pollination. Extreme amounts of rain came in July to alleviate previous drought concerns but created ideal conditions for disease at corn pollination and for later-planted corn. No matter where you were in the state, depending upon the hybrid, many were finding Goss's Wilt, Physoderma brown spot, gray leaf spot or southern corn rust when it was hot. They identified common rust, Northern corn leaf blight and tar spot when it was cool. Many have resoundingly said that fungicide was warranted this year, not only for disease control but also for stalk quality. Elevated nighttime temperatures and tassel wrap

also caused alarm about possible pollination issues.

Rain stopped for many after mid-July, and crops experienced heat and drought stress, but the waterhemp continued to tower over soybean canopies. There were reports of corn leaf aphids, but not as bad as last year. There were isolated reports of red crown rot, Sudden Death Syndrome and white mold. Severe drought persisted in many parts of the state, but some—mostly in the north—were lucky to get some sporadic August rains needed for grain fill and to avoid corn tipback. A false fall and rain came by the end of August, which brought heat and drought relief but came too late to increase yield. The heat and drought not only increased the rate of crop senescence but also greatly decreased soybean moisture and brought dangerous fire risk at harvest. If you were to create a word cloud from all the crop reports submitted to Field Advisor during the growing season of 2025, the largest words would be rain, drought, hot, cool and disease. The weather changed drastically from one extreme to the next.



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President - Beck's Hybrids
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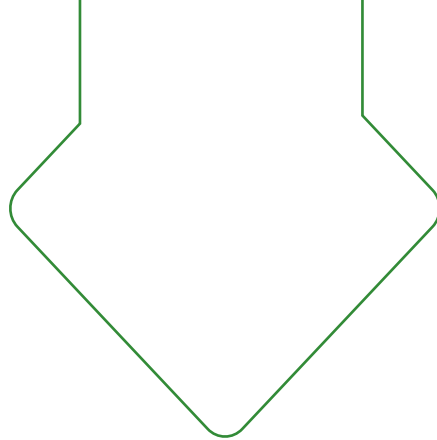
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A Bad Bargain

I want to take a few moments to update you on a policy proposal that has gained attention in Springfield and around the country: a Low Carbon Fuel Standard (LCFS). Some have portrayed this program as a silver bullet for reducing emissions and strengthening markets. But after closely reviewing the policy and its impacts, Illinois Soybean Growers (ISG) must be clear. An Illinois LCFS mandate will harm farmers and our biofuels industry, and it will shrink the farm economy.

At its core, an LCFS is a government mandate on fuel. The result is simple: diesel fuel becomes more expensive. Any suggestion otherwise is either incomplete or misleading. The very design of an LCFS is to transition the transportation system away from liquid fuels by making them prohibitively costly.

But here in Illinois, we know the reality—tractors, combines, heavy machinery and 18-wheelers cannot be powered by electricity. To suggest otherwise ignores the backbone of agriculture and transportation. An LCFS would push more electric vehicles onto the market, further straining an already fragile electric grid and driving up energy costs for families and businesses alike. Higher energy costs, paired with reduced demand for soybeans, is the exact opposite of what farm groups should be working toward.

Supporters of an LCFS often suggest it would create new opportunities for farmers through conservation practices. The truth is far more limited. In practice, only landowners farming their own acres would realistically qualify. With most Illinois farmland rented, both tenants and landlords would see reduced crop revenue as barriers to participation cut them out. On top of that, applying for a so-called “carbon farmer license” would invite the Illinois EPA directly onto our farms, giving the agency new authority to regulate day-to-day production practices. Instead of empowering farmers, this opens the door to more red tape, more inspections and more fines—without any certainty that the returns will outweigh the costs.

The evidence from California is clear: fuel prices rise under an LCFS. At the same time, Illinois farmers could see valuable biodiesel incentives—such as our state sales tax exemption—undermined or eliminated. Although participating in a carbon program might bring some farm revenue, it comes at the cost of lower soybean prices overall. Why? Because an LCFS relies on controversial concepts such as indirect land use change (ILUC) and artificial “soy caps” that devalue our crop.

Illinois farmers have built a strong biodiesel market—more than 60% of our biodiesel feedstocks come from soy. By comparison, California uses less than 20% soy in its biodiesel. If Illinois adopts their approach, it will erode the very markets we have worked so hard to establish.

Finally, the program allows “co-processing,” blending biomass at

petroleum refineries in ways that undermine the integrity of renewable fuels themselves. This blurs the line between genuine biofuel innovation and fossil fuel compliance tactics—hardly a policy Illinois farmers should endorse. This allows petroleum refiners to buy cheap feedstocks when they want and gives them competitive advantages over current soybean oil-based biofuel producers.

In short, LCFS is a mandate that drives up costs, reduces soybean demand and burdens farmers with new regulations. ISG believes in conservation, innovation and expansion of biofuels markets—but we cannot support a policy that actually does the opposite.

Thank you for staying engaged in this important discussion. Together, we can ensure Illinois agriculture continues to thrive without harmful, misguided mandates. Illinois farmers are not playing a zero-sum game in the biofuels market. Some interest groups argue there must be winners and losers, but we reject that approach. Our commitment is to support policies that grow the entire farm economy—where corn is a winner, soy is a winner and all Illinois farmers benefit.





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