

Cornbelt Update
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A weekly Cornbelt digest of marketing, economic, agronomic, and management information.

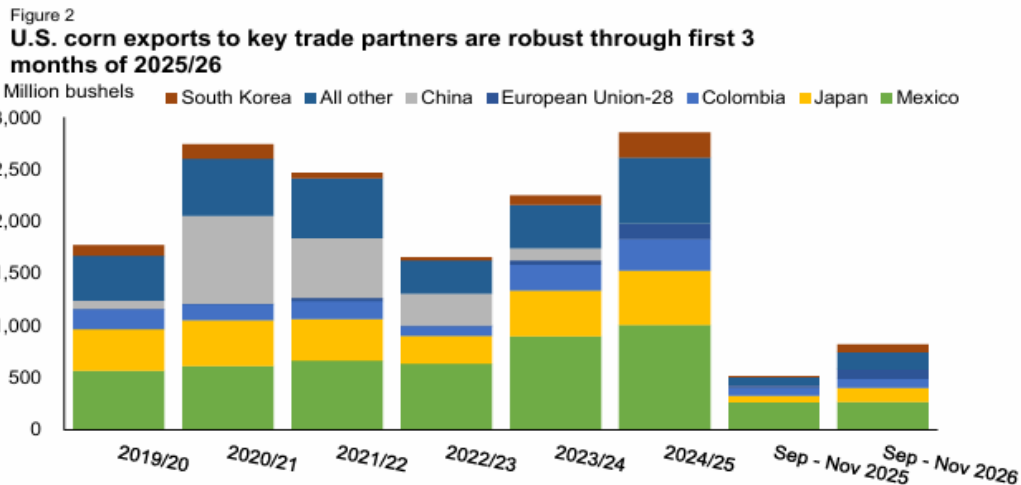
Commodity Market Drivers—

- **Buckle your seat belt**, on the latest about “45Z.” [A transcription from Fox news of the past week](#), featured Sen. Roger Marshall, R-KS, (right) who informed the network host about the potential benefit of the 45Z tax credit provided to biofuels with low carbon intensity. The conversation begins with, “Well, the U.S. Treasury and the IRS releasing a proposed rule which confirms that farmers will be included in the benefits from this 45Z biofuel tax credit. Senator, you say the biggest -- this is the biggest agricultural win of the year. Tell us more about that.” “Yeah, Maria, and it may be the biggest agriculture win for the decade. 45Z is a tax credit that we refined again in the working family tax cuts bill that's going to allow us to take corn and turn it into jet fuel. This is going to help us build that infrastructure over the next 3 years. And the market for this is triple of our export market. So, on average year, we export about 2 bil. bu. of corn. This process, turning corn into jet fuel, could consume 3 times that amount. So, if you can imagine walking in and saying, look, we tripled our exports, that's exactly what this does, and it will give us much more consistency. And by the way, this isn't the only win for agriculture this week. India has announced that they're going to be buying \$500 bil. of agriculture and oil products as well over the next 5 years. That's more than double for them, and China doubled their soybean purchases.....” →



- **There is a lot more to the 45Z policy**, and its impact on commodities. The Renewable Fuels Association said the 170-page proposal was a good first step toward bringing certainty to industries. "Today's 45Z proposed rule is a step in the right direction toward providing the clarity and certainty that ethanol producers are seeking," said [Geoff Cooper, RFA president and CEO](#). "We thank the Treasury department and Trump administration for listening to the input provided by ethanol producers and other stakeholders. The proposal appears to resolve some of previous confusion around what constitutes a 'qualified sale,' and begins to integrate the important improvements to 45Z that resulted from the One Big Bill Act, such as removal of indirect land use change emissions from the carbon intensity scoring framework." However, Cooper said there continues to be unresolved issues including the release of a revised version of the 45Z GREET model to be used in calculating greenhouse gas emissions for purposes of determining credit values. "In addition, questions remain to be resolved around the quantification of emissions related to low-carbon feedstock production at the farm level, implementation of foreign feedstock prohibitions, and provisions related to the use of energy attribute credits," Cooper said. The proposal also calls for integrating a feedstock carbon intensity calculator under development by USDA. This will allow for carbon intensity adjustments for feedstocks produced using no-till farming, cover crops and nutrient management practices. So, farmers producing corn and soybeans or other feedstocks with lower carbon intensity would benefit from making the crops more valuable to biofuels producers seeking higher credits. →
- **Clean Fuels Alliance America** said that although the credit has been in effect since January 2025, "producers and farmers have struggled to capitalize on it with only minimal guidance." [Kurt Kovarik, vice president of federal affairs for Clean Fuels](#), said in a statement the proposed rule does resolve some uncertainties with 45Z. "The delay in rulemaking led to market uncertainty that took a heavy toll on our industry, undercutting fuel production and the value added to agriculture," Kovarik said. "Clean Fuels and its members look forward to working with IRS and treasury to finalize rules that support renewed growth for biodiesel and renewable diesel producers." Fuel retailers were not satisfied with the 45Z credit, as they continue to call for biofuels policies that address affordability. →
- **The 45Z guidance proposal was met with support** by the [American Soybean Association and the National Oilseed Processors Association](#). "Updating federal biofuel policies to prioritize soy-based fuels is a key ASA priority, and we applaud treasury for this action which will help build domestic markets for U.S. soybeans," said Scott Metzger, ASA president. "While Treasury's work to update tax guidance is critical, ASA strongly urges the administration to immediately finalize RFS (Renewable Fuel Standard) blending targets that complement the work of Treasury and Congress, by setting robust biofuel volumes and implementing new policies that will prioritize the utilization of U.S. soybeans in production." NOPA President and CEO Devin Mogler said the industry also needs a "strong RFS that includes the import RIN (renewable identification numbers) reduction mechanism." Another key aspect of the 45Z proposal is its removal of the indirect land use change penalty on agriculture feedstocks.

- **For the 2025/26 marketing year, [USDA is reporting](#)** U.S. corn exports will rise 100 mil. bu. to 3.3 bil. —elevating the forecast further into record-setting territory. The adjustment was made based on USDA, Foreign Agricultural Service export sales and inspection data (through January 29, 2026) that reveal the still-strong pace of corn shipments and continued firmness in foreign demand for U.S.-grown corn. Based on U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census data through November, corn exports for the first quarter of 2025/26 (September 2025

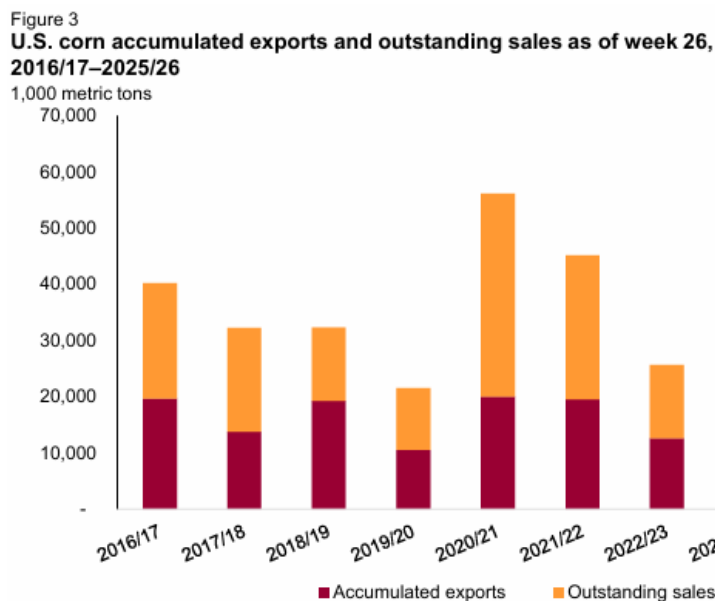


Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.

through November 2025) are running approximately 60% ahead of the same period a year prior. Through November, the United States exported 821.4 mil. bu. of corn,

compared to about 517.2 mil. through the first 3 months of the 2024/25 marketing year. Corn exports to traditional trade partners exceeded last year's pace, in many cases (above). For example, U.S. corn shipments to Japan are more than twice those of the same period a year earlier. U.S. corn shipments to South Korea show a multi-fold increase, as do shipments to the European Union. Notably, similar to 2024/25, U.S. corn sales to China have remained at zero.

At nearly 2.32 bil. bu., the total of accumulated exports and outstanding sales (aka "total commitments") is running nearly 31% above the same time a year prior. While both categories exceed last year's pace by double digits

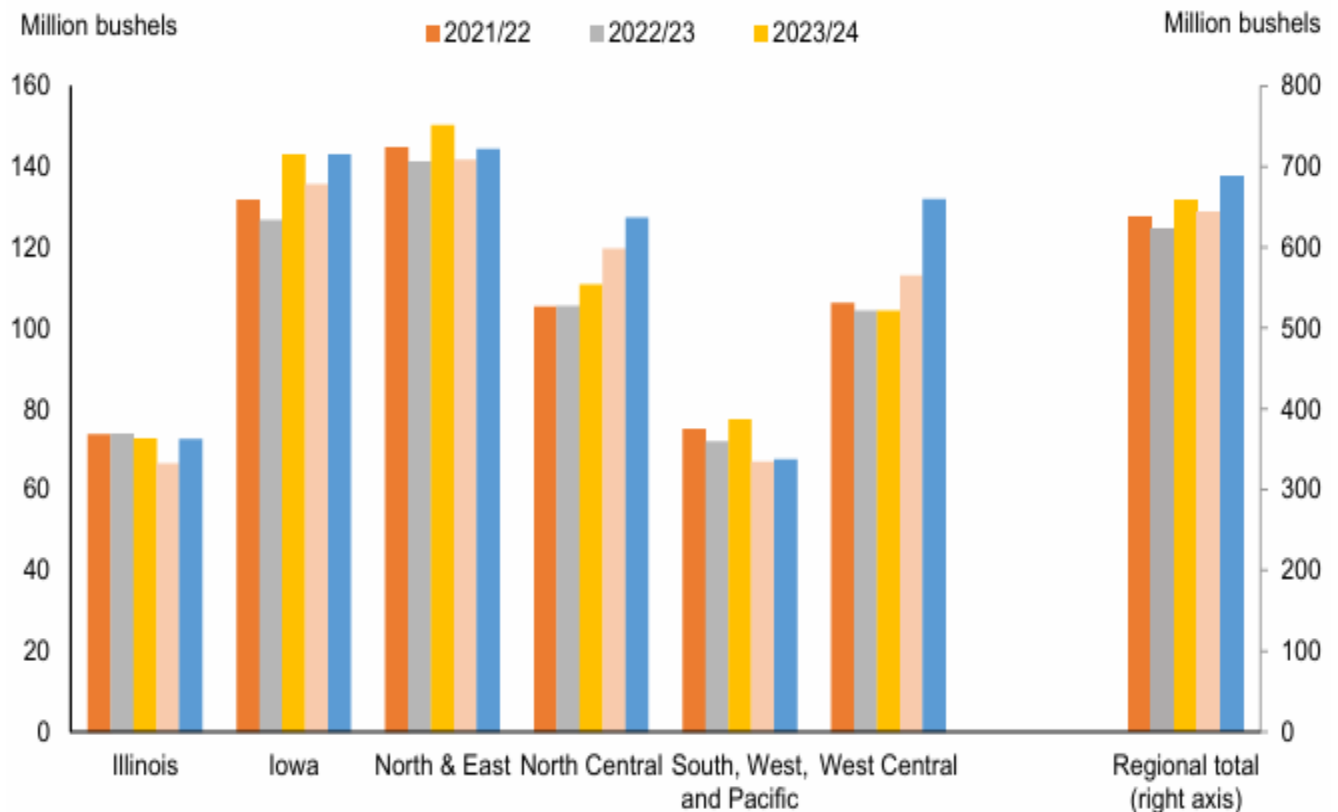


margins, accumulated exports are nearly 49% higher through week 26, as compared to 2024/25. (above right).

- The U.S. soybean supply and demand [projections were unchanged this month](#).** Ending stocks for MY 2025/26 are at 350 mil. bu. The U.S. soybean season-average price received by farmers is forecast unchanged at \$10.20 per bu. The U.S. soybean export forecast remains unchanged. According to USDA, Federal Grain Inspection Service soybean inspections for September–January 2026 totaled 818.5 mil. bu., down 35% from the same period last year. Soybean shipments to China totaled 4.5 166.5 mil. bu., while shipments to the rest of the world are up nearly 9% from last year. U.S. soybean exporters faced strong competition from Brazil, which reported a record harvest. On February 4, 2026, it was reported that China is considering purchasing 735 mil. bu. of soybeans this year, up from the 440 mil. previously announced. While China’s consideration of purchasing 735 mil. bu. of U.S. soybeans does not represent the policy in place, such volumes would imply record counter seasonal U.S. shipments to China and signal major global shifts in trade and export price spreads, given their scale. In December, U.S. soybean crush totaled nearly 230 mil. bu., more than 9 mil. bu. higher than in November and 12 mil. higher than the crush in the same period last year. The monthly crush of 230 mil. implied a new record-high daily crushing rate of 7.42 mil. bu. for December, up 1% from the previous month’s daily crushing rate. For the October-December period, U.S. soybean crush totaled 686.7 mil. bu, up 43.2 mil. from same period last year. The highest increase in the first quarter of the marketing year was in the West Central region (below).

Figure 1

U.S. soybean crush volume by region for October–December



- **Corn and soybean Friday market details from** General Manager Kevin Walker and staff at [Legacy Grain](#).

✓ **Soybean market drivers:** Soybeans rounded out the week with contracts down 2-4 ½¢ at the close, as March was 17¾¢ higher this week. The CmdtyView national average [Cash Bean](#) price was down 4¼¢ at \$10.67¼. [Soymeal](#) futures were 70¢ to \$1.30 higher on the day, with March up \$5.60 this week. [Soy Oil](#) futures 40 to 47 points lower, as March was up 175 points on the week. The markets will be closed on Monday for President’s Day. CFTC data indicated managed money adding 94,316 contracts to their net long position as of 2/10, taking it to 123,148 contracts. USDA Export Sales data has soybean commitments at 1.27 bil. bu., which was down 20% from a year ago. That is also 81% of USDA’s export projection and lags the 89% pace via the 5-year average. NOPA data will be released on Tuesday with analysts looking for January crush at 218.5 mil. bu., with soybean oil stocks seen at 1.71 bil. lbs. [Mar 26 Soybeans](#) closed at \$11.33, down 4¼¢, [Nearby Cash](#) was \$10.67¼, down 4¼¢.

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- ✓ **Corn market drivers:** Corn futures posted fractional gains on Friday, as March managed to close the week with a 1½¢ gain. The CmdtyView national average [Cash Corn](#) price was up ¾¢ at \$3.98¼. The markets will be closed on Monday for President's Day. Large managed money speculators were trimming 20,576 contracts from their net short position as of February 10, with a net short of 48,210 contracts on Tuesday. Export Sales data from Thursday now has corn commitments of shipped and unshipped sales at 2.393 bil. bu., which is up 31% from last year. That is 73% of the full year USDA export projection, matching the average pace. [Mar 26 Corn](#) closed at \$4.31¾, up ½¢, [Nearby Cash](#) was \$3.98¼, up ¾¢.

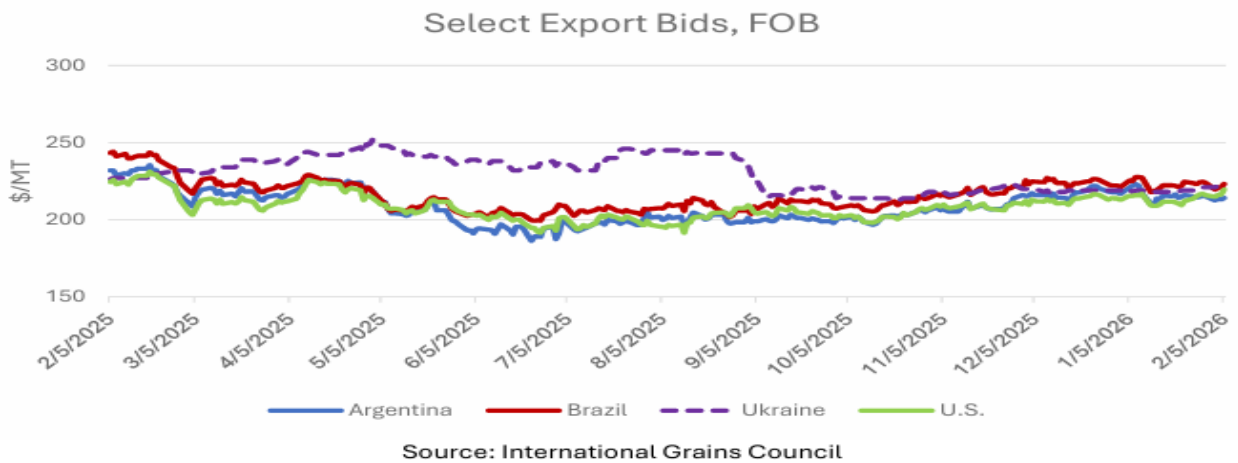
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- **USDA data said inspections of corn and wheat** for overseas delivery rose week to week, while soybean assessments declined during the 7 days ending on February 5. Corn inspections totaled 51.5 mil. bu., which the agency said was up from the 45 mil. bu. the week before. However, it was still behind 53.5 mil. bu. examined during the same week last year. Wheat assessments increased to 21 mil. bu., up from 12 mil. bu. the previous week and 21 mil. bu. during the same time last year. Soybean inspections for export dropped to 42 mil. bu., down from 48.5 mil. bu. a week before. That's still higher than the 40.4 mil. bu. inspected during the same week in 2025. Since the start of the marketing year, export inspections of corn and wheat are higher, at 1.334 bil. bu. and 536 mil. bu., respectively. Soybean inspections are at 848.7 mil. bu. versus last year's 1.297 bil. bu.
- **Private analysts raised forecasts** for Brazil's soybean crop as harvesting gained momentum and weather conditions remained largely favorable across major producing regions. Brazil is already the world's largest soybean exporter. [Reuters reported](#) that consultancy StoneX increased its production estimate, citing strong yields in central and northern growing areas. Celeres also raised its outlook, pointing to improved field results despite isolated weather issues. According to Agriculture.com, the larger crop is expected to pressure global soybean prices and intensify competition with U.S. exports later this year. Traders say Brazil's expanding supply could reshape trade flows, particularly to China, the world's top soybean buyer. Add in the unpredictability of weather, and a lot could change over the next several weeks. As of right now, we think that recent commodity market moves, along with lower costs for soybeans, have shifted momentum toward more soybean acres. However, that is likely to mean an acreage mix similar to last year rather than a shift away from corn.
- **The USDA's World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates** [report last Tuesday](#) projected the 2025-2026 U.S. corn outlook is for greater exports and lower ending stocks. Exports were raised by 100 mil. bu. to 3.3 bil. reflecting sales and shipments to date. However, with no supply changes, and use rising, corn ending stocks dropped by 100 mil. bu. to 2.1 bil. The season-average corn price is unchanged at \$4.10 per bu. The U.S. soybean supply and use projections were unchanged this month. The season-average soybean price is projected to be unchanged at \$10.20 per bu. The report said China is considering buying more U.S. soybeans in the months ahead. The wheat outlook calls for unchanged supplies, modestly lower domestic use, unchanged exports, and slightly higher ending stocks, which were raised to 931 mil. bu., 9% higher than last year. The projected 2025-2026 season-average farm price remains at \$4.90 per bu. The USDA also increased its projections for the crops in South America, which brings its projections in line with other estimates. After the report was released, soybean prices closed with double-digit gains, but most of that was captured prior to WASDE's release, suggesting that demand optimism around recent China's purchase may have been the primary driver there. Corn prices were also slightly firm, while winter wheat prices turned in a lightly mixed performance.

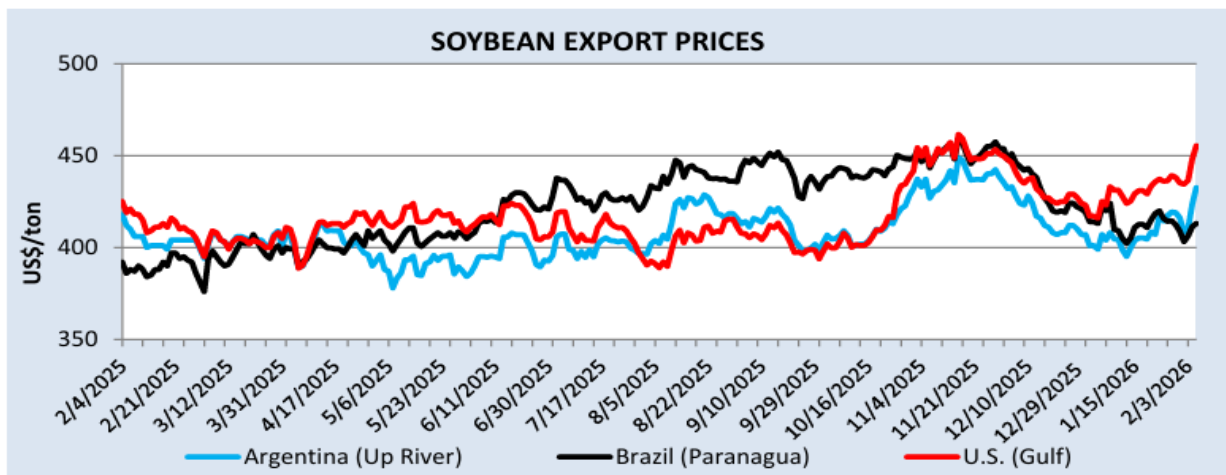
- Record volumes of US corn are being exported**, but what is the competition and where are the price points? USDA's February Grain Trade report says, "Global corn production is virtually unchanged this month as a smaller crop in Mexico offsets larger output in the European Union. Global trade is forecast up this month as increases for Brazil and the United States offset a reduction for Ukraine. Global imports are also forecast up this month, as larger imports for Mexico, Iran, Vietnam, Turkey, Lebanon, and Morocco more than offset a decline for the European Union. The U.S. season-average farm price is unchanged at \$4.10 per bu. Since January, global corn export bids for South American origins softened, while bids for Ukraine and U.S. supplies rose. Argentine bids fell \$7 to

CORN PRICES

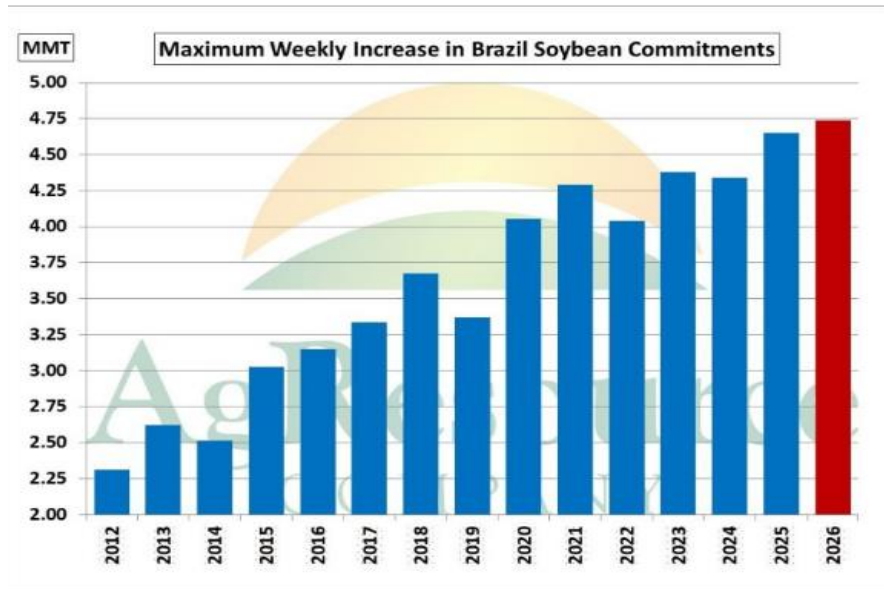


\$214/ton (\$5.43/bu) as pressure from larger U.S. corn exports outweighed weather concerns for the upcoming harvest. Brazilian bids were down \$2 to \$223/ton (\$5.66/bu), largely reflecting movements in other exporters as volumes are thin seasonally. U.S. bids were up \$4 to \$220/ton (\$5.58/bu), as downward pressure from an upward revision to the domestic corn crop was offset by strong global demand and winter storm disruptions to barge logistics. Ukraine bids were up \$4 to \$224/ton (\$5.69/bu) as challenges to export logistics likely boosted prices.

- Competition with US soybean export prices**, puts Brazil and Argentina below the US.



- Brazil's Soybean Export Commitments Increasing** at a Record Pace, says [Bill Tierney](#), chief economist at [Ag Resource](#). He says, "Last week, Brazil's export commitments surged by 175 mil. bu. That is a record weekly increase. Last year, the largest weekly increase was 171 mil. bu. (set in the week ending May 30). Since 2012, the peak in the weekly increase



in commitments came in May in six-out-of-fourteen years (or 43% of the time). This suggests that this year's peak weekly increase has yet to be seen. USDA projects that Brazil will export 4.19 bil. bu. (Jan-Dec). "Pace analysis" suggests that exports could be significantly higher than that. Note: Commitments = shipments to date +

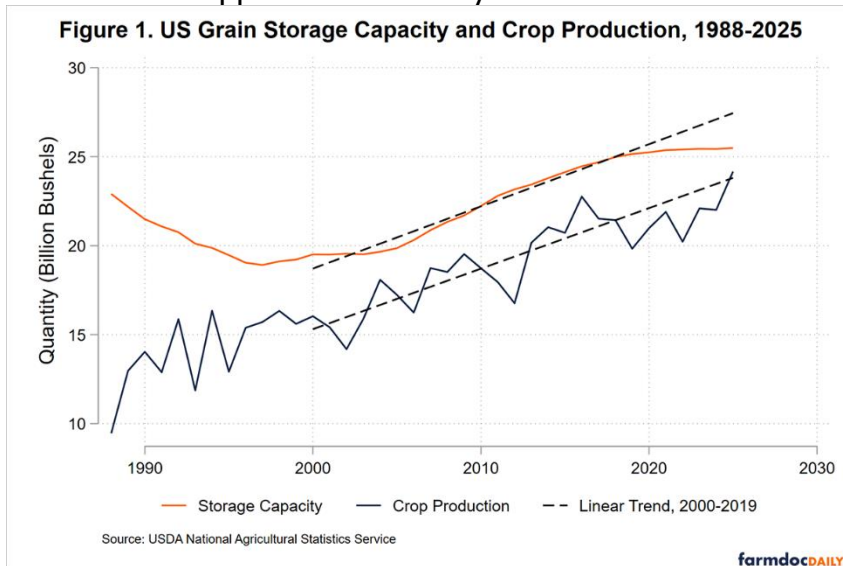
vessels loading + vessels waiting + vessels scheduled to arrive.

- Is something happening in the wheat market?** Nearby Mar 2026 wheat gained 19¢ during the past week, a 33-week high close, supported by expanding open interest and 2 months of heavy volume, both of which are price positives, says longtime grain market advisor Gary Ellis. He says, "Total open interest at 525 thousand contracts, is an 87-month high and the February trading volume to date has been 227 thousand contracts, which is poised for a 20-yr high in open interest. He says the 12-14-week price cycle for wheat will reach week #7 this week, which is also the same week as when the market topped in 2025, which was off a 14-year double-top, hitting the \$13.80 range. He adds that the 9-year price cycle bottomed last fall at \$4.92 with the 12.5% retracement at \$6.04 and 25% retracement at \$7.17." He also says both Chicago and Kansas City wheat are showing seasonal strength with the strongest in the CME contract."



TradingView

- The buildout of grain storage capacity in the U.S. has stopped.** That's according to data from [Univ. of IL Farmdoc ag economist Joe Janzen](#), who says "U.S. grain storage capacity grew in parallel with production from 2000 to 2019 at about 350 mil. bu. per year. However, that growth has stagnated since 2020 across all regions and facility types. Janzen said this stagnation, combined with continued production growth, has led to a record-high-capacity utilization rate, particularly in on-farm storage. The 2025 crop brought these tensions to a head, with December 1 on-farm utilization reaching 80%. Less storage capacity relative to crop production is concerning if it creates bottlenecks in the grain handling and transportation system that raise costs and generate significant differences in price between producer and end-user. In transportation for example, shipping constraints on the Mississippi River waterway due to low water levels have periodically led to large



swings in inland crop prices relative to prices at export terminals. Recently released data showed 80% of on-farm storage capacity was used by major crops as of December 1, 2025. Stagnant capacity growth raises at least 2 unanswered questions for the US grain industry from the farmer forward through the supply chain: 1) how much capacity utilization is too much

before capacity constraints disrupt supply chains and affect market prices? and 2) who will invest in new storage capacity if increases in crop production are expected to continue? What is less clear is why investment in grain storage capacity dropped. Possible relevant factors include increased construction costs and higher interest rates in the post-2020, post-Covid economy, concerns about future production growth, and the irregular and unpredictable nature of grain storage demand. It may be difficult to justify investment in storage capacity when the timing and magnitude of benefits are uncertain. Storage capacity may earn low returns in typical market conditions but become much more valuable in the aftermath of specific supply or demand changes. It takes time and effort for farmers and other firms to consistently generate revenue from storage capacity. In the aggregate, it is difficult to determine if current US storage capacity is sufficient for efficient operation along grain supply chains. At what level of capacity utilization do bottlenecks form and capacity constraints begin to materially affect basis relationships, price volatility, and farmer marketing flexibility? The grain industry, from the farmer outward, will need to consider these questions as it addresses the continually shifting geography of global grain production and consumption in the years ahead." (GSI, Brock, Sukup, time to make some "deals?")

- **“It is time to start drilling down into acreage prospects,”** says the Brock Report, “These discussions will start kicking off in the next week, with the Feb. 19, 2026, USDA Ag Outlook Forum and the first 2026 plantings estimate, based purely on economic projections. Then on March 31, USDA issues its survey-based planting intentions report. IA St. Univ. recently released their estimated costs for corn and soybeans in the state, and they show a clear advantage for soybeans. The big difference in corn and soybean costs is nitrogen—\$103 per acre for corn, per IA St. Fertilizer has become an increasingly political topic over the past year, and the price outlook for buyers remains difficult, due in part to tariffs. Seed costs are also higher for corn, at \$113.70 versus \$63.10 for beans. Seed, chemical and fertilizer costs are projected to be up 10% this year for corn-on-corn acres, compared to a 7.8% increase for soybeans. And there is a variable cost in LP for drying corn. The Univ. of IL recently released 2026 crop budgets present a similar picture — soybean margins are projected to be in the black on cash rented acres, specifically in central and northern IL, while corn is projected as a loser in all regions of the state. Break-even prices for corn are in the \$4.70-\$4.90 range, and for soybeans they are in the \$10.80-\$11.25 range, IL FarmDOC Daily said in mid-January. FarmDOC noted that return projections for 2026 are similar to 2025 prior to the Farmer Bridge Assistance Program announcement. Even with that program, FarmDOC estimates an average loss on corn in central and southern Illinois for 2025. The other part of the equation favoring beans is the rally in soybean prices over the past month. This rally has largely been driven by a couple of China-related news items: President Trump’s phone call last week with China’s Xi Jinping and his subsequent social media post announcing that China may buy 20 MMT this “season” rather than the 12 MMT agreed upon in last fall’s “trade deal”; and a report this week that China is willing to extend that deal by another year when Trump and Xi meet in April. In our opinion, there is still ample reason to be skeptical of these potential boosts to Chinese demand, including the fact there has been no formal signing or even an acknowledgement by China. Regardless of our own skepticism, the market’s reaction says it is clearly buying the optimism. And the news comes at an important time for the market, as February is the Price Discovery period for crop insurance in the Midwest. While the U.S.-China ag trade relationship now seems like it could be drifting back toward old norms, that was definitely not the case in October and November. There’s also the idea that farmers “just like to plant corn.” Corn’s genetics gains have outpaced soybeans and other crops. At our winter seminars in December, the farmers in attendance left us expecting a jump in corn acres and considering the possibility they could plant 100 mil. The concern this year is whether other factors are at play making acreage estimates less reliable. The implication of the story is that data collection has suffered due to declining farmer survey responses, and more recently because of dramatic staff reductions in USDA, including in the Farm Service Agency. Our expectation is that USDA will figure out what if anything went wrong in 2025 and improve open their performance in 2026. Still, what the acreage picture looks like this summer could be much different than it is in February. But our starting point is that 2026 corn and soy acres will look much like they did in 2025.” For the complete commentary and charts go to [The Brock Report](#).

- **Marketing.** “The corn market posted a small rally, beans were strong.” -- [Matt Bennett](#).
 - ✓ **Corn—futures.** March '26 corn was quiet overall last week. March settled at \$4.31¾, up ½¢. This was 1¢ off the high and 2¼¢ off the low. March rallied 1½¢ for the week. Technically, we look to be in more of a consolidation mode on old corn, while new crop continues to build some steam.
 - ✓ **Corn—cash and basis.** Basis was steady/improved. St. Louis terminals were bidding 21¢ over March (5¢ wider), in the last couple of weeks we've seen 40¢ over, paid around the STL market. With such a strong export pace, we'll likely see this sort of action in the basis at times. When we get a hot bid, the grower likely rewards the market, again due to how much corn we know they have in their possession.
 - ✓ **Corn—marketing strategy.** I like having some corn ownership, but at the same time, I'd like to transfer some of that to paper if you get to a point where you're ok with the price. I'm not saying a guy must cover it all, but keeping in the game until we get past the safrinha crop and US acreage discussion on some bushels seems wise to me.
 - ✓ **Corn—2026 crop.** December 2026 corn ended the week at \$4.64½, up 6¾¢. Dec26 continues to show some life. With such strong demand, it seems some in the industry understand we must have big production when we have such strong demand. IF the USDA is correct with a 16.4+ bil. bu. demand structure, it's important to note the only time we've raised a crop bigger than that was last year.
 - ✓ **Beans—futures.** Beans have continued showing strength this past week but gave back heading into the weekend. On Friday, March beans settled down 4¼¢ at \$11.33. This was 6½¢ off the high and 11¢ off the low. Beans rallied 17¾¢ on the week. March meal settled \$5.70 higher on the week at \$303.60, while oil ended at 57.08¢, up 1.75¢.
 - ✓ **Beans—cash and basis.** Basis was steady. St. Louis bids were 24¢ over the March (5¢ wider) Cash beans have seen some appreciation here lately. With what I previously mentioned, it's tough to think we have a bunch more upside without some production issues, which don't look to be likely.
 - ✓ **Beans—marketing strategy.** I got to think this rally is a great chance to get down to gambling bushels, but that's my opinion. Our program has us down to what I would call gambling bushels, and I would have to think that's a good way to look at this. I always go back to fundamentals and while the US could have tighter stocks than we thought, world stocks aren't likely to be tight anytime soon with a huge SA crop on the way.
 - ✓ **Beans--2026 crop.** Nov 2026 beans settled at \$11.13½, up 19½¢ on the week. New beans settling over \$11 on the board is notable in my opinion. While few if any can get a fall bid over \$11, this is the highest we've been on a weekly close in a few months.
 - ✓ **Price ratio—2026 crop.** 2.39/1, beans to corn, based on fall futures, +2/week.

- **Market advisor's thoughts/suggestions:** [Matt Bennett](#). "Chinese soybean purchases

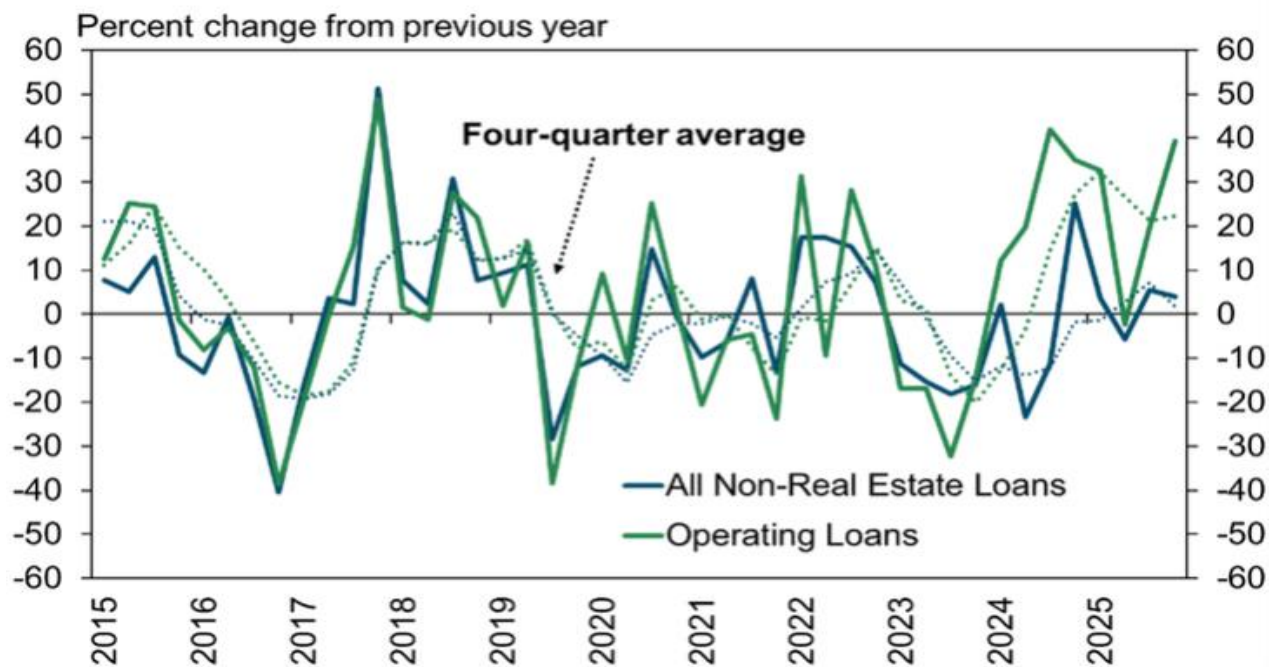


has led to a nice pop in the market. Weather in South America is good for the most part with some lingering dryness in Argentina and a bit too much rain in Brazil where they're trying to harvest and plant safrinha corn. When it comes to this corn market, we have to remember how much old crop there is to come to market sooner or later. While the funds bought 23,000 contracts last week, they're still short 57,000 as of this past Tuesday when the report is tabulated. Looking at the commercials, they're only short 239,000 contracts, which in my opinion is a far cry from where I'd

expect them to be. A ton of farmer selling will occur in the next few months, which should limit gains, especially from a cash bid standpoint. I like some corn ownership due to incredible demand, but big-time improvements in cash is tough to expect until we see more of this corn out of the growers' hands. Given we had 98.8 mil. acres at a record yield 7 bu. better than ever, it's tough to think we can do that very often. While in some areas people tell me corn acres will be up from a year ago, I hear the opposite in many areas, particularly where production wasn't a record. There's no doubt we have some liquidity issues in farm country, so I assume it could limit acres somewhat. I like hedging bin corn as I've talked about lately, while keeping some flex on a good portion of bushels the more aggressive we get in selling..... The bean market has been on a nice run since President Trump announced China 'may' buy 294 mil. bu. of US beans. While we'll take the rally, it sure feels odd to me we're rallying this sharply on such light verbiage. The funds have bought into this big-time with 87,000 contracts bought as of Tuesday's close, pushing them to a 116,000 long. That is the second biggest week of buying on record. While I'd like to see this rally continue, I can't help but think it's an opportunity to sell some beans or hedge off some risk. The fact of the matter is the global balance sheet hasn't changed a bit with a huge Brazilian crop on the way and Argentine production likely good enough to keep world stocks adequate. My thoughts on new beans are similar as to what they always are. If you can't call this a profit, we're a long way from harvest. If you know these prices work, it warrants some thoughts on hedging risk. We must remember Brazil raises the biggest bean crop in the world, and it appears we've locked that in for the most part. Most estimates on Brazil are 6.6 bil. bu., so a record once again. While a US weather problem would be bullish for sure, legging into sales at profitable levels is a tough strategy to beat...If you need help with your marketing plan, let us know. I recommend using either the Profitability Calculator on the Channel website or the AgMarket.Net Profitability App. The AgMarket.Net® App, with revised MyFarm software, is now available on Google Play and the Apple App Store as a mobile app. A desktop version is available through the AgMarket.Net® website. Find it at <https://www.agmarket.app/app/> to get help on budgets and your marketing plan." [Click here to learn more.](#)

Farm Economy---

- **A national survey of ag bankers by the Federal Reserve** found strong demand for operating loans boosted farm lending activity at commercial banks in the fourth quarter of 2025. According to the [National Survey of Terms of Lending to Farmers](#), the average size of loans for operating expenses during the year reached a record high and pushed up lending volumes. Farm loan interest rates remained above the average of recent decades but declined for the sixth consecutive quarter. The share of non-real estate loans with a variable rate increased from below average levels and average loan maturities increased. The outlook for the U.S. farm economy remained subdued alongside weakness in the crop sector, but aggregate farm financial stress remained limited. Direct government payments and resilient farm real estate values have eased some of the strain from weak profitability for crop producers and strength in the cattle sector has lifted incomes in many areas. [Demand for farm loans has grown alongside tighter working capital, elevated production costs and a surge in cattle prices](#). Market conditions in the crop sector are likely to keep profit opportunities narrow in the months ahead, prolonging challenges for growers that have led to steady deterioration in agricultural credit conditions. Substantial growth in operating loans drove strong demand for farm lending at commercial banks in 2025. According to estimates from the survey, the volume of new farm operating loans increased nearly 40% from the previous year in the fourth quarter and grew by an average of more than 20% throughout the past year (below). While the rise in non-real estate lending during the fourth quarter was attributed to operating expenses, [increased feeder livestock lending also contributed to growth in activity](#) throughout most of 2025. Operating loan volumes



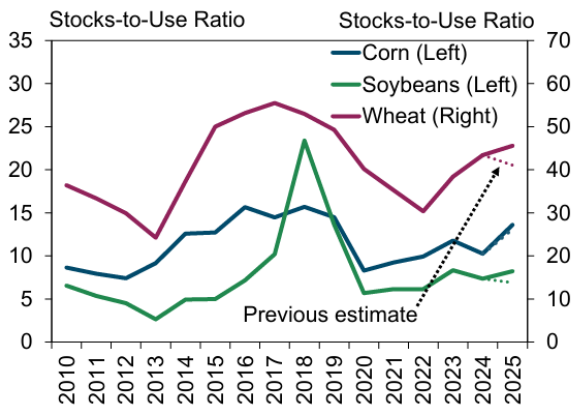
increased alongside notable growth in loan sizes. Adjusting for inflation, the average size of farm operating loans during 2025 was 30% larger than the prior year, following similar growth during 2024. →

- **Bankers were updated on the farm economy by [economists from the Federal Reserve](#), who made 4 primary observations:**

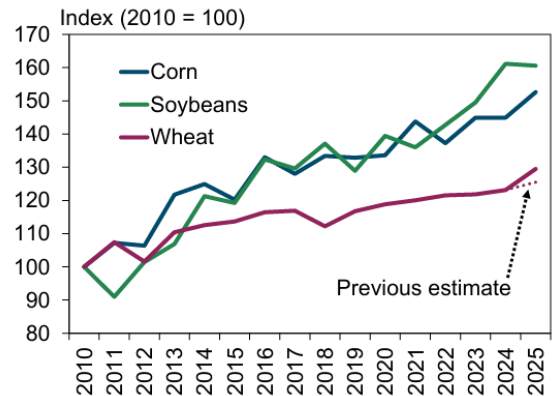
- ✓ Disparities in the U.S. ag economy have persisted with notable weakness among row crop producers and ongoing strength among cattle operations.
- ✓ Despite significant uncertainty associated with trade, as well as some signs of increased stress, financial conditions in agriculture have remained stable.
- ✓ Growth in farm real estate values has slowed but have remained a key source of stability.
- ✓ Macro-economic growth has been resilient despite a variety of potential risks and uncertainties.

Elevated U.S. supplies and strong global production continue weighing on crop prices.

U.S. Crop Inventories

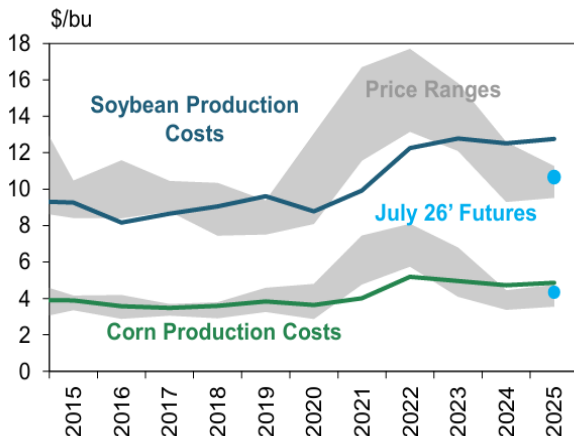


Global Crop Production

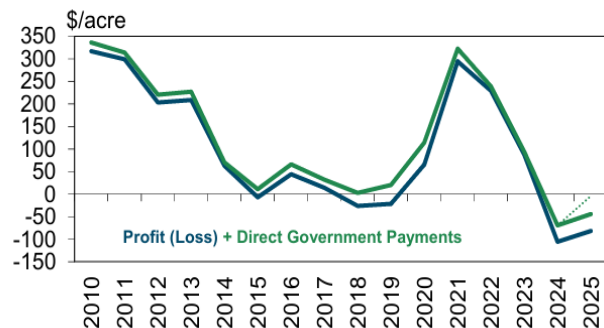


Crop profit opportunities remain narrow, but ad hoc payments and insurance will provide modest near-term support.

Corn and Soybean Profit Opportunities



Average Profit (Loss) for a Hypothetical 50/50 Corn and Soybean Farm

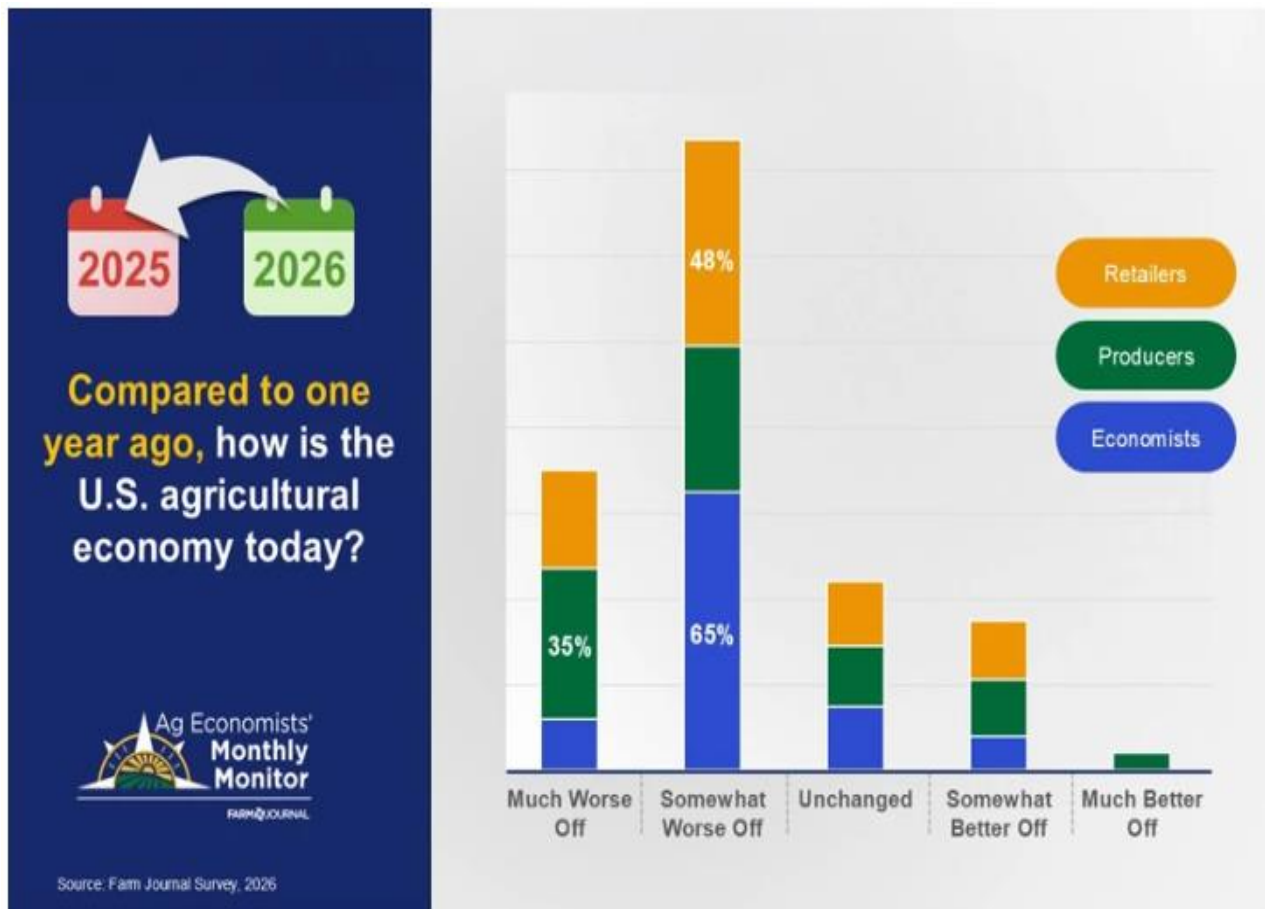


2024: [Emergency Commodity Assistance Program \(ECAP\)](#)

2025: [Farmer Bridge Assistance \(FBA\) Program + Projected ARC/PLC Payments](#)

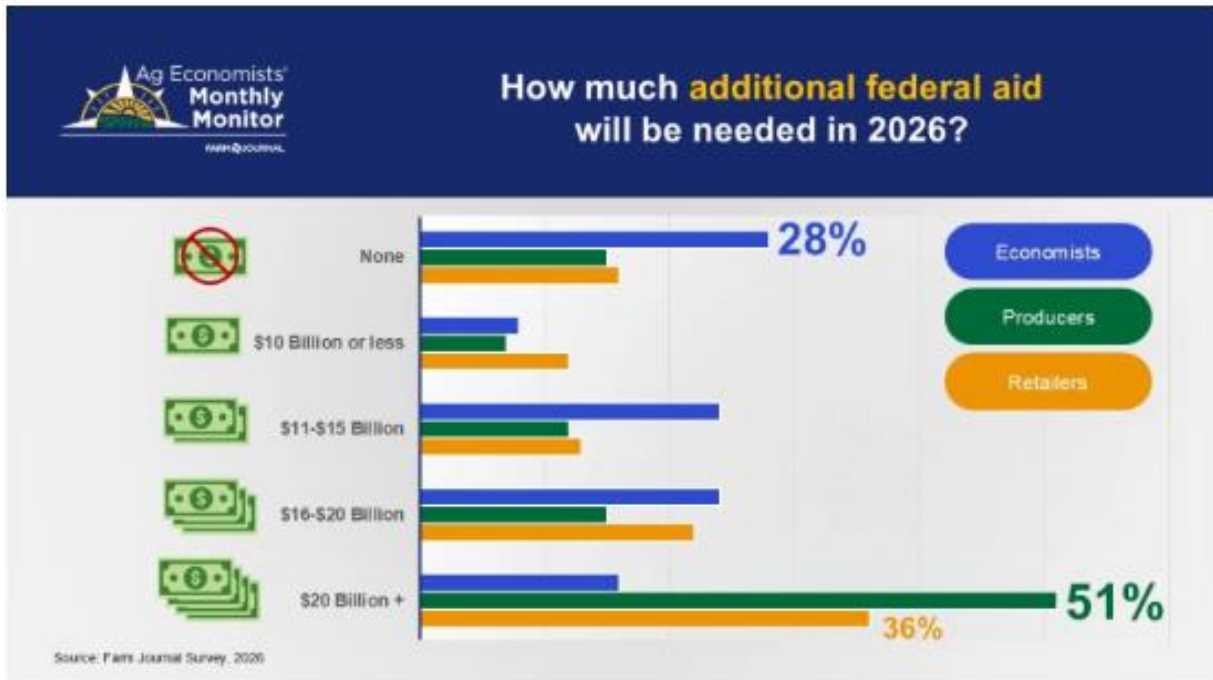


- Farm Journal's Ag Economists' Monthly Monitor** shows the U.S. ag economy entered the year in a clear crop-sector recession. However, the survey also finds a deeper crisis of confidence. Economists say the downturn is cyclical and manageable through optimization, but farmers are experiencing it as a structural stress test on their operations and livelihoods. [Economists in January's survey](#) pointed to a familiar but intensifying split in the ag economy: strength in livestock, particularly beef cattle, versus persistent financial stress across much of the row-crop sector. Tight cattle supplies and strong global demand for animal protein continue to support profitability in the livestock sector, even as economists warn that future prospects remain uncertain. At the same time, global surpluses of corn, soybeans and wheat, combined with weak export demand for certain commodities, are weighing heavily on crop prices. Across nearly all responses, margin pressure emerged as a

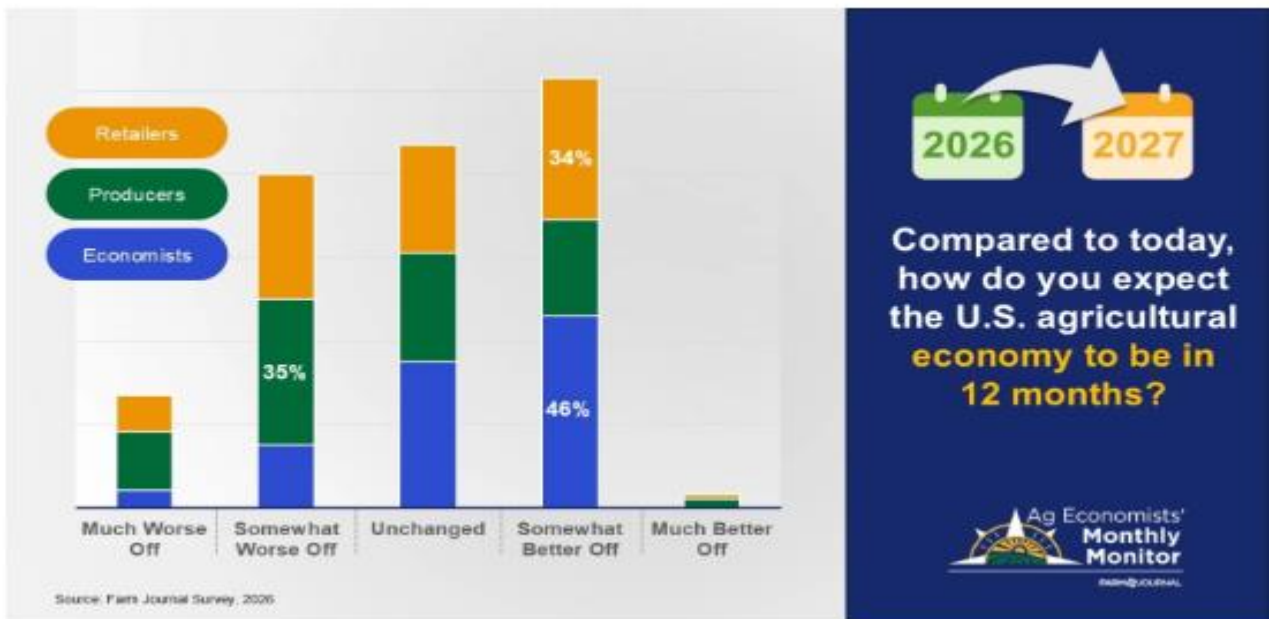


dominant concern. Elevated input costs, rising interest rates and tightening access to operating loans are pushing break-even costs above market prices for many producers, especially in grain production. Economists repeatedly cited policy uncertainty, ranging from trade relations to biofuels policy, as a pivotal factor. While government assistance and expectations of additional ad hoc payments are providing some near-term relief, many note those funds are largely being used to service debt rather than reinvest in operations, underscoring ongoing liquidity challenges in farm country. →

- **And what does this mean** for the balance of 2026 and into the next year?



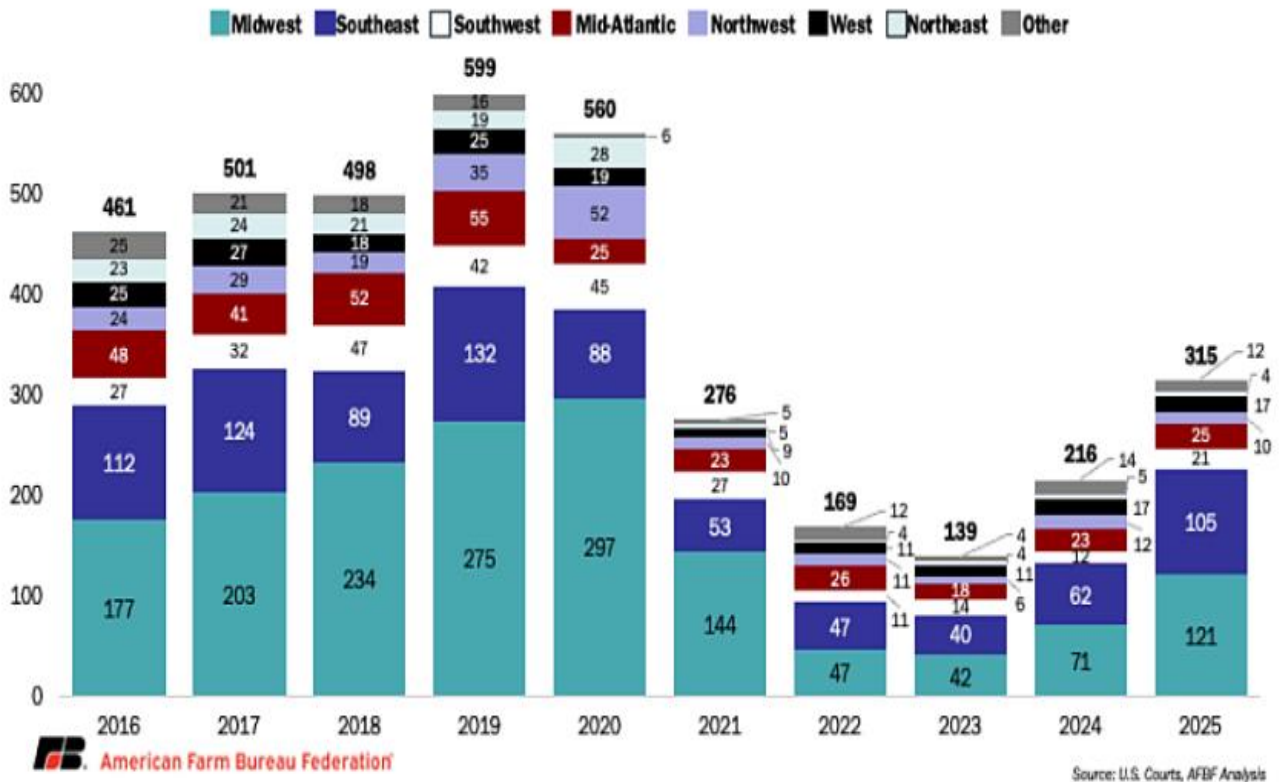
When asked a simple but heavy question: "What can you do to be successful in 2026," farmers didn't sugarcoat the challenge. Their answers reflect pressure, fatigue and uncertainty. But underneath the blunt language is a clear, consistent strategy emerging across operations: protect cash, defend ROI and stay flexible long enough to outlast the cycle. While several producers said they're looking to diversify as a key to success, the most dominant theme was cutting costs to the bone, especially when it comes to capital spending. Farmers repeatedly emphasized zero, or near-zero, capex, delaying equipment upgrades and scrutinizing every purchase.



- A new American Farm Bureau economics report** said [Chapter 12 farm bankruptcies](#) increased for the second year in a row, reaching 315 filings in 2025, a 46% increase from 2024. The Midwest and Southeast filed 121 and 105 Chapter 12 cases, respectively, far outpacing any other regions. Deep crop losses across commodities common in those 2 regions have compounded after years of declining receipts and rising expenses. Filing for Chapter 12 bankruptcy is a last resort for farmers who have incurred large debts to continue operating with increased flexibility for payments. Midwest states with double-digit filings include IA with 18, NE 17, MO and WI each had 16 filings, MN with 13, and KS had 11, IN 9 and IL 8. OH only had 1 filing. The Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City said farmers are taking out larger operating loans and taking longer to repay them. USDA estimates that total farm debt will rise 5.2% to a record \$624.7 bil. this year.

Chapter 12 Farm Bankruptcies Filed By Region

2016-2025 | Jan. 1 - Dec. 31



A fourth consecutive year of expected declines in farm income will continue to strain agriculture, placing further reliance on credit options that are growing thin. For many families, excessive debt loads could be met with little flexibility as Chapter 12 eligibility prohibits them from using the tool specifically designed to accommodate downturns in the farm economy. Instead, we will likely continue to see increases in both bankruptcy and farm closures, further straining the remaining farms – and the food, fiber and fuel supply chain for all Americans.

- **Former USDA ag economist Agata Kingsbury** looked at the work of her former colleagues on their analysis of the US Farm Economy and reports, "One finding really stopped me in my tracks. Farming, by itself, no longer pays the bills for most households.



Yes, aggregate U.S. farm income still looks "strong" on paper. But when you pull the data apart, a different reality emerges. Nearly 30% of the projected net farm income in 2026 comes from government payments. Off-farm income is now the primary source of financial stability for most farm families. In other words, what looks like stability is increasingly built on policy support and non-farm wages, rather than on market profitability. That disconnect motivated me to put together a new report for the U.S. Agricultural Economics series. ERS continues to publish excellent data, but the usual deep narrative analysis isn't there this year, and the story gets lost when you're staring at spreadsheets in isolation." Kingsbury, who is the CEO of the

economics firm Demetrica, says, "The latest USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) data suggest the U.S. farm economy is holding steady heading into 2026. But a deeper look reveals a more complicated, more sobering story. [We've just released a new report](#) in our U.S. Agricultural Economics research series that synthesizes ERS data on farm income, government payments, production costs, household income, and debt. Rather than reproducing tables, the report focuses on what the data imply when viewed together. Farm sector "stability" is now heavily dependent on government payments and off-farm income rather than on market profitability. Nearly 30% of net farm income in 2026 is projected to come from Federal support. Off-farm wages and benefits are now the primary source of financial resilience for the typical farm family. In other words, aggregate farm income remains elevated, but farming alone no longer pays the bills for most producers."

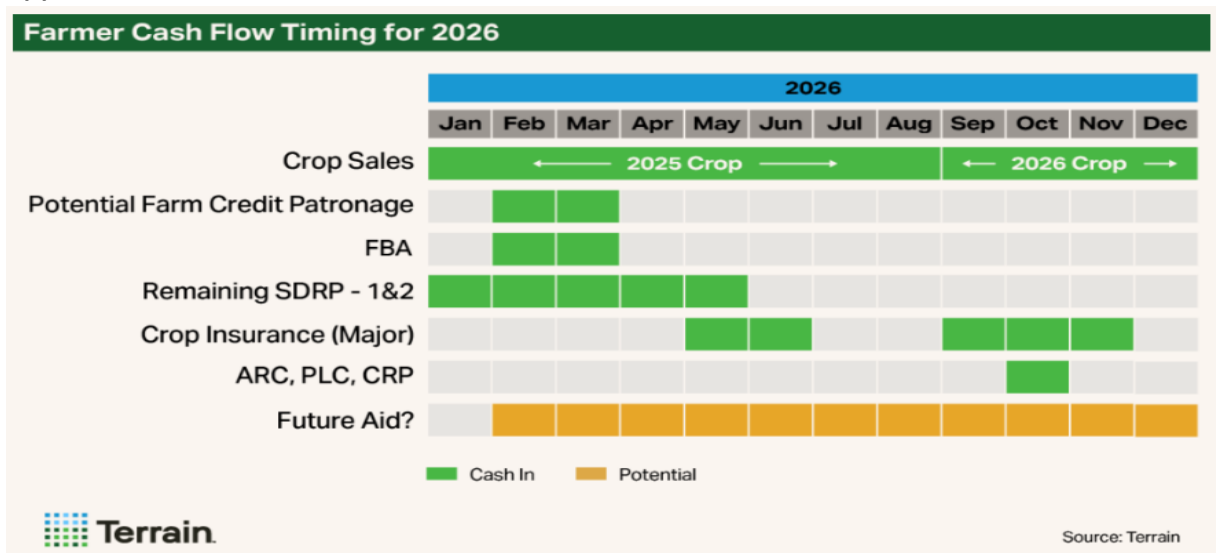
- **Newly released farm income data** confirms the economic crisis in rural America. In this week's commentary, American Farm Bureau President Zippy Duvall says part of the solution could be found in a new Farm Bill, "As a farmer, I don't need a spreadsheet to tell me times are tough – but the numbers back up what farmers are living every day. USDA has now lowered its 2025 farm income outlook by \$25 bil. This economic downturn is deeper and has lasted longer than many anticipated. This year, farm income is projected to be 48 bil. dollars below the highs we saw in 2022. Low commodity prices and high costs are leaving many farm families with little room to breathe. Rising debt and uncertainty make it harder to plan, invest, and weather challenges. This is why Congress needs to act with a new, modernized Farm Bill and immediate support that reflects today's farm economy." (American Farm Bureau)

Farm Programs and Mailbox Money—

- **USDA officials say they remain on schedule** to meet the late-February rollout for the Farm Bridge Assistance program. Payments are expected to begin flowing on schedule, and new digital tools are being introduced to streamline the process for producers. Richard Fordyce, USDA Undersecretary for Farm Production and Conservation, speaking with Agriculture of America, said the agency's timeline "remains solid" as procedural steps near completion. As part of the program's rollout, USDA plans to administer the program through login.gov, a federal portal already used by multiple government agencies. Fordyce said that will allow producers to access, review, and sign the required FBA forms electronically. He advised farmers to set up accounts at login.gov ahead of time to avoid delays once the forms are released. USDA views the FBA program as an early test case for the broader use of login.gov in future farm programs.
- **The USDA is on track** to deliver the Farmer Bridge Assistance Program payments to farmers. Richard Fordyce, USDA Undersecretary for Farm Production and Conservation, said things are looking good to get that help in the hands of producers this month, "We've gotten most of the procedural things done in order to get the payments out by the end of February, and that timeline looks good. I mean, we're very confident we're going to be able to do that. One way that we're going to deploy this program is going to be through login.gov, and login.gov is basically a portal that folks need to set up an account in." Fordyce is encouraging producers to create an account at login.gov as soon as possible, When your FBA form is available for you to view and to sign, you can do it through the login.gov platform. And so, you know, I'm just urging farmers to take about 10 or 15 minutes when they've got a little bit of downtime, just go to login.gov and set up an account. It is pretty straightforward. And certainly, if you have trouble setting up a login.gov account, feel free to call the local Farm Service Agency office. I think those folks will be able to help you kind of go through that sign up process or the setting-up that account process, and we're hopeful that it works pretty well for the folks that want to use it. We're going to continue to use that platform as we deploy other programs going forward."
- **While USDA says it will be widely distributing the payments** at the end of this month, nearly every farmer applied weeks ago to qualify for the payments. Not much was heard about farmers who were denied, but apparently some were. The National Ag Law Center, going to bat for those farmers, says: "According to [data](#) recently published by the Economic Research Service (ERS), direct farm payments from federal programs are expected to increase in 2026. In 2025, over \$30 bil. in direct payments were made to U.S. farmers, mainly through USDA programs and supplemental assistance provided for by Congress. In 2026, ERS is predicting this number to increase to \$44.3 bil. ERS attributes this increase to higher expected payments under the Farm Bill program, which are triggered by decreases in commodity prices. ERS also anticipates both supplemental and ad hoc disaster assistance payments to remain high. To learn about the process for challenging a denial of program benefits, click [here](#)."

The Business of Farming—

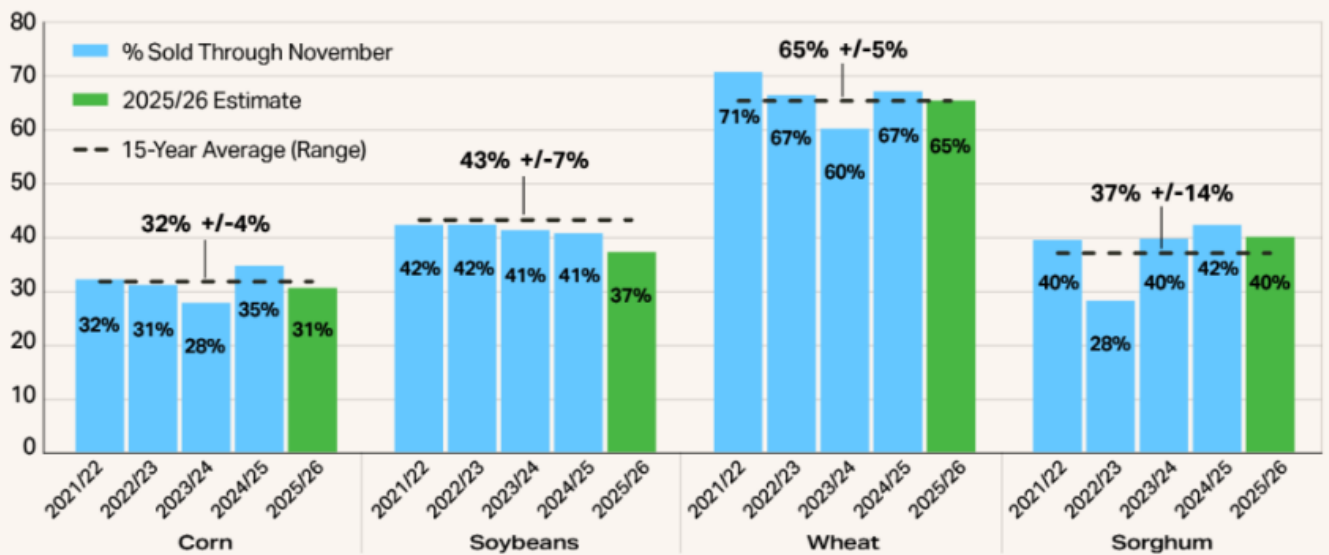
- **In 2026, with tight margins continuing across row crops**, farmers aren't just managing income levels this year—they're managing cash flow timing, too, says [Marc Rosebohm, grain and oilseed market analyst with Terrain Ag.](#) He says:
 - ✓ Cash won't necessarily arrive steadily. Beyond grain sales, many operations may see cash infusions spread across late winter, spring, summer, and fall from government programs and possible insurance-related payments.
 - ✓ Grain marketing has not appeared to follow 'normal' patterns. Weak prices, wide basis, and margin pressure appear to have shifted sales—especially for soybeans—pushing more producers to initially sell only what's needed for near-term liquidity and potentially shifting some sales to 2026.
 - ✓ The takeaway is that planning in advance can:
 - Help farmers have more productive conversations with their Farm Credit lender,
 - Provide better visibility into anticipated cash flows for the year ahead,
 - Help inform crop sales and purchasing strategies for this past harvest and next, and
 - Can bring additional clarity to your financial picture should unexpected expenses or opportunities arise.



Rosenbohm and colleague Matt Clark say, “Because of continued tight margins, cash flow timing will matter perhaps more than usual this year. Paying attention to this year’s upcoming government programs, their rules and payment dates will be important for farmers as they work to manage cash flows for their operation. Paying attention to this year’s upcoming government programs, their rules and payment dates will be important for farmers as they work to manage cash flows for their operation.” Those include the Farmer Bridge Assistance payment in a few days and Stage 2 of the Supplemental Disaster Relief Program payment that some farmers may get later this year, along with ARC and PLC payments from 2025 crops that will come in October. And crop insurance indemnity payments could be generated and paid later this fall. →

- Rosenbohm and Clark of Terrain Ag** say, “Now could also be a good time for farmers to assess how their marketing plans and anticipated cash flows interact. The payment for sales of much of the 2025 corn and soybean crops will arrive in 2026 alongside increased government payments. For any grain currently in storage, whether on-farm or in commercial storage, consider how the ongoing carrying cost for those bushels balances with expectations for how markets will evolve — in futures, basis or both — in the months ahead. With average operating note interest rates near 8%, the cost of carrying grain is higher than it was during the lower-rate environment of the recent past. On-farm average carrying costs (assuming a nine-month storage period) could total about 10 cents/bu. per month for corn and about 14 cents/bu. per month for soybeans. These estimates are based in part on Iowa State University’s grain storage cost calculator and incorporate upfront expenses such as drying, handling in and out of storage, transportation, and debt service or return on invested capital averaged over the storage period. Individual farmers’ costs may be slightly different than these averages. To take a closer look at individual estimated cost of carry, check out the [calculator tool](#) from IA St. Univ. or a [similar one](#) adapted by ND St. Univ.

Below-Average Share of Corn, Soybeans Sold Through November



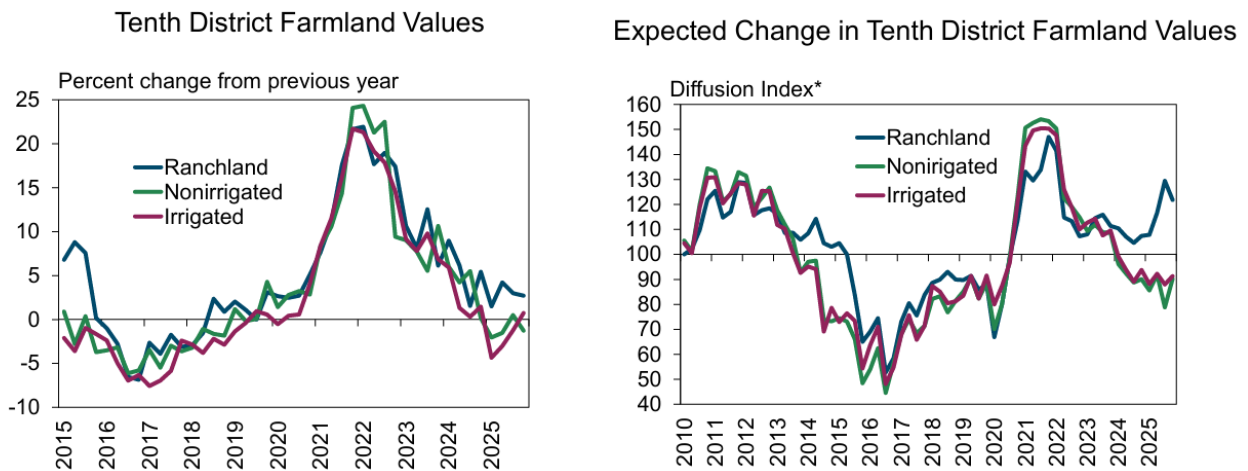
Sources: USDA NASS, WASDE, Terrain

Planning these in advance can help farmers have more productive conversations with their Farm Credit lender, provide better visibility into anticipated cash flows for the year ahead, and help inform crop sales and purchasing strategies for this past harvest and next. Mapping out projected income and expense dates with your lender can bring additional clarity to your financial picture should unexpected expenses or opportunities arise. It’s also important to communicate with your Farm Credit lender, tax advisor and accountant about accrual adjustments and tax planning to avoid confusion at the end of 2026.

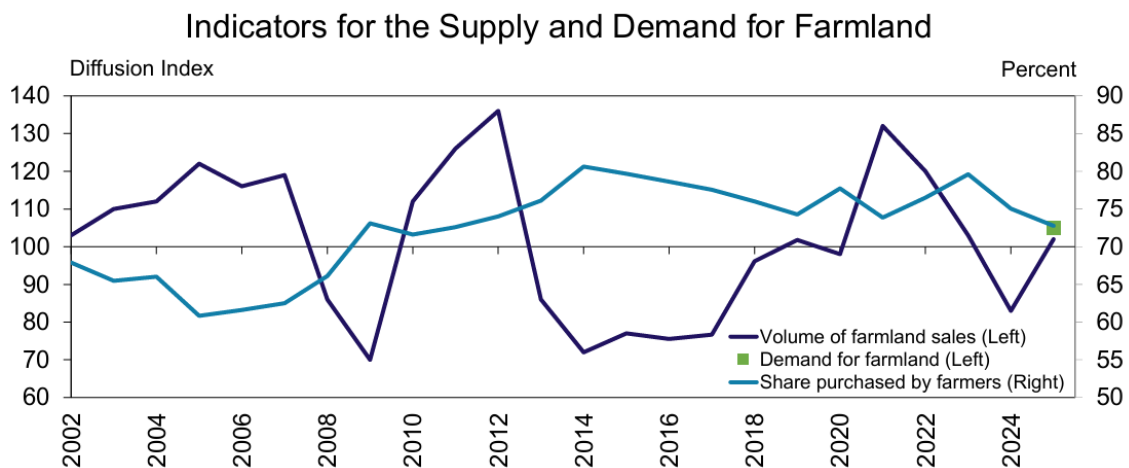
Land Prices and Farmland Issues—

- **Federal Reserve ag economists** have taken a look at [farmland values and demand trends](#) and see a difference between cropland and pasture land values.

Cropland markets have softened, but values remain firm and lenders see potential for strength in ranchland.



Farmland sales ticked up in 2025, but demand indicators fell slightly



- **Farm security got a boost this past week** when USDA and the Defense Department signed a new collaboration agreement. The rise of China and its farmland buys near sensitive U.S. military installations prompted the USDA-Pentagon signing of the new MOU, additional collaboration between the Department of War and the USDA.” USDA says information and personnel will be shared with DOD’s Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, or DARPA, on Ag vulnerabilities. It also adds to efforts to streamline data collection on such buys. USDA will also create a new office within the USDA Office of the Chief Scientist to coordinate security research. (Berns Bureau Washington)

- **Where are farmland values headed in the near future?** Colton Lacina, the senior vice president of real estate operations for the Farmers National Company, says, "As we kind of enter this new phase of transition, land values have been very, very resilient over the past handful of years. But as we enter this phase where we're seeing compressed margins on the row crop side of things, we're seeing widened margins on the livestock sector, so it's really creating scenarios where land prices are really looking at those local factors. And so, we're seeing areas that have a very strong livestock presence. We're seeing really resilient and even robust land values for areas that are primarily corn and soybeans." Lacina talked about the current demand for farmland, "We look back 2 to 3 years, and just a scenario here where we would have an auction, and there may be 3, 4, 5, up to 6 or 7 guys, who are individuals that would bid on a farm. Now we're seeing that number is being reduced to 2, 3, and if one of those individuals is successful and ends up buying the farm, if we have a sale in that area again, you know, we're taking another bidder out of the pool." Given the strength in livestock prices, especially beef, it shouldn't be a surprise that pasture is in demand, "Let's start on the livestock side of things. Pasture is in demand right now, just given the wider margins, operations are looking to expand, and so in the past year, we've seen strong demand for pasture, really, across the board. When we look at the row crop side — as I said, row crop has been very localized in the last 6 months — a few of the factors that buyers are really looking at are historical productivity, quality of the soil, fertility of the soil, and water availability have been a big topic here lately, especially in the Western states. Just looking at water laws and regulations that are changing in individuals forecasting down the road, do I want to purchase a property that, potentially, down the road, is going to be impacted by water loss that's going to reduce or potentially reduce the productivity on these farms?" (American Ag Network)

Fertilizer, Fuel, and Other Inputs—

- **DTN retail fertilizer prices for the first week of February 2026** are evenly mixed. 4 fertilizers were slightly lower in price compared to last month while the other 4 were slightly higher. [DTN designates a significant move as anything 5% or more.](#) One fertilizer with a sizeable price increase was urea. The nitrogen fertilizer was 5% higher compared to last month with an average price of \$596/ton. The other higher-priced nutrients were DAP with an average price of \$851/ton, MAP \$879/ton and potash \$488/ton. The 4 fertilizers with slightly lower prices were 10-34-0 with an average price of \$665/ton, anhydrous \$860/ton, UAN28 \$410/ton and UAN32 \$464/ton. On a price per pound of nitrogen basis, the average urea price was \$0.65/lb. N, anhydrous \$0.52/lb. N, UAN28 \$0.73/lb. N and UAN32 \$0.73/lb. N. All 8 fertilizers are now higher in price compared to one year earlier: 10-34-0 by 5%, MAP 9%, potash 12%, both DAP and urea 14%, anhydrous 16%, UAN32 20% and UAN28 by 23%.

- **Fertilizer supply and price trends** from Josh Linville, StoneX, Feb. 11, 2026. "In the big picture, Fortunately, Iran/U.S. tensions have fallen a bit, but still need to be watched. 3 of the top 10 global NH₃ exporters need the Strait of Hormuz. Saudi Arabia, 1 of the top 5 global phosphate exporters, needs the Strait of Hormuz. If a fight breaks out and it slows/stops vessel traffic, it will be devastating for fertilizer."
- ✓ **UAN:** In a surprising move, UAN values are nearly the same price as urea in the gulf. NOLA UAN @ \$325 = \$0.508/lb. of actual N; NOLA Urea @ \$460 = \$0.50/lb. of actual N. While we have seen the same spread this time of year in the past, this has not been expected in 2026. UAN has significant a greater number of supply issues than urea. We had been expecting UAN a decent premium to urea...but the market is not reflecting that. This has us nervous that a UAN rally is coming shortly.
- ✓ **Urea:** India announces yet another urea purchase tender, highly expected by the market, but still a supportive price event. My belief is that the market story afterwards will be "India soaked up all the urea and left the market tight"...right before last minute spring needs are purchased." Urea values continue to scream higher. First half December saw NOLA urea values hit a low of \$350. Have now traded as high as \$465. For year-on-year reference (NOLA, inland values will differ), Urea - \$465 today vs \$389 last year.
- ✓ **NH₃:** Otherwise, great weather has allowed a much earlier start to NH₃ applications across parts of the Midwest. I know around where we live (Omaha), toolbars are getting pulled through fields. It is FAR too early to make any grandiose calls for the spring NH₃ application. However, if weather conditions remain like this (open for NH₃ application), we could see a decent chunk of nitrogen demand pulled from urea and UAN.
- ✓ **Phosphates:** Global markets are seeing continued support on limited sales with price ideas up at least \$20 USD. Our continued major 2026 fear is the lack of Chinese exports until August. Normally world's largest exporter at 8 to 10M tons per year of DAP/MAP. 2025 saw them only exporting 5.3M. If they keep this strategy, it will leave a huge supply hole in the global phosphate market. Farmers globally will feel the impact. Even if China comes back and values start to fall, downside price potential is currently limited due to high production costs. Lastly, we are continuing to watch for the 5-year sunset review of the U.S. counter vailing duties against Morocco and Russia. We are hopeful that their rates will be done away with, given recent attention by D.C. Vaden/USDA has made comments regarding the duopoly seen in phosphate and potash.
- ✓ **Potash:** Potash continues to be well supplied and well-priced. It is the only major fertilizer that is still tied to grain values in a normal way. Aside from having to watch U.S. / Canada relations, hard to see potash values moving substantially higher/lower before spring.

- **Leaders of both the IA and TX Corn Grower Assns.** have asked the Justice Dept. what it is doing to investigate [manipulation in fertilizer prices](#), after USDA pointed a political finger toward 2 global fertilizer suppliers. The response was the firing of the head of the anti-trust division within the Justice Dept. Both TX and IA corn groups highlighted comments made by leadership at USDA, citing "unacceptable" concentration in the fertilizer market and identifying a



"duopoly" that "has constrained supply and exerted excessive pricing over American farmers," the TX Corn Producers Association (TCPA) noted. "When the USDA -- the very agency tasked with overseeing our industry -- openly questions the actions of this highly concentrated market, it is a clear signal that the status quo is failing America's farm families," TCPA stated. In a webinar on Jan. 21 hosted by the National Agricultural Law Center, USDA Deputy Secretary Stephen Vaden (above) alleged 2 major fertilizer companies, Mosaic and Nutrien, were colluding to restrict phosphate and potash supplies to increase costs. Vaden called Mosaic and Nutrien a "duopoly" as well. The IA Corn letter, signed by the group's president, Mark Mueller, stated, "Over the past 20 years, the manufacturing of fertilizer has consolidated to the point where today, in the United States, we have only 4 main players across 3 products that farmers utilize to grow their crops." Both IA Corn and TCPA cited a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between USDA and the Justice Department in September to help coordinate antitrust enforcement. "However, as we enter the 2026 planting season, TX farmers need more than a memorandum. They need transparency. They need solutions," TCPA stated. IA Corn stated, "The time is now to report back on the progress that is being undertaken to examine the fertilizer industry."

Risk Management and Crop Insurance—

- **Farmers eligible for Supplemental Disaster Relief Program Payments**, but those who have questions about the complexity of the program, the lengthy form, and USDA terminology, can possibly get their questions answered by the USDA's Risk Management Agency. RMA has posted a Q/A page with dozens of potential questions. [Find your possible answer here.](#)

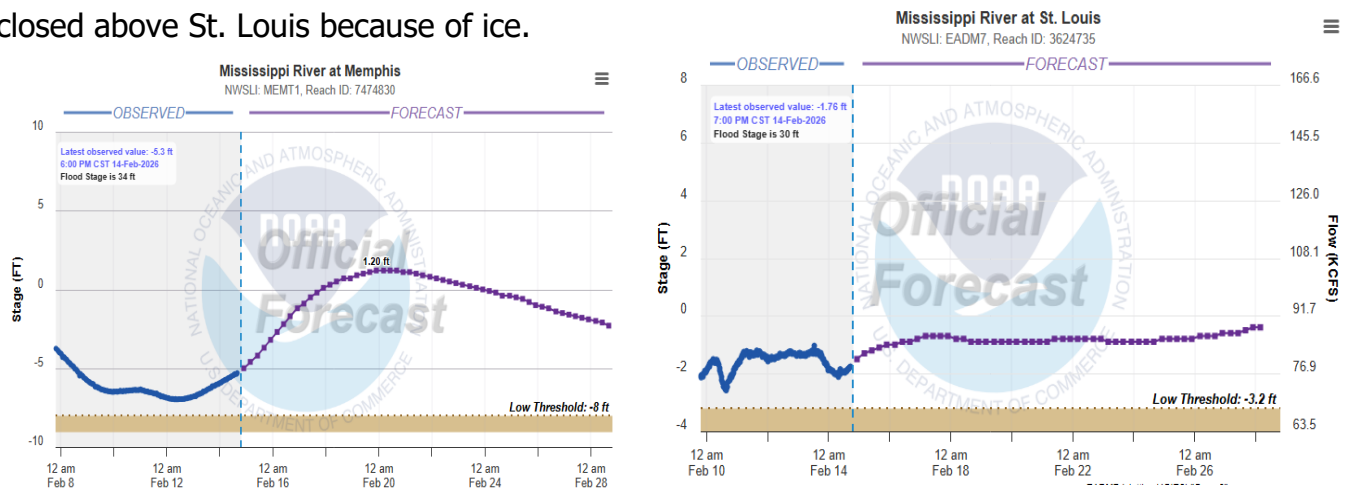
- **Farmers are in the midst of the crop insurance season**, but with recent USDA changes, some decisions may be more difficult. So, [IL Farmdoc ag economists](#) came to the rescue. They say, a “revised tool takes into account recent increases in premium support for the Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO) and the Enhanced Coverage Option (ECO), as well as increases in support for the COMBO product. As a result of these premium support changes, many farmers may consider taking ECO and SCO and potentially lowering RP coverage levels, particularly for soybeans in the central part of Illinois. The new tool illustrates the impacts of using SCO and ECO in conjunction with other crop insurance programs. Overall, many producers will find taking ECO at the 95% level an attractive alternative. The Insurance Evaluator is a web-based tool jointly developed by the Department of Agricultural Economics (ACE) and the National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA), both at the Univ. of IL. The Insurance Evaluator is available on the [farmdoc](#) website. It is under the Tools menu in the upper-right of *farmdoc*. Select “[Crop Insurance Tools](#)” and then “[Crop Insurance Evaluator](#)”. (Once the choices are filled out) “users can click “Run Evaluator” to run the simulation and generate results. Results will depend on the projected price, volatility factor and futures price. The official projected price and volatility factor will be used when released by the Risk Management Agency (RMA). The One Big Bill Act (OBBA) increased premium subsidy on SCO from 65% to 80%, resulting in much lower farmer-paid premiums. By administrative decision, RMA also increased premium support for ECO to 80%. As a result, farmers should consider SCO and ECO as they make crop insurance decisions in 2026, and compare, by lowering the coverage level on RP and then using SCO and ECO. Note that the trade-off in doing so is that risk protection will be lowered for farm-level events caused by lower yields on the farm. However, including ECO and SCO will increase coverage for price and yield decreases occurring over wider areas. The ability of farmers to use county-level products to cover individual losses depends on the correlation between their own yields, county yields and prices. To assess this strategy’s impact on risks, the “Compare Mode” in the Insurance Evaluator was used to evaluate RP scenarios at 60% coverage against the base selection of 85% coverage. Net benefits increase for switching from RP to ECO and SCO for several reasons.
 - ✓ Loss experience has been extremely low in the productive parts of the Midwest, and premiums are relatively high compared to payouts.
 - ✓ Percent premium subsidy declines with higher levels of RP coverage. The lower percent premium subsidy at higher individual farm insurance coverage levels introduces an incentive to lower RP coverage levels in the presence of add-up area insurance.
 - ✓ For most parts of the Midwest, production is relatively homogeneous with regards to yields. Thus, on average, farms tend to have a moderate to high yield correlation with their county yields.
 - ✓ Many farmers will find ECO and SCO a good risk management tool. ECO 95% will provide additional benefits in many cases. SCO has fewer benefits. For many farmers, taking ECO 95% and lowering the RP coverage level will lower farmer-paid premium costs, but risk benefits must be taken into account.”

- **As National Crop Insurance Services** kicked off its annual meeting last week, industry leaders say farmers are facing some of the toughest conditions in years, from high input costs and interest rates to ongoing weather disasters. NCIS Chairman Andy Caruso, who also serves as vice president and general manager of American Farm Bureau Insurance Services, says the strain across farm country is real and growing, “The pressures that farmers are facing today are not abstract, and they are not temporary. Input costs remain elevated, interest rates are high, commodity prices have softened, and many operations are still trying to recover from repeated weather events over the past several seasons. For a lot of farmers, there’s simply less room for error than at any point in recent memory.” Caruso says those financial pressures don’t just affect balance sheets. They’re also taking a toll on farmers and their families, “When uncertainty piles up year after year, it creates real stress. We’re seeing the mental health impacts of that pressure across rural America. That’s why conversations about resilience can’t focus only on finances. They also have to recognize the personal and human side of farming.” Against that backdrop, Caruso says crop insurance continues to serve as farmers’ most reliable risk-management tool. And the bond between farmers and their insurance agents can be particularly important in times of stress, “In times of both weather and economic uncertainty, crop insurance remains farmers’ primary line of defense. It’s not a profit center. It’s not a guarantee. It’s a stabilizing force that allows farmers to keep operating, maintain access to credit, and plant again when the unexpected occurs. When all else is going wrong, I believe that crop insurance can be a big point of stress relief.” It’s no wonder that crop insurance participation continues to grow nationwide, with nearly 9 out of every 10 eligible acres now protected. Caruso says, “We’ve seen firsthand how quickly crop insurance responds.” In some cases, indemnity payments arrive within days or weeks, long before other assistance can. Farmers have told us that support was a lifeline, and, in some cases, the reason their operations were able to survive and move forward. At the end of the day, this work is not about programs or policies alone. Farmers are counting on us to deliver protection and to preserve confidence, stability, and hope for their future.” (National Crop Insurance Services)

Transportation Issues—

- **January runoff in the Missouri River Basin** above Sioux City, IA, was one mil. acre-feet, which is 132% the average. Runoff was above average for all the reaches in the upper Missouri River Basin, even though most of the upper Basin had below-normal precipitation. This was due to above average temperatures causing early snowmelt. The updated 2026 calendar year runoff forecast for the Missouri River Basin above Sioux City continues to be below average. “Runoff into the reservoir system was above average for the month of January despite the dry conditions across the basin,” said John Remus of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. “With the below-average plains and mountain snowpack, we are forecasting a below-average runoff year for the Basin, resulting in reduced flows from the reservoirs, particularly in the upper basin.” The 2026 calendar year runoff forecast above Sioux City is 23.4 mil. acre-feet, 91% of the average. So, the Missouri will not be contributing much additional water to the Mississippi to get barges floating again.

- Mississippi River levels** at both St. Louis (right) and Memphis (left) are above the low threshold levels and forecast to remain above for the next few days. That will allow some grain barge traffic to move between St. Louis and the Gulf, but the Mississippi remains closed above St. Louis because of ice.

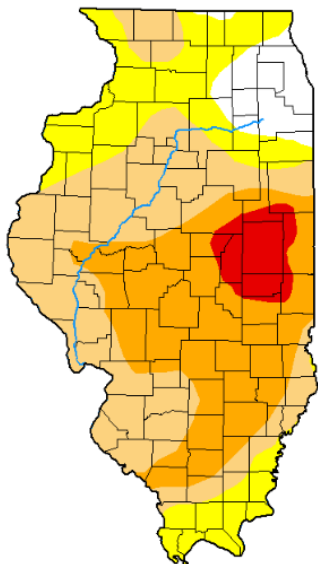


- American Commercial Barge Lines** says [it has resumed operations on the Illinois River](#). Vessel movements have recommenced; however, delays should be expected as traffic normalizes, and conditions continue to improve. Northbound and Southbound timings are being planned as conditions allow, but again transits are slower than normal. ACBL will continue to closely monitor river conditions and operational impacts and will provide further updates as necessary. Some docking points between St. Louis and Cairo have resumed operations; however, there are significant delays with towing work and dock spots are limited. The following fleet operations have resumed; however, there are significant delays with tow work and dock spots are limited as of February 13th at Beardstown, Dosh, Havana, Peoria, Pekin, Spring Valley, Hennepin, LaSalle, Ottawa, Morris, Naples. Operations have resumed; however, there are significant delays, minimal tow work, and limited dock spots as of February 13th at Lemont with barge cleaning. Transit from Lemont to Chicago is expected to begin slowly this week. On the Ohio River, the following fleet operations have resumed; however, there are significant delays with tow work and dock spots are limited as of February 13th at Metropolis, Shawneetown, Mt. Vernon, Owensboro, Newburgh, Jeffersonville, Madison, Cincinnati, Southpoint. The Lower Mississippi has returned to mostly normal operations.
- Funding for waterways improvements in the US** have [run aground in the widely opposed funding](#) for border patrol and immigration enforcement. They are both part of a larger appropriations package. Although it passed the House, it stalled in the Senate. Back in the House, the minority leader of the appropriations committee introduced a bill that would halt immigration funding issues but allow other appropriations sections to be considered for passage.

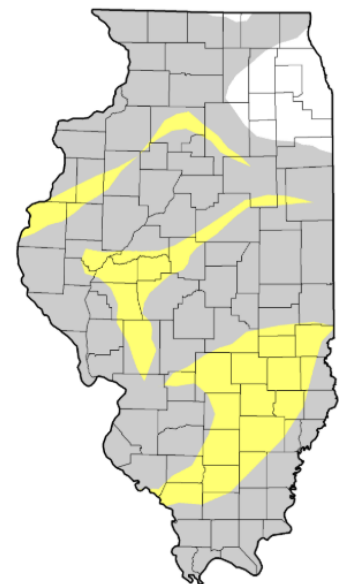
- **Grain elevators on a BNSF line** should watch for maintenance crews in the area. BNSF plans to spend \$3.6 bil. on capital investments and 75% of that is maintenance. That includes a new surface on 13,000 miles of track, replacing 2.5 mil. ties, and building 400 miles of new track. BNSF also plans to expand track at its Galesburg, IL, to increase switching capacity.
- **After the US Surface Transportation Board** rejected the proposed merger of Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern, what has happened? [USDA's transportation economists](#) have been keeping "track" of the proceedings. UP and NS intend to resubmit their application in March. If STB deems the new application complete (within 30 days of its submission), interested parties will be able to comment, later this year, on the merits of the transaction. STB's final decision will likely be issued by early next year. In the meantime, the STB has been receiving a "carload" of correspondence pro and con about the planned merger.

Weather and Climate—

- **More dry weather across most of IL**, is the [Drought Monitor's analysis](#). "It was another dry week across the Midwest, receiving little to no precipitation while temperatures remained below normal. Snow cover continues across the northern part and portions of the Great Lakes, keeping soils frozen. While most of the Midwest was unchanged this week, widespread degradations were made across portions of IL and MO where 3-to-6-month precipitation deficits grew, with low streamflows and below-normal groundwater levels. In central and southern IL, water table levels remain well below the 10th percentile at many monitoring sites, and streams are running near or below seasonal norms. Similar short- to mid-term precipitation deficits and declining streamflows supported expansion of dryness across parts of MO, including northwestern, south-central and southeastern areas, with additional intensification near the MO-AR border where longer-term deficits continue to

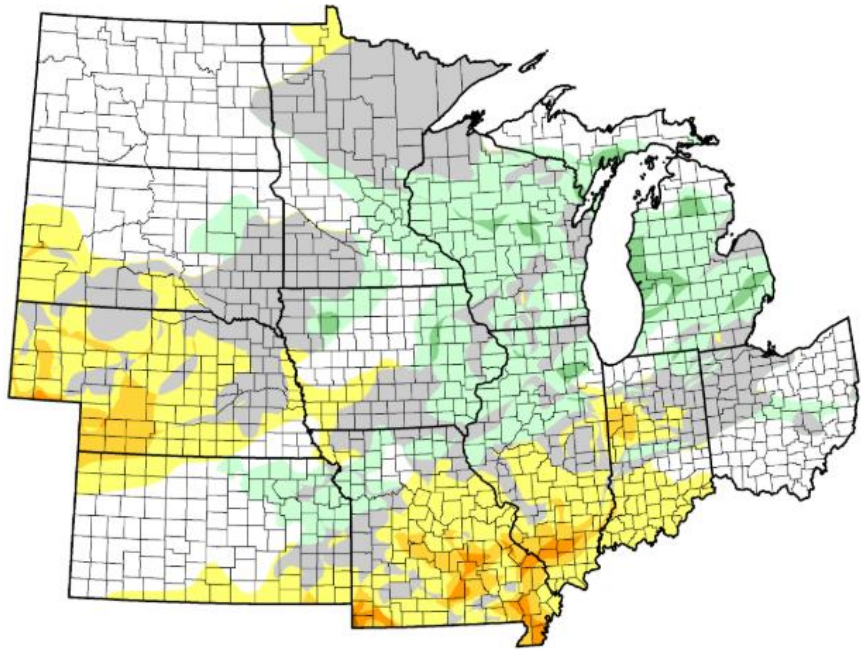


grow. Farther north and west, localized expansion of abnormal dryness occurred in portions of MN and IA where recent weather systems largely missed and short-term soil moisture percentiles show drying." 71.5% of IL is now in moderate drought, 35% in severe drought, and 5.5% in extreme drought (left). Just over the past week, several large areas of IL (right, yellow) have indicated where drought impacts are increasing.

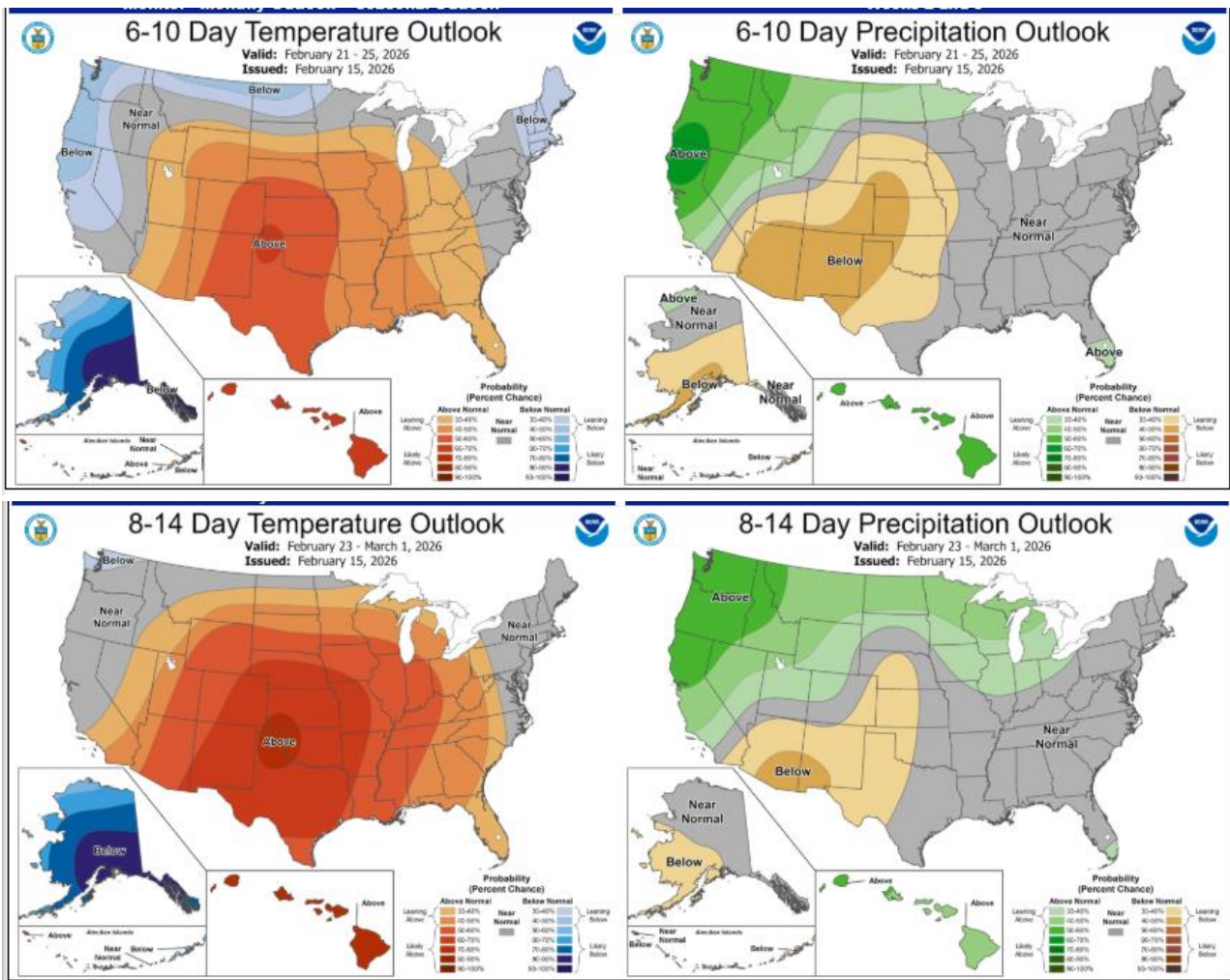


Those are indications of 1 category of degradation for the week between Feb. 3 and Feb 10.

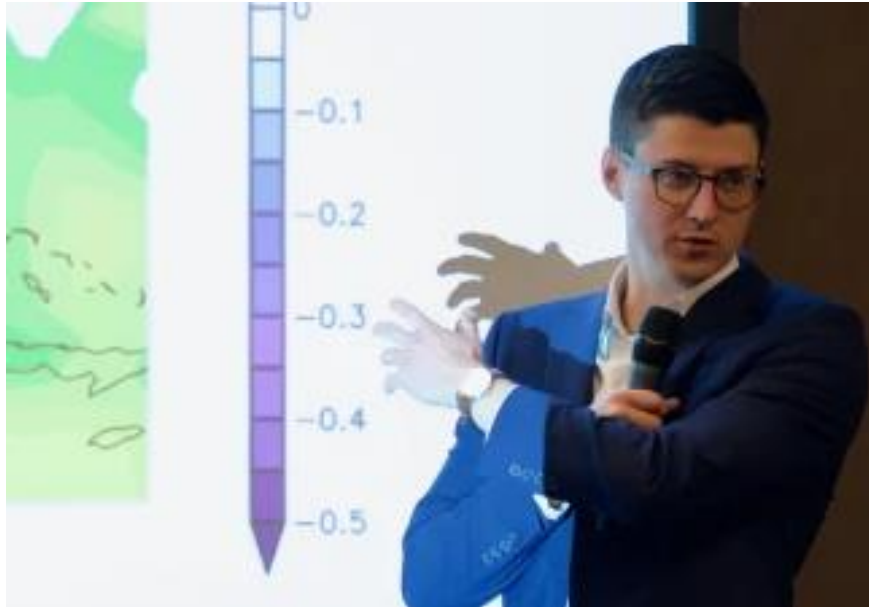
- Most of the dryness in the Cornbelt** has been focused from the western end of Lake Erie to the Ozarks, and the degradation is increasing over time. As indicated below, most of the drought degradation has occurred since early December, and carved out a wide area of southern IL and large parts of IN. The northern half of IL has received beneficial moisture, but in recent weeks, amounts of precipitation have declined.



- Does this look like winter?** Some folks in the dark orange are putting on NH3?



- **“We tend to root for El Niño**, particularly in North America, as it tends to be beneficial for our growing regions with a little more precipitation. But those correlations are very far from a home run. We’re talking just a slight lean in that direction.” [That is what Matt Reardon \(below\) of Nutrien’s weather staff told Jennifer Shike of Pork Business.](#) “For many U.S. farmers, El Niño is often welcomed because it can bring increased precipitation to

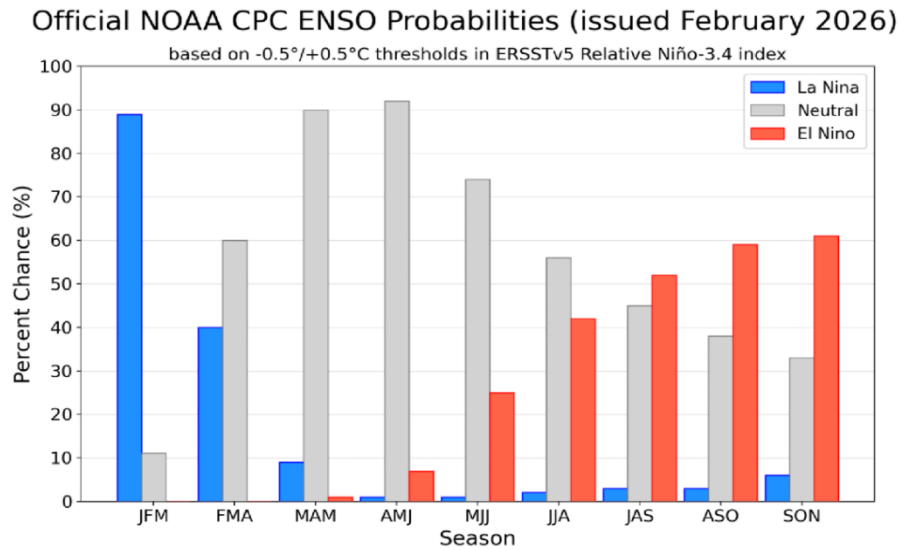


major growing regions, though it can also cause flooding in some areas. Meanwhile, La Niña is frequently associated with increased drought risk in the Southern Plains and Mid-South, which can lead to yield-robbing conditions if the pattern persists into the summer. He says the forecast predicts fading out of La Niña pretty quickly in spring and heading toward

an El Niño, potentially by summer. “What I’m looking at as we head toward both spring planting then summertime heat and real drought risk in June and July is that one sea surface temperature is closer to home in the Northeast Pacific,” he says. “We found, especially this decade, that as those sea surface temperatures go, our season tends to go.” Reardon admits he’s learned that “cautious optimism about where things are headed” is often helpful when determining weather expectations. As he looks toward 2026, he sees a similar start to 2014, which was a huge bumper crop year. “But things can change,” Reardon adds. “There’s that spring predictability horizon we’ve got to leap over here.” “We are keeping an eye on the Southern Plains,” Reardon says. “They are getting some rain over the next seven days, but that’s an area that’s so prone to drought, especially in spring. If we see it build there and then try to leach over to Little Rock or Nashville, that can start to become a concern.” In big yield-robbing drought years, it often flares in the Mid-South or even the Southeast over into the southern plains, first in April or May, and then tends to spread north. “That’s a common behavior of some of these big concerning years of the past like 2006 or 2012, so we are keeping an eye on that right now,” he says. “But the good news is, in the next 10 days, we are going to get some moisture into the ground.” More from Matt Reardon, colleague of Eric Snodgrass at Nutrien, [can be found in this short video.](#)



- On Thursday, the Climate Prediction Center** issued [its latest ENSO advisory](#). “In summary, a transition from La Niña to ENSO-neutral is expected in February-April 2026 (60% chance), with ENSO-neutral likely persisting through the Northern Hemisphere summer (56% chance in June-August 2026. For the late summer and beyond, there is a 50-60% chance of El Niño forming.”



- AccuWeather long-range experts say the harshest cold of winter** is likely in the rearview mirror, but the rest of the season will bring various weather threats, including ice jams, flooding, severe storms, and an increased risk of wildfires. “Rising temperatures will melt snow and ice over the next few weeks, which can trigger ice jams and river flooding earlier than usual, especially along the Mississippi and Ohio rivers,” said Paul Pastelok of AccuWeather. Forecasters say an extended dry stretch in CA will be coming to an end with more rain and some snowfall in the mountains. Rain and snow will also return to the Rockies and the rest of the West in the weeks ahead. Even with 30% of the country having snowpack on the ground, almost 20% of the U.S. is currently dealing with severe, extreme, or exceptional drought conditions, compared to 17% at this time last year.
- A leading American research lab** is slated to lose its critical supercomputing facility, according to a [letter released Thursday](#) by the National Science Foundation. The move is part of the Trump administration’s [effort to disassemble the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder](#), one of the world’s top weather and climate research centers, which the admin views as a source of climate change alarmism. The computing center, which is slated to be turned over to an unspecified third party, runs weather and climate research models and is used by about 1,500 researchers from over 500 universities around the country. The work done on this supercomputer benefits the American people by leading to more accurate forecasts of extreme weather and climate events, aircraft turbulence and more. The White House [announced its intention to “break up” NSF NCAR](#) in January.” The plan “could therefore imperil NOAA’s effort to improve its own weather modeling capabilities, which have consistently lagged its international competitors in recent years.” The facility, its computer, and its staff are used to predict changes in storms, as well as changes and movements of hurricanes threatening US coastal areas. →

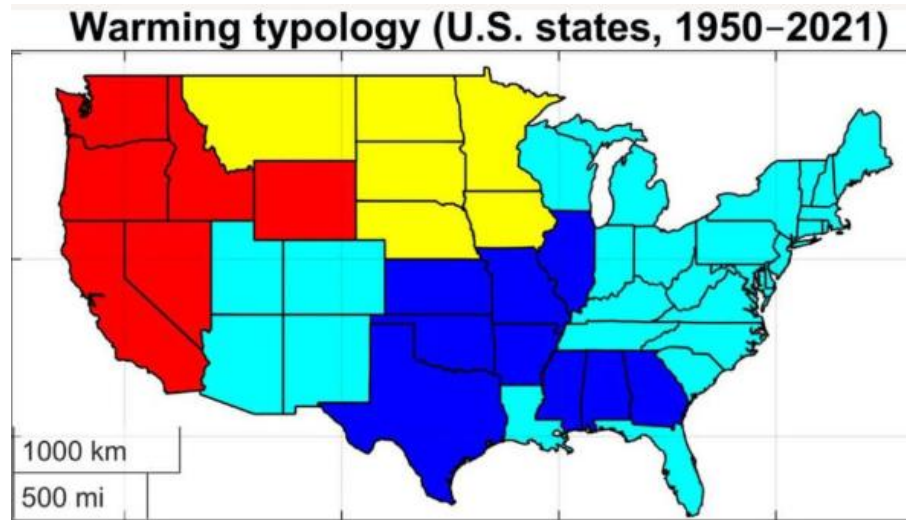
- **The climate is one of those immense meteorological factors** that is hard to comprehend the complexity. But the Trump administration has apparently succeeded and has de-regulated the climate. [Formal announcements were made last week](#) by



Administrator Lee Zeldin of the EPA, Russell Vought, head of the Office of Management and Budget, and the White house. A major announcement from "[the EPA last week indicated it will end "the endangerment finding](#) -- in which the agency had determined greenhouse gas emissions endanger public health and welfare -- and the agency in 2009 went beyond the authority of the Clean Air Act.

Instead, EPA stated that retracting the endangerment finding will eliminate more than \$1.3 tril. in regulatory costs and "restore the American dream." President Trump called the decision, "the single largest deregulatory action in American history." EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin said he was getting rid of the "Holy Grail of the climate change religion." There is a lot of impact on the brief announcement. It apparently overturns the 2007 Supreme Court finding that greenhouse gases (GHGs) are "air pollutants" and EPA did have authority to regulate them if they endangered public health or welfare. The High Court has maintained that position over the years since. [The National Academies of Sciences \(NAS\)](#) sought to curb this deregulatory decision last September with a 112-page report highlighting the consequences of climate change. When it comes to human health, higher greenhouse gases have exposed people to more extreme heat, ground-level ozone, more wildfire smoke and higher particulate matter and allergens. The wildfire smoke issue stands out, given the Midwest and Plains states now either face constant summer smoke from wildfires in Canada or the Southern Plains. "Groups such as older adults, people with preexisting health conditions or multiple chronic diseases, and outdoor workers are disproportionately susceptible to climate-associated health effects," NAS cited. Excessive heat and precipitation extremes have negatively affected crop yields in the southeastern parts of the country while the western U.S. has become hotter and drier. The nutritional values of crops also decline under elevated CO2 conditions. "These nutritional changes affect dietary needs for both human food crops and livestock forage," NAS stated. Livestock also suffer under acute heat stress, with increasing diseases, slower weight gains, declines in milk production and greater death loss. Livestock production is also constrained by lower forage quality and drought stress. All of that helps explain why the U.S. has its smallest beef herd since the 1950s. Now we are ramping up imports to support the country's beef demand. Climate change and the debate over greenhouse gas emissions is one more political football, but it's almost impossible to argue EPA's decision is based on science." Many farmers have expressed concerns about shifting weather patterns, timing, precipitation volumes, and surprising temperature variations. But if there is any change in the climate that is resulting in those, the evidence is being washed away.

- Global warming has become the most significant concern** the masses are facing worldwide. However, it may not be happening in the same way everywhere in the United States. [A new study](#), published in [PLOS Climate](#), focused on calculating the average temperatures of the states. According to the team, even though [climate change](#) is a global issue, people experience the weather locally. They looked at the full range of daily temperatures in each state, examining whether warming shows up on the coldest days, the hottest days, or steadily throughout the year. A handful of U.S. states have not shown statistically significant signs of warming so far. Those states are AL, AR, IL, KS, MS, MO, OK, and TX. The states where temperatures did not fluctuate, mostly in the central and southern



U.S., fall within what scientists call a “warming hole.” It refers to a region where [temperatures](#) have not increased as clearly as they have in much of the rest of the country, even as global warming rises. For years, researchers have viewed this pattern as an unusual exception or an anomaly. However, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) revealed that this might not be good news after all. This muted warming may be linked to factors such as air pollution from aerosols, changes in land use, or shifts in the water cycle. These influences can interact with [greenhouse gas emissions](#) and hide long-term warming trends.

Agronomy—

- Corteva Agriscience** is canceling its herbicide Enlist Duo, which is a blend of 2,4-D and glyphosate. [Corteva Agriscience said on its website](#): “Demand for Enlist Duo is today less than 1% of total U.S. Enlist sales. We have therefore made the decision to stop U.S. production and sales of Enlist Duo. This decision is the latest in a series of steps we have taken over the past few years to streamline our portfolio and does not affect the production or availability of Enlist One, which remains a market-leading solution,” Corteva adds. When approached for comment, the EPA told *Newsweek* that it published a notice in the Federal Register in November 2025 announcing Corteva Agriscience’s request to voluntarily cancel the registration of Enlist Duo. “The decision to voluntarily cancel a product is at the discretion of a registrant,” the agency said. The EPA also told *Newsweek*: “This administration is not here to relitigate or defend regulatory decisions made years before we arrived.”

- **Crop scientists at the Univ. of IL** have been evaluating the performance of soybeans under different cropping systems. Giovanni Preza Fontes is leading the project across IL and IA, "It was mostly in response to some recent dust storm events that we've experienced in the past couple of years, especially in Central IL. And by the way, the dust storms were not only in Central IL, but also happened across some of the other Midwestern states." He is looking at the economic impact of conservation practices. It is research funded by the IL Soybean Assn. and the direct result of a dust storm in the spring 2023 that caused an 80-car pile-up on Interstate 55, south of Springfield, that killed 8 people, "When we think about soil erosion, right, either by wind and water, conservation practices such as reduced tillage and cover crops are well established, right? So, we know there is a body of work in the literature showing they are very effective at reducing soil erosion. And not only that, but there are also many other, what we used to call, Agro-ecosystem benefits from those practices, right? So, you're keeping the soil covered for most of the time with the cover crops. You know, there's evidence that they're helping suppress weeds, breaking pest disease cycles, and improving nutrient cycling. Cover crops are a big component of our IL Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy. There is a lot of work that shows that we can reduce nitrate leaching losses in tile drainage with a grass cover crop. So, we know all the benefits, but then when we look at adoption, it's relatively low." The numbers in IL, for example, show just 15% of corn acres are no-till and 35% of soybean acres. This is mainly because of the perception that these practices are risky and wrongly associated with yield penalties. His research centers on 4 different production practices: 2-pass conventional tillage, fall strip-till, no-till, and no-till with a cover crop, all with and without starter fertilizer. The starter fertilizer made the soybean crop look better early in the season, but did not result in a yield bump, "So, on average across 6 sites in 2 years, we saw that we were able to maintain soybean yields when we moved to some of those reduced tillage practices. If you look at the average yield statistically, we did not see any significant differences among the conventional till, the strip-till, and the no-till. We saw slightly lower yields when we had the no-till with the cereal rye, but numerically, that was just like 2 bu. compared to the conventional till. So, they all average about 76 to 78 bu. to the acre." The research shows that no-till, while it had a lower gross revenue than both strip-till and conventional till, had a higher net per-acre income because there were no costs associated with a tillage pass, "Again, we only did this as a partial net return. So, we were only taking into consideration the cost of the tillage, right? So, if you look at the partial net return, we did see higher returns with no-till, and exactly as you said, just because there are no expenses with no-tilling. Followed by strip-till and conventional till." The lowest partial return came because of the cover crop. It was paired with one of the no-till experiments. No-till alone proved to be the most profitable. The online article is titled "Evaluating Soybean Performance in Conservation Systems: A Project Report." It's on the Crop Central website. (WILL radio)

- Will US tariffs, imposed on China,** mean higher weed control costs this year for farmers using Syngenta products? Val Dolcini, Head of Public Affairs at Syngenta North America, says tariffs are one of the top issues he'd like to see addressed in the coming months. He added that farmers can't afford to wait forever for things to get better and for the Administration's tariffs to get the results the President would like to see, "At the end of the day, a farmer wants to make his or her income from the markets, from selling their crops either domestically or overseas, and not have to rely on a government check or a relief package of some sort. I think that to the degree that tariffs can provide some much-needed revenue to our national treasury, that's a good thing. To the degree that it equals out some of the trade relationships where we've had imbalances and trade deficits over the years, that's also a good thing. But today, American farmers want to be able to sell their crops overseas, and tariffs stand in the way of that." Dolcini doesn't just want to see action from the Trump Administration. When it comes to Congress, he wants lawmakers to focus on passing a Farm Bill, addressing trade deficits, and all during a mid-term election year. With so much going on and so much out of a farmer's control, producers can struggle with what they should listen to and what they should ignore. Dolcini's advice, "To use an agricultural term, you've got to separate the wheat from the chaff, and there's a lot of chaff out there. I think for farmers, it's tough to focus on the things that are really important because we're being besieged and bombarded by all kinds of news and other information on our social media and throughout the course of the day. Farmers just need to continue to do what they've done so well for centuries, and that's just produce a crop, bring that crop to market, hopefully at a profit, care for their families, build up the rural communities in this country that have been the backbone of our nation for 250 years, and I think we'll be in good shape." (PNW Ag Network)
- A coalition of leading agricultural organizations** sent a letter to EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin, urging the agency to uphold its rigorous, science-based pesticide registration process and ensure timely reviews under federal law, and not bow to politically charged movements. They also emphasized that access to safe, effective, and innovative crop protection tools is essential to achieving those goals. The organizations highlighted that science-based pesticide approvals are critical, not only to food security and affordability, but also to the long-term sustainability of U.S. agriculture, enabling growers to protect yields, use inputs efficiently, reduce losses, and continue investing in environmental stewardship and innovation. "For soybean farmers, these tools are critical to protecting yields, managing weed resistance, and continuing to produce safe, affordable food, feed, and fuel," said Scott Metzger, (left) president of the American Soybean Assn.



- **The Environmental Protection Agency announced** a new federal registration for low-volatility Dicamba herbicides in 34 states. This registration will enable U.S. farmers to have access to this important weed control tool in Dicamba-tolerant soybeans and cotton. Bayer is launching the new registration as Stryax Dicamba herbicide, a restricted-use pesticide. “With a federal registration in hand, we’ll begin the process of seeking state approvals,” said Dr. Ty Witten, Bayer’s vice president of commercial stewardship. “In the weeks ahead, we’ll launch applicator training opportunities and stewardship education to help ensure that growers and applicators have the best experience possible.” The registration will enable the use of approved low-volatility Dicamba herbicides in-crop up to 7 days pre-harvest in XtendFlex cotton, and up through R1 in XtendFlex soybeans. Bayer said Stryax is intended to help manage glyphosate-resistant broadleaf weeds, as well as other tough-to-control weeds.
- **The National Ag Law Center** took note of the EPA’s approval of dicamba over the top on soybeans and said, “The new labels include a variety of new application restrictions, including temperature-based application limits, a cut to the maximum application rate, and mitigation measures intended to reduce dicamba exposure to threatened wildlife species. Previous EPA decisions to approve dicamba for over-the-top use have been overturned by courts on 2 separate occasions, once in 2020 and more recently in 2024. It is likely that the newly approved labels will also face litigation. To learn more about EPA’s regulation of over-the-top dicamba, click [here](#) to view NALC article “The Deal with Dicamba: EPA Proposes Unconditional Registration for Over-the-Top Use.”
- **There is a growing number of states** that have passed pesticide laws which say, essentially, “If its Ok with the EPA, then it’s OK with our state.” FL, MO, and WY, were first and the KS legislature may be in the process of doing the same. The National Ag Law center says, “To learn more about the recent trend of state pesticide liability bills, click [here](#) to view this 2025 article “Update on State Pesticide Liability Limitation Bills.”
- **What is your waterhemp control strategy**, given its growing resistance to glufosinate (Liberty)? Short of a weed hook, that is about your last line of defense in soybean fields. [IL weed specialist Aaron Hager](#) suggests, “Do everything possible to achieve maximum efficacy when applying glufosinate,” Hager advised. This starts with selecting the appropriate application rate. “You can’t afford to skimp on rates just to save money,” he said. “Applying low rates encourages weed escapes and resistance.” The right carrier volume will ensure good spray coverage. Also, include label-recommended spray additives that help glufosinate work better. Previous research has demonstrated improved waterhemp control when glufosinate is combined with 2,4-D choline on Enlist crops compared with either herbicide applied alone. Reducing or eliminating waterhemp seed production is the only effective method to ensure no change in resistance frequency occurs over time,” Hager said. Metribuzin can be an effective option for waterhemp control in soybeans, even for waterhemp populations resistant to atrazine, Hager said. Consider higher labeled rates for optimum effectiveness. Metribuzin crop injury can be a concern for soils with high pH or low organic matter, and with certain genetics, he added.

- **Developing new technologies in the pipeline** is a never-ending task. There are many current trait innovations in the pipeline. Steve Sterchi, head of product and commercial strategy for Syngenta Corn Traits, talked about how they prioritize which technologies move forward, "Simplicity, we know that sometimes is really not synonymous with the ag industry, but what we try to do is there's breakthrough traits that are only valuable if they're easy for the farmer to put to work, and so what we try to focus on is we design from the ground up, and we try to keep that complexity with us. But how we do that is with a robust pipeline and AI-driven insights that really help us match that right trait package to the right acre, so growers don't have to guess. That's that recommendation piece, because we're looking for consistent performance and a seamless fit into the existing management system." Sterchi said the strength and depth of the pipeline is what excites him the most, "It starts with, or it continues with, the Durastak trait that we're launching this year, but it's robust, diverse, and it's really built to deliver solutions for challenges we can already see coming, and for those we can only predict with those advanced models in AI. (Syngenta)"
- **NE researchers have been doing extensive studies on red crown rot.** Dylan Mangel says red crown rot is a confusing disease, "They're basically looking at crown rot, trying to figure out what the real cause of this disease is, and it's been a really confusing disease, because it's not clear what the pathogen that's causing most of the damage actually is. So, they've been bringing a lot of samples back and really digging into those and trying to find which fungus is in there causing that. And a lot of them turn out to be species of a fungal genus called Fusarium. So, it's a common fungus. It's all over the place. It also causes diseases in wheat and soybeans, but it looks like that might be a contributing factor to this crown rot that we've seen, and I think they experienced quite a bit of that across the region last summer." He said the disease can have a significant impact on producers' yields, "The yield impact from this will often show up as dead plants, so they don't see it impact the entire field, but they will see just certain plants mid-to-late-season, start to look stressed and wilted, and then you'll come back, and you'll see several green plants in a row, and then they'll just be one dead plant, and they call that a "ghosted plant." So, when they see that the fungus got in there and clogged up or impacted the ability of that plant to move water, and if it can't get water up, it's just going to dry out and die." Mangel talked about the optimum conditions for crown root rot to develop, "It just depends on those conditions, and I think maybe a driving factor in this, and a lot of soil-borne diseases is going to be soil moisture and early-season temperatures. So, in this case, maybe if you get a pocket of the field that is wet and has more moisture there, the fungus is going to thrive and do a little bit better, and in cooler temperatures, that seems to help the fungus get into those plants a little bit better. In areas where you get those perfect wet, early, cool-season temperatures, it could infect more of those plants and kill them." The best thing farmers can do is keep a close eye on their fields, "If you're not sure if you have this or not, watch your fields and see what's present. If you have plants dying like that, it's really hard to go and look at them and tell exactly what it is." (Backroads of Illinois Podcast)

- **Dr. Norman Borlaug won the 1970 Nobel Peace Prize** for his work in saving millions of lives from starvation resulting from his work in wheat breeding. His work at the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) in Mexico began the “Green Revolution.” [Where is today’s Norman Borlaug, and why is grain research ironically starving for funding](#), is a rhetorical question asked by Arvin Donley, Editor of World Grain magazine.



“The Trump administration last summer canceled \$80 mil. in funding for the CIMMYT after dismantling the US Agency for International Development (USAID), which for many years served as its strategic partner. Having lost about 40% of its budget, CIMMYT leaders say the center may not survive another year without funding to make up for the shortfall. The organization recently announced that it is streamlining operations and diversifying funding sources to protect its core scientific assets, including seed collections, long-term field experiments, disease surveillance

networks, gene-editing research and open data platforms, that cannot be rebuilt once lost. It’s not just CIMMYT that’s feeling the pinch. Crop breeding and disease-surveillance programs at universities and research centers around the world have seen cutbacks in funding. Global spending growth on agricultural research and development slowed by one-third between 2015 and 2021, with high-income nations reducing investment while China, India and Brazil increased funding, according to a *New York Times* report. Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of these cuts is they are occurring at a time when the threat of climate change has never been greater. Because reducing carbon emissions to the level where it would mitigate extreme weather impacts would require all countries to participate, it likely will not happen. Therefore, money must be spent on trying to develop grain seeds that will thrive in volatile and adverse weather conditions. Although the world is currently awash in grain, all it takes is a couple of drought years or a fast-spreading plant disease to deplete stockpiles. Continued advancements in plant breeding for wheat and other grains is a necessity, not a luxury. Without adequate funding for institutions like CIMMYT, the task of maximizing grain production and quality will become increasingly difficult.” At the Univ. of IL, Dr. Jessica Rutkoski, (right) a wheat researcher, who spent time learning and working at CIMMYT, has been following in Borlaug’s footsteps, working to improve wheat yields.



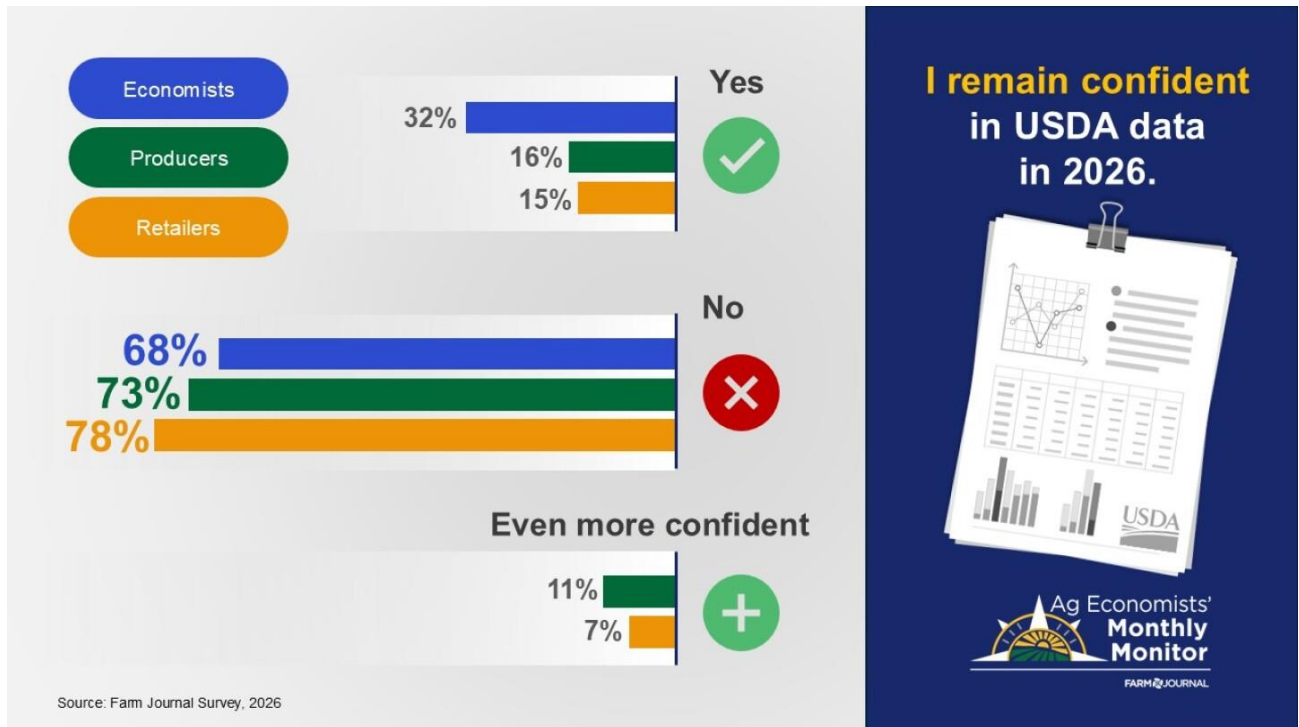
USDA—

- **What will agriculture look like in 2035**, 10 years from now? [USDA has released its annual projections with a 10-year lens](#), seeing, “a continuation of positive economic growth, but with global growth rates continuing to slow over the long term.” USDA’s ag economists report, “As prices remain well below the elevated levels experienced by most crops in the early 2020’s, and with elevated production costs.”
 - ✓ **Total planted acres** for the 8 major field crops are projected at 247.6 mil. acres in 2026/27, down 0.9 mil. acres from the prior year. Total planted acres for these 8 crops are expected to remain below 246 mil. acres from 2028 through 2035, with total planted acres for these crops falling to 241.6 mil. acres in 2035. The reduction comes primarily from lower corn acres, which drop from 95.0 mil. acres in 2026 to 91.0 mil. acres in 2035. Rice is the only crop projected to show upward movement in planted area over the projection period.
 - ✓ **Harvested acres** mirror planted acres, with the 8-crop total starting at 225.4 mil. acres in 2026 and projected to fall to 219.5 mil. acres in 2035. Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres are projected to climb by 0.6 mil. acres from 2025 to 2026 (reaching 26.4 mil. acres). CRP acres are projected at 26.8 to 26.9 mil. acres the remainder of the projection period.”
 - ✓ **Prices of all crops** climb slightly from levels that have come down significantly from their recent peaks (all of which reached record or near record levels). The Baseline projections assume no major shocks to supply or demand.
 - ✓ **Corn prices** have declined from elevated levels in 2022/23 and 2023/24 and are projected to remain relatively stable, and corn planted acreage is projected to decrease from 98.7 mil. acres in 2025/26 to 91.0 mil. acres in 2035/36. Prices start at \$4.10 per bu. in 2026/27 and climb incrementally to \$4.40 per bu. in 2029/30 and the remainder of the projection period. Planted corn acreage declines after 2027/28, ending the projections at 91.0 mil. acres. Corn production climbs steadily but slowly during the projection period due to yield growth, but production remains below the record level attained in 2025/26.
 - ✓ **Soybean prices** are projected at \$10.30 per bu. in 2026/27, continuing a downward adjustment from the near-record \$14.20 per bu. in 2022/23. Prices are projected to climb incrementally to \$10.55 per bu. in 2029/30 and remain at that level through 2035/36. Planted soybean area in 2026/27 is projected to climb 3.9 mil. acres from the previous year to 85 mil. acres and then decline gradually to 83.0 mil. acres at the end of the projection period. Despite a reduction in acreage, rising yields drive soybean production up modestly by a total of 5.8% from 2026/27 to 2035/36, ending at a record 4.73 bil. bu. →

- ✓ **As wheat prices** come down from the elevated levels during 2021/22–2023/24, planted acres have also declined. Planted wheat area is projected at 44.0 mil. acres in 2026/27, down 1.3 mil. acres from the prior year and 5.6 mil. acres below 2023/24. Planted area is projected to remain unchanged at 44.0 mil. acres throughout the projections. Wheat prices are projected at \$5.40 per bu. in 2026/27, up \$0.40 per bu. from 2025/26. Prices rise to \$6.00 per bu. starting in 2031/32 and hold at that level.
- ✓ **Net farm income** (NFI) and net cash farm income (NFCI) are forecast to increase in 2026, but modestly. NFI is forecast to increase \$3.5 bil., or 2.7%, from \$179.8 bil. in 2025 to \$183.3 bil. in 2026. Net farm income is projected at \$93.0 bil. in 2035. NFCI is projected to increase \$4.1 bil. (2.9%) from \$180.7 bil. in 2025 to \$184.8 bil. in 2026 and is projected to fall to \$92.8 bil. in 2035. Higher cash receipts are the primary contributors to the projected increase in net farm income for 2026 compared to 2025. NFCI represents annual income from cash receipts, cash farm-related income, and Government farm program payments minus cash expenses paid during the year. NFI is more inclusive measure of profits.
- ✓ **In 2026, total U.S. agricultural exports** are projected to decrease from 2025 at \$173.0 bil., which remains below the 2022 export record of \$196.0 bil. Starting in 2027, agricultural exports are projected to steadily increase at an average annual rate of 1.7%, ending at \$208.3 bil. in 2035.
- ✓ **Agricultural imports** have grown over the last decade and posted a record \$219.4 bil. in 2025. The growth in 2025 occurred early in the year, due in part to importers front loading shipments in anticipation of increasing tariffs. This slowing is expected to continue into 2026 with imports forecast to drop 4.3% to \$210 bil. If realized, this would mark the first significant decline in imports since the 2008 global financial crisis. After 2026, U.S. agricultural import growth is projected to resume a more moderate growth rate, increasing by an average annual rate of 1.0%, growing to \$241.8 bil. in 2035.
- ✓ **The trade deficit** is expected to narrow starting in 2026 as conditions such as the application of new tariffs and moderating exchange rates slow the growth of import volumes. For example, while import demand for processed food and horticultural products is projected to continue, it is at a reduced pace. The growth of domestic livestock, dairy, and poultry sector is also anticipated to reduce imports and support exports through 2035 in that category. However, an increasing supply of grains and oilseeds from South America is expected to dampen U.S. export competitiveness.
- **USDA will be handing out \$1 bil.** to producers of [specialty crops due to unfair market disruptions](#), but farmers need to report their 2025 acreage by March 13. These one-time bridge payments will help address market disruptions, elevated input costs, persistent inflation, and market losses from foreign competitors engaging in unfair trade practices that impede exports. Specialty crops eligible for payments include many common garden and orchard crops, but also bananas and coffee. Commodity-specific payment rates will be released by the end of March. Crop insurance linkage will not be required.

- **The USDA says it will protect farmers from the USDA.** It has launched the Farmer and Rancher Freedom Framework — a policy initiative designed to shield producers from what the department calls politically motivated legal actions and regulatory overreach. The Secretary described the 4-pillar plan as a cornerstone for defending agricultural heritage and providing fairness in rural America. The framework formalizes existing USDA efforts to streamline regulations, reduce compliance burdens and enhance protections for farmers and ranchers facing litigation or enforcement actions. Agricultural stakeholders welcomed the announcement, though critics argue it could weaken environmental and consumer safeguards. The policy echoes recent USDA moves to end “agricultural lawfare,” which has been discussed by advocacy groups and within USDA strategy briefings. The initiative also comes amid broader debates over farm profitability, market pressures and federal intervention in agriculture. (Rest easy tonight, USDA is watching its policies.)
- **The Farm Service Agency (FSA)** has issued final [Emergency Livestock Relief Program \(ELRP\)](#) payments totaling more than \$1.89 bil. Eligible applicants who applied for ELRP 2023 and 2024 Flood and Wildfire (ELRP 2023 and 2024 FW) assistance will receive 100% of their eligible calculated payment in a single lump sum. USDA is also making a second payment to producers who previously received their initial factored payment for ELRP 2023 and 2024 assistance for losses due to eligible drought and wildfires. Livestock producers previously received an initial payment for drought and wildfire assistance that was factored by 35% to ensure payments did not exceed available funding. After assessing ELRP 2023 and 2024 FW applications, FSA determined that a payment factor is not needed. Producers with approved ELRP 2023 and 2024 FW applications are receiving 100% of their calculated payment in a single lump sum, totaling \$604 mil. in recovery assistance. ELRP 2023 and 2024 and ELRP 2023 and 2024 FW have a combined payment limit of \$125,000 for each program year. Producers who already received the maximum payment amount from ELRP 2023 and 2024 for drought and wildfire losses will not be eligible to receive an additional payment. Eligible producers may submit form FSA-510, “Request for an Exception to the \$125,000 Payment Limitation for Certain Programs,” by Nov. 2, 2026, to be considered for an increased payment limit of \$250,000.
- **The USDA is facing some doubts about the reliability of its data** from farmers, grain traders, and economists. Reuters said the doubts are coming about because of the agency’s significant staff losses and the sharp upward revision in how many acres of corn U.S. farmers harvested in 2025. “Thousands of employees left the agency last year as a part of the administration’s push to shrink the federal government, and industry stakeholders are worried that the shrinking staff limited the agency’s ability to produce timely and accurate data,” Reuters said. USDA’s final January estimates of how many acres corn farmers planted and harvested in 2025 represented unprecedented increases from June’s initial estimates. Already-low grain prices dropped over 5% at a time when growers were already struggling to make enough money to stay in business. The unexpected revisions prompted the National Agricultural Statistics Service to launch an internal review of its processes for making acreage estimates. →

- USDA's January Crop Production Report** was a point of contention last month. With much debate about the validity of the latest yield, acreage and production data from USDA, [Farm Journal's January survey](#) results is the near-universal erosion of trust in USDA data, not only among producers, but also economists and retailers. 68% of economists say they are not as confident in USDA reporting as they were in the past. 73% of producers agree. 78% of retailers say their confidence in USDA has waned.



- "The USDA, long the world's gold standard for crop estimates, [faces mounting doubts about the reliability of its data from farmers](#),** grain traders and economists following deep staff losses and a sharp upward revision in how many acres of corn were harvested. Farmers, traders and food manufacturers everywhere closely follow monthly USDA reports on production, supplies and demand so they can anticipate prices and inventories. Thousands of employees left USDA last year as part of President Donald Trump's drive to shrink the federal government, and experts worry the shrinking staff hobbled the agency's ability to produce accurate and timely data. USDA data last month "appeared to reflect an agency in disarray," said Arlan Suderman, chief commodities economist for StoneX, citing changes to acres and other estimates. The revisions prompted USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service, which releases acreage estimates, to launch an internal review, said Lance Honig, a top NASS official. At the Farm Service Agency, another USDA branch, staffing reductions hampered employees from processing data on plantings last summer and feeding it to the statistics service, said Spiro Stefanou, a former acting USDA deputy undersecretary who resigned last fall. "This delayed the statistics service from receiving a complete picture of acreage," he said. "NASS had less information to go on," Stefanou said. "That was going to make their estimates less reliable."

- **Personnel shortage in your local Farm Service Agency office?** They are probably doing their best. State FSA staff may indicate work is getting done. But decisions on personnel were issued at the top, and there is no appeal process. [Efforts are underway](#) to create a push—from the bottom upward—to cure the problem with the hiring of more personnel in FSA and NRCS offices. Reports indicate, “In 2025, USDA lost 22% of staff at the Natural Resources Conservation Service and 24% at the Farm Service Agency following staffing changes implemented last year. We’re already seeing the impact on the ground: longer waiting times, delayed payments, reduced technical assistance, and fewer staff available to help navigate increasingly complex application processes. As negotiations over funding legislation and the Farm Bill continue on Capitol Hill, it’s critical that lawmakers hear directly from farmers and ranchers. A well-staffed USDA is essential if these programs are going to work as intended. That’s why we’ve launched a farmer and rancher sign-on letter calling for adequate USDA staffing—so these agencies can actually deliver on the promises made to producers. If you farm or ranch, please consider adding your name and sharing this with your peers. [The more producers who speak up, the harder this is to ignore.](#)”
- **Soybean promotion organizations** are doing “high-5’s” after the [USDA unlocked nearly \\$17 mil. for market development funds](#). The American Soybean Association (ASA), the U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC) and the World Initiative for Soy in Human Health (WISHH) will get the money from the Market Access Program (MAP) and the Foreign Market Development (FMD) funds. ASA CEO Steve Censky said, “The FMD and MAP programs are essential tools that enable American soybean farmers to compete and succeed in the global marketplace.” Jim Sutter, CEO of the US Soybean Export Council said, “These program investments are vital for helping U.S. Soy sustain and expand global market opportunities by building partnerships, addressing customer needs, and delivering the transparency and sustainability that international buyers value. We are grateful to USDA-FAS for championing U.S. agricultural export trade efforts around the world.” This year’s allocation represents a 5.6% increase from 2025 funding levels. In marketing year 2024/25, U.S. Soy exported 68.7 mil. metric tons of beans, meal, and oil valued at \$29.6 bil. — a 12.8% increase in year-over-year volume and a 2.95% gain over the 5-year average.
- **The Grains and BioProducts Council** is also cheering that USDA is distributing some long overdue funds to promote US farm commodities around the world. USDA’s Foreign Agriculture Service is awarding more than \$212 mil. through the Market Access Program (MAP) and Foreign Market Development (FMD) program to help promote export of corn and corn products. MAP allocates funds to ag industry organizations across the United States to promote U.S. fruits, vegetables, nuts, processed products and bulk and intermediate commodities to global consumers. The Foreign Market Development (FMD) program benefits U.S. farmers, processors and exporters by addressing long-term foreign market import constraints and by identifying new markets or new uses for U.S. agricultural commodities. [USGBC President & CEO Ryan LeGrand](#) said, “Our job at the U.S. Grains & BioProducts Council is to open new markets for our farmers, ranchers, and producers, and both MAP and FMD annual allocations allow us to meet our mission to develop markets, enable trade and improve lives for those around the world and here at home.”

Conservation, Environment, Carbon—

- **The USDA announced the enrollment periods** for agricultural producers and landowners to submit offers for the Continuous and General Conservation Reserve Program. The Farm Service Agency is accepting offers for Continuous CRP through March 20, 2026. Enrollment for the General CRP will run from March 9, 2026, through April 17, 2026. FSA will announce the dates for the Grassland CRP signup in the near future. “We’re still very close to the 27-mil. -acre statutory cap, with 1.9 mil. acres available for all CRP enrollments this fiscal year, so enrollment is likely to be competitive,” said Richard Fordyce, USDA Undersecretary for Farm Programs and Conservation. “It’s not about the total number of enrolled acres, it’s about producers and landowners offering the acres that can best deliver real and lasting benefits to soil, water, and wildlife.” Producers and landowners interested in participating in CRP should contact their [local FSA county office](#).
- **Farmers, advisors and conservation professionals** looking to sharpen their skills and further stewardship practices in IL are encouraged to apply for the IL Sustainable Ag Partnership’s (ISAP) Soil Health Leadership Program. The program, which brings together diverse participants working together to improve agricultural environmental stewardship, is now looking to fill its seventh graduating class. Interested applicants should fill out the necessary application by March 1, 2026. Visit ilsustainableag.org/shlp for more information.



Trade, Tariffs, (and USMCA!) —

- **The chief White House trade advisor** poured cold water on renewal of the USMCA trade agreement. Peter Navarro said Thursday that the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement has “significant flaws,” raising questions about the future of the landmark North American trade pact but stopping short of endorsing an exit. Navarro told reporters the pact will be “reevaluated” during negotiations ahead of a mandatory July review and flagged concerns, including how goods from China could enter the U.S. through Mexico and Canada. The comments come amid broader uncertainty about the pact’s future. Bloomberg News reported that President Donald Trump is privately considering withdrawing from USMCA, a deal his administration originally negotiated to replace NAFTA, though the White House called such speculation “baseless” until the president speaks publicly. USMCA, designed to eliminate most tariffs among the 3 countries and deepen economic ties, faces political and economic strain as U.S. trade policy shifts toward protectionism and reevaluation of longstanding agreements.

- “**Since USMCA took effect in 2020**, U.S. agricultural exports to Canada and Mexico have grown by \$20 bil., reaching \$60 bil. in 2024—a 47% gain that far exceeds export growth to the rest of the world,” says National Corn Growers Chief Economist Krista Swanson. “But export values alone don’t tell the full story. At the Agricultural Coalition for USMCA press conference on Tuesday, I shared findings from a new economic impact analysis showing agricultural and seafood exports under USMCA generate \$149 bil. in total economic contribution, support nearly 493,000 jobs, and add \$64 bil. to U.S. GDP. For every \$1 in exports, an additional \$2.45 flows through the broader U.S. economy. USMCA has also proven it works—providing certainty, strong enforcement tools, and stable market access when farmers need it most. Without the USMCA, that stability disappears—leaving farmers more exposed to uncertainty, reduced access, and disruption. As the agreement enters its review period, the data are clear: renewing and strengthening USMCA is critical for farmers, rural communities, and long-term U.S. competitiveness.”



\$1.9T

Total of goods and services traded under USMCA.



\$60B+

American agricultural exports to Canada and Mexico. Nearly 1/3 of all American agricultural exports.



13M

American jobs supported by trade with Canada and Mexico.



31%

Of U.S. trade-related rail traffic is tied to Canada and Mexico under North American trade flows.



Trade with Mexico and Canada delivers significant economic benefits to rural communities across the U.S. That’s according to new economic analysis released today by the Agricultural Coalition for the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement. During a press conference in Washington, D.C., coalition members highlighted the findings and urged leaders of the 3 countries to renew and further strengthen USMCA as the agreement enters its formal review period. “Our analysis shows that USMCA is a powerful driver for employment, investment, and long-term competitiveness in the U.S. agricultural sector,” said Krista Swanson, chief economist for the National Corn Growers Association, a coalition member. “While the agreement is due for a few targeted improvements, overall, it’s critical to the farm economy and a key part of rural America’s success and resilience, particularly during the tough economic times that we’re in right now.” Among the coalition’s findings, agricultural and seafood exports to Canada and Mexico generated \$149 bil. in total economic output.

- **Renewal of the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement** won strong bipartisan support at a Senate Finance hearing as the trade deal that replaced NAFTA comes up for its 6-year review this year. Finance Chair Mike Crapo, R-ID, (below, right) conceded USMCA isn't perfect but added that it's been a boon to industry and agriculture, and should be extended, "USMCA propelled the US to export \$60 bil. in agricultural goods to Canada and Mexico, which represents 1/3 of all US agriculture exports." But Crapo says greater enforcement is needed in some areas, "...ag biotech, dairy..." ID dairy farmer with the Northwest Dairy



Association Ted Vander Schaff (Skoff) accused Canada of restricting quota access to its market, "...by reserving the vast majority of quota volumes for domestic processors who lack incentives to import. Meanwhile, distributors get minimal amounts of quota, while retailers, restaurants and food service operators are excluded entirely."

Vander Schaff says Mexico, US dairy's biggest customer and under pressure from the EU, hasn't fully protected common cheese names like Parmesan and Feta for US use. Minority leader Sen. Ron Wyden, D-OR, (above, left) hailed USMCA's passage 89-10, but complained the president's tariffs complicate USMCA renewal, "The House voted to repeal Donald Trump's tariffs on Canada. Trump's chaotic tariffs are losing support across the political spectrum. Now, the Senate needs to get that legislation to the president's desk." Trump will undoubtedly veto that, and the Senate would have to muster an unlikely 2/3 majority to override him—leaving the issue of presidential tariff power up to the Supreme Court. (Berns Bureau, Washington) →

- **Dave Salmonsen, of the American Farm Bureau trade staff**, said testimony before the Committee highlighted the benefits of the agreement, "Basically, talked about how good it had been for North American business, how good it had been for North American agriculture, how much it's increased our exports, how important it is to our supply chains, and I guess crucially, going in through this review process that's going to happen later this year, why it needs to continue. If they agree in July, it should go forward, then it goes forward for at least another 16 years. Salmonsen notes that while the deal has overall been positive, there are still some updates that need to be made, "We never quite realized all that we wanted and was negotiated in the original USMCA agreement. We thought we negotiated some extensive dairy access with Canada, and they have grown, but not to extent we thought they would, to get the access we know we should get." Salmonsen said it's important to look at USMCA through a historical lens of relationships between the U.S.'s neighbors on both sides of the border, "We've had such strong growth. You go back to 1993, the beginning of NAFTA, the US exported about \$8 bil. of ag products to Canada and Mexico combined. Now we're over \$60 bil. Mexico is our number one, Canada is our number 2 export destination now. The best trade is to trade with the neighbors. It's the most efficient trade there is."

- **For agriculture, especially corn farmers, [USMCA greatly impacts markets, prices, and farm income](#).** Agriculture organizations are joining forces to emphasize the importance of USMCA—The [Agriculture Coalition for USMCA](#). Their message: Renewing this trilateral

agreement with targeted adjustments will keep the American economy growing and provide long-term certainty for the U.S. food and agricultural value chain. Mexico is the top export market for U.S. corn and Canada is the top export market for U.S. ethanol. Together, they support billions of dollars in annual agricultural trade and provide consistent demand that



stabilize prices. Without trade certainty, markets become unpredictable leading to reduced demand and lower prices paid to farmers. This is why agriculture organizations are urging the Trump Administration to treat USMCA enforcement and renewal as priority for the agricultural economy. Sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures are intended to protect human, animal, and plant health. [GMO \(Genetically Modified Organism\)](#) corn is critically important to modern agriculture, with over 90% of U.S. corn being genetically engineered for insect resistance and herbicide tolerance. When countries use SPS rules or GMO restrictions without scientific justification, trade slows or stops entirely. The U.S. used USMCA enforcement to overturn Mexico's attempted restrictions on GM corn imports in 2023. USMCA protects market access for ethanol and distillers dried grains (DDGs). These products drive value for corn and support export demand. If USMCA weakens, farmers risk losing ethanol and DDGs demand. USMCA is a critical agreement for agriculture to protect market access, stability, and farm income. As the 2026 review approaches, the Agriculture Coalition for USMCA has formed to ensure U.S. farmers can continue delivering food, fuel, and feed to critical markets with certainty."

- **The US House voted 219 to 210 in a largely symbolic vote** to end the national emergency President Trump used to impose global tariffs on Canada. 6 Republicans joined all but 1 Democrat in favor of the joint resolution. House Speaker Mike Johnson argued for renewal, telling reporters, "The rationale for this is to allow the Supreme Court to rule on the pending case that everybody's watching." Nearly all farmers have complained that the tariffs have cost market share, depressed crop prices, and raised costs on inputs like fertilizer. Johnson counters that new trade deals have boosted markets for farmers and others, "The president's trade policies have been a great benefit to the country. We went through some of the statistics and how that's helped the economy. And I think the sentiment is that we allow a little bit more runway for this to be worked out. (Berns Bureau)

- **President Trump's tariffs are being challenged** in the US House even as the Supreme Court weighs whether the Executive Branch overstepped its bounds when levying them. Arlan Suderman, the Chief Commodities Economist for StoneX Group, says, early on, several pundits worried that the tariffs would cause inflation of up to 10%, "It ended up really more than 2.5% to 3% inflation level, kind of as a one-off, and then an adjustment from that. And I think there's a lack of realization that most countries charge large tariffs to us. When you look at what President Trump did, as he said, okay, we're going to put tariffs on you unless you negotiate yours down. And so many countries negotiated theirs down." Suderman says at the end of the day, the tariffs have had some good effects, "It has generated a considerable amount of income revenue, which is illustrated by the fact that the financial markets are worried right now, if the Supreme Court rules against those reciprocal tariffs, it's going to have an adverse effect on the treasury market, because we're accustomed to that revenue, and if we lose that revenue, then we're going to have to find new sources for it." (NAFB News Service)
- **The future of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement**, huge for farm trade, will be decided this year. One U.S. senator is calling on President Trump to renew his strong support for the deal, "Since 2019, U.S. agriculture exports have increased by almost 35 bil. dollars, and nearly half of that was from just 2 countries, Canada and Mexico." Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-IA, says President Trump once hailed the USMCA as a giant win for U.S. farmers, "A colossal victory for [our] farmers, ranchers, energy workers, factory workers, and American workers in all 50 states." And given the stakes amid a required 6-year review of the agreement, Grassley is calling for Trump to renew his support despite recent tariff tensions with both countries, "President Trump needs to speak forcefully about the success of the USMCA. His positive words will take the uncertainty out of whether this agreement will be extended and if it's not extended, [it's a] great economic loss to the United States." Grassley points out that U.S. agriculture exports to Mexico shot up by \$11 bil. between 2019 and 2024, to over a total of \$30 bil. Mexico is the number one market for U.S. corn, and around 1/3 of all U.S. agriculture exports go to either Canada or Mexico. (Berns Bureau, Washington) →
- **Sen. Grassley is also having "buyer's remorse"** on Congress giving up some of its tariff power to the president back in the 1960s and 70s. Grassley says a new Texas A & M study puts the cost of tariffs to farmers for Moroccan phosphate at nearly \$7 bil. since 2021. But asked if Congress could take back tariff powers it delegated to the president some 60 years ago, "We could take that back if we had the votes to do it, but I don't think that that's going to happen. We find ourselves, kind of, in a defensive position, because previous congresses have delegated too much authority to the president. I'd like to take it back, but I don't think we can." Grassley earlier gave the president the benefit of the doubt on tariffs to see if they'd bring down trade barriers, and there have been numerous trade deals. But tariffs have cost farmers market share, hurt prices, and raised input costs, and Grassley's farmers and others are demanding relief. (National Ag News Audio)

- **USDA is expanding financing options** under the Export Credit Guarantee Program to help expand American agricultural exports. Under the new policy, USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service will offer an 18-month repayment option that allows buyers to pay the full loan amount at the end of the term instead of in installments. The new option will initially be available in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, all regions with strong potential for American export growth, and is expected to make U.S. financing more competitive and increase use of the Program. "This program provides credit guarantees to U.S. banks, and in some cases, to U.S. exporters to help finance foreign purchases of American food and agricultural products by approved foreign banks. While the program allows repayment terms of up to 18 months, this is the first time that borrowers will be able to repay the full amount in a single payment at the end of the 18-month term.
- **There is a new trade agreement between the US and India**, but farmers in India don't like it. Thousands of farmers and union members staged a nationwide strike in India last week to protest an interim trade agreement with the US, fearing that expanded market access for U.S. agricultural exports could undercut local producers. The action disrupted transport and markets across multiple states in India as demonstrators demanded more protective safeguards for staples like rice, wheat and pulses. India's commerce minister defended the trade pact, saying essential commodities remain shielded from tariff cuts, but farmers said the agreement still poses risks to livelihoods due to disparities in subsidies and infrastructure. The protests follow U.S. reports about trade framework negotiations and have drawn parallels with broader international debates about agricultural trade policy and farm sector vulnerability. Analysts say the dispute underscores how global trade deals can trigger domestic agricultural unrest when farmers perceive imbalanced benefits and competitive pressures.
- **The United States announced new trade agreements** with Taiwan and North Macedonia aimed at lowering tariffs and expanding market access for U.S. agricultural and industrial goods. Under the deal with Taiwan, the island will eliminate or reduce tariffs on 99% of U.S. products, according to a fact sheet from the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. Tariffs will be scrapped on U.S. beef, lamb, seafood, dairy products, potatoes, vegetables, legumes, nuts and fruits. The agreement also streamlines export procedures for U.S. beef, poultry, pork and processing potatoes, the White House said, while protecting the use of common names for meats and cheeses. In a joint statement, North Macedonia said it agreed to eliminate customs duties on all U.S. industrial and agricultural goods. Taiwan currently applies an average tariff rate of nearly 17%, while North Macedonia's average rate is close to 13%, according to the World Trade Organization. U.S. officials said the agreements are intended to strengthen trade ties and support American exporters.

- **U.S. Wheat Associates welcomed the announcement** of the signing of the U.S.-Bangladesh Agreement on Reciprocal Trade by the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. “The signing of the reciprocal trade agreement between the U.S. and Bangladesh is a win for American wheat farmers,” said Mike Spier, USW President and CEO. “Beyond putting bu. on boats, this bilateral agreement reinforces our shared commitment to a mutually beneficial relationship with Bangladesh.” In July 2025, USW signed a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) with the Government of Bangladesh, which committed to annual purchases of 25.7 mil. bu., of U.S. wheat for the next 5 years. Bangladesh is already fulfilling that commitment, rising from a swing buyer to the 8th-largest market for U.S. wheat in the 2025-2026 marketing year. As of January 29, 2026, Bangladesh has purchased more than 24.8 mil. bu., of U.S. wheat.
- **“Our 15-plus year endeavor** to break down trade barriers in the high-value market of Taiwan has paid off. This means more U.S. pork on international tables and more opportunities and prosperity for American producers,” said NPPC President Duane Stateler. USDA has finalized a beneficial trade agreement with Taiwan, a direct result of the National Pork Producers Council’s long-fought effort to secure greater market access in the Asian nation. It means cutting tariffs on U.S. pork exports by half, as well as eliminating import licensing procedures that restrict U.S. imports, as well as removing facility and product registration requirements. Additionally, within 6 months Taiwan must recognize the African swine fever protection zone established by the United States.
- **The USDA’s Foreign Agricultural Service** is accepting applications for a trade mission to Istanbul, Türkiye. The trip is May 11–14, and U.S. exporters interested in going to explore trade opportunities in Türkiye and other areas of Central Asia should apply by February 24. The U.S. was the 5th-largest supplier of agricultural products to Türkiye in 2024, while Türkiye ranked as the 16th-largest market for U.S. agricultural exports, which is a figure that’s grown by about 45% since 2020. Total U.S. agricultural exports to Türkiye exceeded \$1.7 bil., including more than \$590 mil. in retail-ready goods like fruits, meats, and dairy.
- **For Canadians watching American events last week**, it’s been a roller-coaster ride. The sudden about-face by President Trump, early in the week, threatening to block the opening of the Gordie Howe Bridge between Detroit and Windsor, continues to make Canadian news. Then the U.S. House of Representatives passed a vote to rescind Trump’s tariffs on Canadian goods. The vote is largely symbolic, as it also needs approval by the Senate, and then must go to President Trump, who is extremely unlikely to sign it into law. For Canadians, an eventful week like this makes the famous quote in former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau’s speech, in 1969 to the Washington Press Club, all the more relevant today, “Living next to you is in some ways like sleeping with an elephant. No matter how friendly or even tempered is the beast, one is affected by every twitch and grunt.” And nearly 60 years later, for Canadians, the American elephant continues to twitch and grunt. I suspect, come spring when the weather breaks, the bridge will open.” (NAFB News Service)

Illinois Issues—

- **IL lawmakers are back at work**, with many bills filed, and committee meetings scheduled. IL Farm Bureau Governmental Affairs Director Kevin Semlow is watching:
 - ✓ The state will have \$30.5 bil. to spend which is called the Total General Fund, after distributions are made to local governments. This year compared to last year at this time the state has collected \$1 bil. more than it did last year. That equals a 3.5% increase. The estimated total fiscal year General Funds to be collected and available is \$54.2 bil. This was established by the Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability (COGFA), which is the General Assembly's fiscal analysis unit which has a long track record of being pretty accurate. \$54.2 bil. is a lot of money, but we all know it is how the State spends the tax collections in the end. There are always attempts to spend every penny and then some. The Governor will announce his blueprint for a state budget, but it is up to the General Assembly to pass a budget. We will continue to update everyone as the state budget process evolves.
 - ✓ IFB is a member of the [Illinois Sustainable Ag Partnership \(ISAP\)](#). ISAP is hosting a Soil Health Leadership Program which is now accepting Applications through March 1, 2026. ISAP offers Soil Health Leadership Program to a limited number of applicants. The training course is designed to provide you with knowledge of the whole soil health system: physical, biological, and chemical characteristics of soil and the relationship to farm management. The 6-meeting program include 2-day in-person workshops over the course of 18 months. Workshops will take place at locations around IL for exposure to multiple cropping systems and soil types. The first workshop is slated for August 2026 in Peoria, IL; remaining dates will be announced. To apply, visit <https://ilsustainableag.org/>
 - ✓ US EPA recently announced Environmental Education Grants with \$3.2 mil. in funding available for locally and regionally focused environmental education grants. US EPA will award grants between \$200,000-\$250,000 each, up to 16 grants nationwide support hands-on projects that help people better understand environmental challenges in their own communities and take practical steps to address them. Funded projects will focus on environmental education efforts that use modern tools, including artificial intelligence, to help identify problems early, monitor water quality, and prevent future water contamination before it affects families and neighborhoods. Funded projects will also provide participants with the skills necessary to make informed decisions to take responsible actions toward environmental stewardship. Applications are due on March 3, 2026. For more information, visit US EPA's web site or contact a member of IFB's Environmental Team.

Farm Bill 2.0—

- **The U.S. House Agriculture Committee** dropped the [text of the U.S. Farm Bill](#) Friday, an 802-page package authorizing various nutrition, rural development and farm support programs. The [Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026](#) renews and enhances crop insurance and price support, disaster assistance, risk management programs, operation and marketing loans, and federal agricultural research. It also outlines investments in rural broadband connectivity, forest management, water infrastructure, and hospital assistance, as well as the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP). Some Democratic lawmakers, however, have already come out against the bill. Provisions in the bill that many Democrats oppose include limiting federal investments into solar projects located on forest or prime farmland, and loosening restrictions on PFAS chemicals and pesticides.
- **So, what is in the GOP Farm Bill of interest to you?** You decide for yourself:
 - ✓ The full text of the bill can be found [here](#).
 - ✓ View a short overview [here](#) and a title-by-title summary [here](#).
- **[Many agricultural and food assistance provisions](#)** were addressed in Republicans' One Big Beautiful Bill Act — which the GOP has rebranded to the "Working Families Tax Cut" — that passed without input or support from Democrats last year. That bill included controversial reforms to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which is funded by the federal government and administered by states. The GOP mega bill boosted work requirements and a requirement for states to share a portion of benefit costs if their payment error rates were above a certain percentage high. Rep. Angie Craig, D-MN, ranking minority member on the House Agriculture Committee, signaled opposition to the Farm Bill, accusing Republicans of ignoring Democrats. "Our review of the legislative text is ongoing. Based on what I know, the Republican Farm Bill fails to meet the moment facing farmers and working people," Craig said in a statement. "Farmers need Congress to act swiftly to end inflationary tariffs, stabilize trade relationships, expand domestic market opportunities like year-round E15 and help lower input costs," Craig said, referencing the fuel made with 15% ethanol fuel that is not allowed to be sold in summer due in part to concerns about smog. "The Republican majority instead chose to ignore Democratic priorities and focus on pushing a shell of a Farm Bill with poison pills that complicates if not derails chances of getting anything done," Craig said. "I strongly urge my Republican colleagues to drop the political charade and work with House Democrats on a truly bipartisan bill to address the very real problems farm country is experiencing right now – before it's too late." The bill also [includes a provision](#) that could anger the "Make America Healthy Again" base in the GOP that prevents states and courts from penalizing pesticide makers for failing to include warnings on their label about health effects that go beyond those formally recognized by the Environmental Protection Agency. It "fails to meet the moment," according to committee Ranking Member Angie Craig, D-MN.

- **Reaction to the GOP version** of Farm Bill 2.0 varied, as expected:
 - ✓ **Agricultural and conservation groups** said they are cautiously optimistic after House Agriculture Committee Chairman Rep. Glenn Thompson, R-PA, introduced a new Farm Bill proposal Friday afternoon aimed at restarting stalled negotiations in Congress. Thompson unveiled the "Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026," which is scheduled for consideration by the House Agriculture Committee beginning Feb. 23. If advanced, the legislation could reach the House floor later this spring. Agriculture-aligned conservation groups welcomed the move as a signal of progress after months of uncertainty. Several farm-related matters were previously addressed in last year's "One Big Bill." Aaron Field, director of private lands conservation for the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, said the Farm Bill plays a critical role in supporting working lands, wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation tied to agriculture. Groups emphasized that bipartisan support will be required for passage and said they plan to closely review the bill's conservation and forestry provisions as the legislative process moves forward.
 - ✓ **"Farmers appreciate Chairman Glenn Thompson and the House Agriculture Committee** for their work in drafting a new, modernized Farm Bill," says [American Farm Bureau Pres. Zippy Duvall](#). "The legislation is needed more than ever as America's farmers and ranchers struggle through the worst economic storm in generations. We're still reviewing the text of the bill, but it includes important updates to credit, conservation, research, and rural development programs, and calls for expansion of specialty crop programs. The bill also preserves interstate commerce to enable farmers to remain competitive in the evolving marketplace. "We urge the House Agriculture Committee to work in a bipartisan manner to find consensus and move the bill forward. Additionally, in light of the ongoing economic conditions plaguing rural America, Farm Bureau will continue to work with congressional leaders on our top priorities including additional funding for bridge assistance payments, year-round E15, and a solution to our agricultural labor crisis."
 - ✓ **"We appreciate that Chairman Thompson** heard the concerns and needs of soybean farmers and addressed them in the bill," said [ASA Pres. Scott Metzger](#). "The provisions included will provide much-needed market and regulatory certainty for producers facing new risks and difficult business decisions." Over the past two years, ASA has advocated strengthening the Farm Bill to meet the pressing needs of soybean farmers. The Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026 includes significant enhancements to improve access to credit, meaningful investments to promote expansion and diversification of markets, and support for vital provisions such as the BioPreferred Program, pesticide labeling uniformity, full access to domestic markets for the meat products of our livestock customers, and investments in precision agriculture. Strengthening the Farm Bill is critical for the future of U.S. soybeans, and ASA stands ready to work with lawmakers to advance this legislation and help stabilize today's challenging farm economy.

- ✓ **The National Pork Producers Council** says it is happy that the Thompson proposal for a Farm Bill includes language for each state to have the exclusive right to regulate how livestock are produced within their borders. That upends the dominance that CA lawmakers had on the rest of the US by dictating how hogs would be raised, whose meat may make its way to CA food stores. [National Pork Producers Council President Duane Stateler](#) said, “We implore the full House Agriculture Committee to stand up for the American farmer, preserve states’ rights, and help keep pork affordable for the American consumers.”
- ✓ **Well-known animal rights activist Wayne Paccelle** is [placing his bets against passage](#) of the Farm Bill proposal of the House Republicans, on the pork issue. “It’s no small matter for a handful of lawmakers to try to overturn the votes of 10 mil Americans who approved measures to halt the use of immobilizing crates for pigs. Given that nearly all House Democrats are on the record in opposition to the Save Our Bacon (SOB) Act, and dozens of Republicans also oppose it, it’s not a serious legislative proposal. If this is the offering from the committee majority, there’ll be no Farm Bill in 2026. In the 119th Congress, there were [32 Democrats and Independent Senators](#) who signed a [letter opposing the Senate version of the SOB Act](#). There were [14 Republicans who lined up on a letter](#) to the Agriculture Committee leaders against the SOB Act. And in the fall, there were 182 Democrats who [signed onto a letter](#) adding their voices of opposition to the SOB Act.”

Agri-Politics—

- **IL Soybean Assn. directors and staff** met with Sen. Dick Durbin, D-IL, last week. They discussed the expensive costs of farming, the high price of losing IL soybean markets in China to Brazil as a result of U.S. trade policy, and the broken Farm Bill process. The group also advocated for keeping biodiesel goals strong when approving the all-year sale of E-15 – a bill supported by Durbin. For the past several years, Durbin has secured an emergency waiver from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to allow for the biofuel’s summertime sale. Sen. Durbin said, “I believe those now in charge in Washington have broken their promise to farmers, because today’s constant, chaotic policies are making farming far too expensive. The Trump Administration is also attacking farm research, which if not stopped, will hand global leadership in this area to China. I encouraged the IL Soybean Assn. to maintain their support for 3 important projects targeted by the Trump Administration: the USDA Agriculture Research Lab in Peoria, and the 2 labs at the Univ. of IL, the Soybean Innovation Lab, and the National Soybean Germplasm Collection.”



- **Farmers are independent, and no one disputes that.** [An independent farm group](#) has been rising in visibility over the past couple of years, with some outspoken leadership. Farm Action has focused on 7 policy priorities and is pushing for them to be included by either the majority or minority sides of the proposed Farm Bill 2.0. Those 7 include:
 - ✓ Use procurement policy to shift public food purchasing toward producers and supply chains that support public health, rural communities, and long-term economic and environmental sustainability.
 - ✓ Strengthening competition, transparency, and innovation across the food and agriculture system by addressing consolidation, input costs, and market abuses.
 - ✓ Support decentralized processing, aggregation, and distribution that strengthen farmer viability, competition, and access to healthy, locally produced food.
 - ✓ Expand risk management access for diversified and specialty crop producers largely excluded from the farm safety net so they can stay viable and meet growing demand.
 - ✓ Align conservation programs, technical assistance, and risk management tools to make it easier for farmers to transition to organic, regenerative, and soil health approaches—and to ensure public investments deliver lasting environmental, public health, and economic benefits.
 - ✓ Protect state authority to set and enforce food, farming, and animal welfare standards that create market opportunity for independent farmers. Preserve accountability for pesticide-related harms by opposing proposals that grant manufacturers legal immunity and weaken protections for farmers, workers, and communities.
 - ✓ Restore MCOOL requirements for beef so U.S. producers can compete on a level playing field and consumers can choose to support them with clear, accurate labeling.

Biofuels News--

- **The rural economy is suffering,** and the news about increasing farm bankruptcies and the USDA's unexpected jump in the 2025 corn harvest came at a bad time. Geoff Cooper, the president and CEO of the Renewable Fuels Association, said a record corn crop should be good news. "Demand hasn't kept up, which means lower commodity prices and farm income," Cooper said. "Government payments, while appreciated, don't clear out bins, but stronger markets do." He also said the best and easiest solution lies before Congress, which is legislation to allow year-round E15 sales nationwide. "It's now up to the House's E15 Rural Domestic Energy Council to present its proposed approach for approving year-round E15 by this Sunday, February 15," he added. "The House has promised to hold a vote on the legislative proposal by the end of this month." Year-round E15 would be the most effective way to address the supply-demand imbalance.

- **Corn farmers, ethanol producers, and industry stakeholders** are wondering what's next after Congress failed to pass legislation allowing year-round access to E15. Pat Westhoff, the director of the Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute (FAPRI) at the Univ. of MO, is watching closely and said we'll see how it evolves going forward, "The corn ethanol folks were very hopeful that they'd be able to get legislation allowing E15 use year-round as part of a budget bill that's working its way through Congress, but that didn't happen, at least not this time around. There are some promises for future votes, but it's not clear to me what the process is going to be to actually get a bill back on the floor with a chance of passage here in your future. Just lots of uncertainties today with getting much of anything passed in Congress, so we'll see whether or not the folks who are more supportive of E15 year-round are able to succeed." It's an unusual situation because ethanol and most of the petroleum industry have come together to support year-round E15, "It's been an interesting set of developments here, watching those two groups that have often been at odds with each other in the past come to at least some degree of agreement on support for E15. However, it seems like things are getting hung up, in part, concerning some small refineries and whether or not they will continue to be exempt from the ordinary rules of the Renewable Fuel Standard. We obviously have people on both sides of that who feel very strongly, and whenever that happens, it can be tough to get legislation accomplished." Westhoff said industry supporters should be contacting their Congressional officials every day to let them know the farm economy needs the extra demand year-round E15 would bring, "Right, there's definitely a challenge to the farm economy right now, and on the crop side of the ledger, having additional sources of demand would definitely be supportive." Westhoff is retiring and will be replaced by former USDA Chief Economist Seth Myers. (Backroads of Illinois Podcast)
- **CEO Neil Caskey of the National Corn Growers** issued an open letter to Congress about E15. And he did not "mince any words," as the saying goes. "The exclusion of E15 in last month's budget bill was a real kick in the teeth. It came nearly a year after year-round nationwide E15 was stripped out of the continuing resolution that Congress passed at the end of 2024, which was also a real punch in the gut. These are trying times on the farm. Planting is around the corner of what will be one of the most expensive corn crops to produce in history. And corn prices are nowhere near where they need to be right now. All eyes are focused on Washington this week and the deadline the House set for the E15 Task Force to complete its work. And I hope it will. Because the best way to help us forget about that kick in the teeth and punch in the gut is by producing a meaningful E15 bill. Farmers have done their part. They know what it takes to work together and have done so. Our coalition has found common ground with the petroleum industry and members of the gasoline supply chain that would address our mutual concerns...twice. Farmers counting on you, Congress. No more delays. Let's get E15 done."

- **There are many things the farming community can do**, and is doing, to help the environment and climate. But perhaps consumers are not aware of one area when it comes to the environment that the farming sector is already helping: the gas pump. Anne Steckel, senior advisor for biofuels at the National Farmers Union, says interest in biofuels and renewable diesel continues to grow as consumers understand the many benefits. She noted that biofuels not only reduce carbon emissions but also reduce the price at the pump, “We see states like WA, OR, CA, that have low carbon fuel standards recognizing and incentivizing the use of these lower-carbon fuels. And so, you’re seeing a lot of growth in those markets, which is a really exciting new avenue.” Steckel added that biofuels mean commodities grown in the United States can be used in the United States, meaning farmers don’t need to worry about the ebbs and flows of trade and international issues. As she looks to the future, Steckel says the goal of NFU is year-round E15 sales nationwide, “We’ve worked very closely with the refiners in the petroleum industry to try to put together some legislation that works for everyone. It’s always easier to put together a good coalition to get something across the finish line than to go at it alone. And so, we’ve really put a lot of work into building a successful coalition. So, Congress can say, these groups have decided that this makes sense for them. We feel comfortable voting on that.” When it comes to E15 sales, California recently agreed to go to year-round sales of the blended fuel. Steckel said California is not a corn-producing state, so for consumers to recognize the benefits of E15 highlights the many positives of biofuels. (PNW Ag Network)
- **What’s a RIN?** Many folks ask, and the answer from Christopher Burdett of Indian River Biodiesel is that a RIN is money. Unfortunately, for Burdett he overstated his biodiesel production, that increased his RINS, and he was able to claim more than \$6 mil. in fraudulent tax credits. He is scheduled to be sentenced in the coming months. The conspiracy includes a maximum penalty of 5 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. When auditors sought more information from the company, Burdett and general manager Royce Gillham, who was sentenced last year to 37 months in prison, provided false information about their fuel production and customers. The company filed IRS forms requesting tax payments for \$2.3 mil. in March 2018, as well as for \$5.9 mil. and \$1.5 mil. in February 2020. (RIN: Renewable Identification Number)
- **Data from the Energy Information Administration** showed that ethanol production rebounded 16% to 1.11 mil. barrels a day during the week ending on February 6. That’s equivalent to 46.62 mil. gallons daily. Analysis from the Renewable Fuels Association showed output was 2.6% higher than in the same week in 2025 and almost 5% above the 3-year average for the week. Still, the 4-week average ethanol production rate declined 1.9% to 1.08 mil. barrels a day, equivalent to an annualized rate of 16.52 bil. gallons. Ethanol stocks edged up 0.4% to 25.2 mil. barrels. However, stocks were 1.7% less than in the same week last year and 1.4% below the 3-year average. Inventories were built across the East Coast and Rocky Mountains but thinned through the remaining regions. Ethanol exports scaled back by 36% to an estimated 137,000 barrels a day, which was a 4-week low.


- **NASCAR is the first major U.S. motorsports series** to utilize zero-carbon bioethanol, thanks to a new partnership with POET, the nation's largest biofuel producer. POET is now the Official Biofuel Partner of NASCAR. POET Founder and CEO Jeff Broin said the partnership with NASCAR is the right place to show off the new zero-carbon fuel, "Well, we believe NASCAR is a perfect place to showcase this new zero-carbon fuel. NASCAR has already driven more than 25 mil. miles on E15, putting it to the test in some of the most challenging conditions available anywhere. E15 already lowers



harmful emissions, creating healthier conditions at the track for drivers, crew members, and literally every fan. So, we feel this is a home fuel advantage for NASCAR, powering a great American sport with a great American fuel." Broin said both POET and NASCAR are very excited about the zero-carbon bioethanol, "Well, today we're announcing the first zero-carbon liquid transportation fuel available at commercial scale. We believe, probably in the world, certainly in the US. This is zero-carbon before the

seed is planted until it comes out of the tailpipe. So, life cycle carbon emissions are zero. Gasoline's right at 100. It's a pretty remarkable announcement. This isn't a future fuel. It's here today, and it's available commercially today." This is good news for corn farmers and everyone along the biofuel supply chain, "Today, the industry uses more than 5 bil. bu. of corn each year. That's more than 2 times the amount we export. Between 2000 and 2025, ethanol corn demand tripled commodity prices and more than double land values. E15 and low-carbon fuels will drive that demand again, the demand for grain, increasing grain prices and land values, really, for every farmer. Looking at regenerative farming, which is cover crops, limited tillage, and organic fertilizer, coupled with CCUS, Carbon Capture Utilization and Sequestration, those two technologies are going to be critical to producing the lower carbon, higher value fuels of the future, and the one that we're announcing today. So, we look forward to working with farmers to produce these new high-value, low-carbon fuels that are going to change the game." There will be some new farming practices needed to get in on the zero-carbon biofuel market, "It's going to require regenerative farming practices that lower the carbon emissions of the grain coming into the plant. That's a critical part of making this ultra-low-carbon, zero-carbon fuel. So, it includes cover crops, strip till, no till, minimum tillage, as well as organic fertilizer, in a lot of cases, manure, organic fertilizer. And when we couple those 3 things with carbon capture utilization and sequestration, and of course, our feed credits that we get, we can create a zero-carbon fuel for the world. We believe people are going to be willing to pay a reasonable price for that, a premium for that, and that will be good for rural America." Interested parties or farmers who want more information can go to POET.com/zero. (POET)

Animal Agriculture--

- **The U.S. will temporarily expand the amount of beef** it can import from Argentina, thanks to an executive order signed by President Trump last week. Fox Business said the move is intended to help lower the price of beef, but the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association said that isn’t accurate. The proclamation increases the in-quota tariff-rate quota for lean beef trimmings by 80,000 metric tons for the calendar year 2026. The additional imports will be entirely allocated to imports from Argentina and released into the U.S. market in segments 4 times through the year, beginning this week on February 13. “The White House said the action is intended to boost supply and make ground beef more affordable for American consumers,” Fox reported. “The proclamation from the White House said the administration is acting in response to historically high beef prices and a prolonged decrease in the U.S. cattle herd.” [Reuters reports](#), “Instead of imports that sideline American ranchers, we should be focused on solutions that cut red tape, lower production costs, and support growing our cattle herd,” said Sen. Deb Fischer, R-NE, a major cattle-producing state. Washington and Buenos Aires [signed](#) a broader new trade and investment agreement that will give preferential market access to U.S. goods in Argentina. Economists have said increased U.S. imports of Argentine beef will likely be too small to significantly lower costs for grocery store shoppers, but the shipments could help improve margins for food companies. The U.S. imported about 33,000 metric tons of Argentine beef in 2024, representing 2% of total imports, according to government data.
- **Almost as soon as the trade deal was announced**, [Trump was met with backlash](#) from key allies and constituents, including ranchers who say that buying more beef from Argentina hurts U.S. producers. “The National Cattlemen’s Beef Association and its members cannot stand behind the President while he undercuts the future of family farmers and ranchers by importing Argentinian beef in an attempt to influence prices,” Colin Woodall, head of the trade group, said [in a statement](#).
- **On February 6th, President Donald Trump signed a proclamation** with Argentina, increasing imports of Argentine beef quotas from 20,000 tons to nearly 100,000 tons for 2026.  Matt Perdue, the president of the ND Farmers Union, (left) said they were disappointed in the decision. Perdue said this decision will lead to future challenges for the upcoming generation of producers, stating that’s where the conversation needs to focus. “Increasing Argentine beef imports is the wrong approach to growing our beef supply. While the administration claims this move will lower grocery bills, history and economists tell us otherwise: it will push down the prices paid to American ranchers, not the grocery store prices paid by consumers. That is why this plan has garnered nearly unanimous opposition from U.S. cattle producers. “The administration should focus on supporting U.S. ranchers, not our foreign competitors. We urge the administration to address consolidation in the meatpacking sector, advance country-of-origin labeling, and give young ranchers the tools they need to expand their operations.”

- Cattle industry leaders and producers** are concerned about the continued lockout of U.S. beef from the Chinese market. Erin Borrer, vice president of economic analysis for the U.S. Meat Export Federation, said there has been almost no progress on the issue. Even with low cattle numbers, access to China is vital for maintaining the value across the whole carcass, Jay Theiler, chair of the U.S. Meat Export Federation, recently



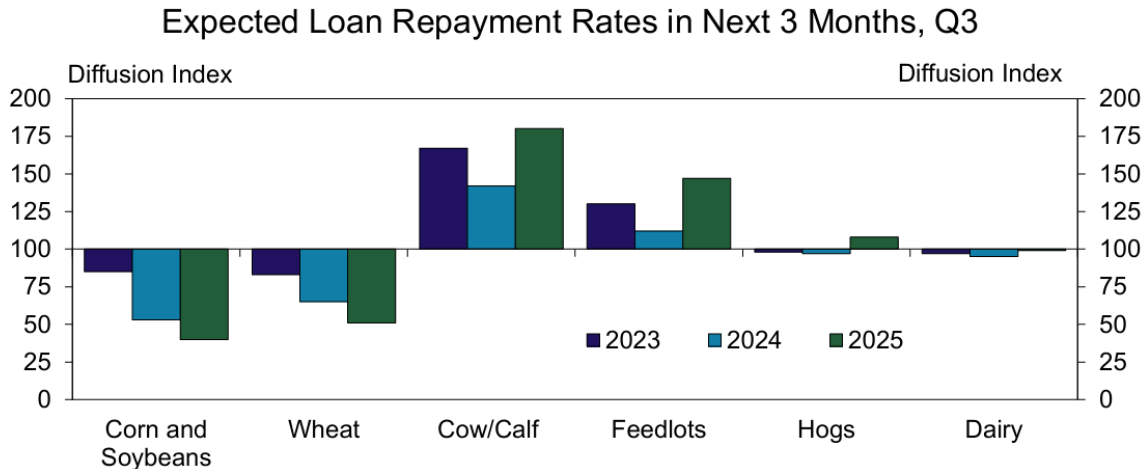
traveled to Washington, D.C., to discuss the issue with the USDA and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. He said the government is fully engaged on the issue and understands the importance to U.S. producers, but China continues to refuse to renew registrations for U.S. beef production and cold storage facilities. Most U.S. beef production has been locked out of China since March. (NAFB News Service)

- Despite high beef prices**, the U.S. cattle herd remains at record low numbers. Nate Kauffman, the senior vice president and Omaha branch executive for the Kansas City Fed, said the numbers show there should be some rebuilding underway, "You might ask the question that inventories have been declining for some time, this market would be suggesting that there should be some expansion happening, and there should be some herd rebuilding. And the reality is that that has been pretty slow." He said, "Part of the reason is that, while there are still costs involved, these costs really have to be taken into account for multiple years, and not just the current environment. I think there's some hesitation and some amount of risk aversion, just given the current level of prices. Thinking about expanding or investing in this market, whether you're the operator or the lender, there is some risk involved. And so, just given the level of prices, and essentially the point at which you would be investing in this market, the herd rebuilding has been relatively slow. It's happening in some places." What's amazing is how much beef is still getting produced despite the smaller herd size, "Now it is important to keep in mind that it's not just the, I think this point sometimes gets missed, but it's not just the number of animals. You obviously must be thinking about what it means in terms of beef production. And beef production has been declining, but overall, that level has been higher than what the inventories would otherwise suggest. And this is just because the animals are generally heavier than they were years and years ago. And so, the production that we get from beef hasn't declined quite as much as what the inventories might suggest." (NAFB News Service)

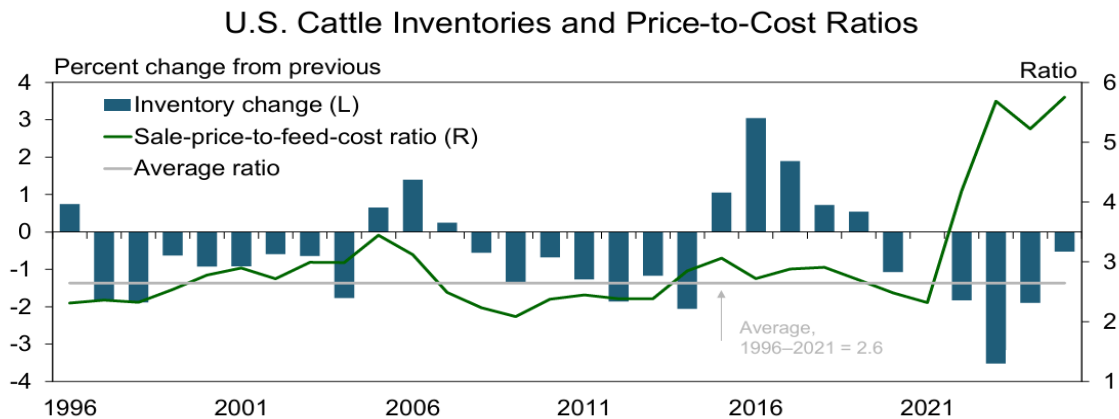
- **The U.S. Meat Export Federation** reported USDA numbers indicating that exports to Mexico grew 11 percent year-over-year to 111,207 metric tons. Export value increased 9 percent to \$246.9 mil., the 6th-highest on record. Through the first 11 months of 2025, exports to Mexico were 7% above the record pace of 2024 at 1.12 mil. metric tons, while value increased 11% to \$2.58 bil. Andy Tauer, vice president of international market development at the National Pork Board, explained which products are consumed in Mexico. "The variety meats increase going there, and with our inability to ship some of those into China due to the tariff rates, that's helped us on the cutout value tremendously. Bacon is up. Feet, primarily, is an offal that's really shown a surge here through the first half of the year, and we've also seen some cured and brine products starting to pick up in that marketplace." Mexican producers and buyers want to hear from producers about the values they hold, and partnerships with the U.S. Meat Export Federation help maintain this line of communication, while showcasing the unique cuts and cuisines. Tauer said it's essential to remember that Pork Checkoff dollars used with USMEF are then matched by USDA dollars, creating numerous opportunities, "And not to mention, you know, our friends over on the soy and the corn side, the Z-pork is value-added, and they put some money in. And I know there are several of the state commodity checkoff boards that invest in that Mexico market as well, through USMEF, and they've got a great team down there, with boots on the ground, real-world, real-time intel on how the market is changing, evolving, and just do tremendous work." NPB's international market development strategy builds confidence in U.S. pork by diversifying market cuts, developing emerging markets, and differentiating itself from competitors. (National Pork Board)
- **The Illinois Performance Tested Bull Sale** will be held on the IL State Fairgrounds in Springfield on Thursday, February 19th. Extension Beef Cattle Specialist Travis Meteer (below, right) manages the sale and says, "This is a data-driven sale. The information available to buyers isn't just collected on the day of the auction; it is the result of tracking genetics over time. He says the genetics introduced today will remain in a herd for years to come, producers need that data to make the right investment. A bull purchase this year will result in calves in the next, you know, two to five years; those heifers that are retained are going to be in the herd for the next three to seven to ten years; and then the daughters of those, the cow families that are established, that's generational. And so, these purchases do matter. This investment that you're making at this time does matter. So, you need to have the data to make good decisions and the breeders behind them, like we have, a sale with a guarantee and breeder that's willing to work with you in the future." The sale begins at 11am February 19th at the State Fairgrounds in Springfield, but you can also watch and bid online. [You can find the catalog and details here.](#)



- Federal Reserve economists at the Kansas City Fed** recently told [ag bankers and farm loan officers](#) that livestock operations were doing much better financially than other farms. Farm finances and credit conditions have also remained stronger for cattle operations.



In the cattle sector, are profit margins *too high* for herd expansion?



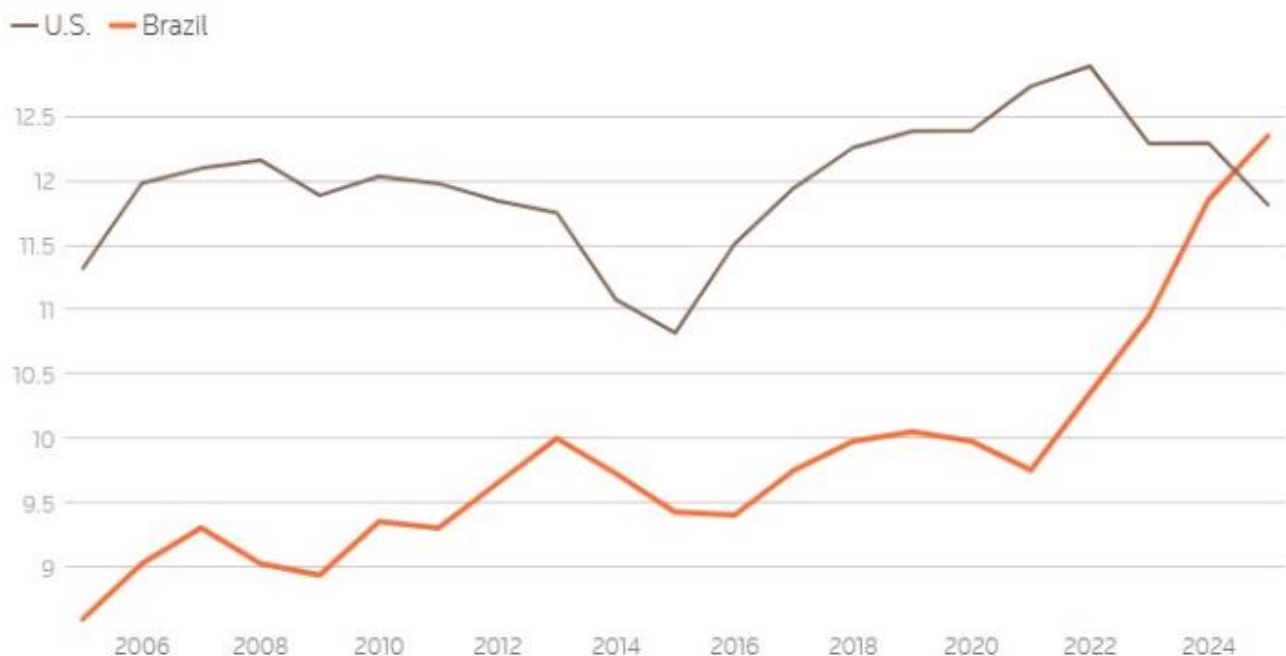
- The final Emergency Livestock Relief Program**, expanding payments to livestock producers disrupted by catastrophic drought, flooding and wildfires in 2023 and 2024 will soon be headed to producers. USDA officials said the plan aims to help ranchers recover losses and continue operations after extreme weather events strained forage supplies and forced herd reductions. The relief comes as cattle and beef markets continue to show volatility, with the national herd shrinking and prices elevated, reflecting persistent supply pressures. The relief program will provide one-time payments to eligible operations, with details on qualifying losses and application timelines expected soon. USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins said the emergency funds complement broader administration efforts to support rural economies and agricultural resilience through targeted assistance. The announcement follows heightened calls from farm groups and lawmakers for more robust safety nets for producers facing climate-linked losses.

- **It's well-known that the U.S. cattle herd continues to shrink.** The January U.S. Cattle Inventory report showed the total inventory at 86.2 mil. head on January 1. That was down 300,000 head from last year. American Farm Bureau analysis showed the combination of fewer beef cows, and a declining calf crop means the 2026 calf crop will likely continue to trend downward because there are fewer calves available for the breeding herd, even if more heifers are kept for breeding purposes. Tighter cattle supplies will contribute to higher prices and volatility for cattle and beef in 2026. Smaller cattle supplies paired with strong consumer demand for beef have driven up prices for both cattle and beef. With cattle supplies this tight, markets have become more responsive to news and events that could impact supply and demand. Beef cattle cash receipts have been one of the few bright spots in the U.S. agricultural economy.
- **Pork producers are continuing to bounce back** from one of their toughest years ever in 2023 and are hopeful this year will continue to see profitable returns. Roy Lee Lindsey, CEO of the NC Pork Council, says producers lost more per head in '23 than the previous record low in 1998, but they've turned the corner since then, "We've seen that rebound a little bit. We think that '24 was a pretty good year, it was better, anyway. '25 was much better. We're having an opportunity maybe to put some money back in and fill some of that hole that '23 created." So, what about 2026? Lindsey is optimistic, "It looks like, based on what the markets are telling us right now, '26 should be a pretty good year. Exports have remained fairly steady with 25-26% of our product going overseas, and that's critical for us, right? Most of what we sell overseas is not products that we would consume here. So that always adds to our bottom line." Lindsey adds it will depend on finding balance between the hog and grains markets that will determine how much of the year will go. (NAFB News Service)
- **Cargill announced it will be down to 1 meat processing plant** in WI after it shuts down a plant in a Milwaukee facility. Cargill announced that the protein processing plant in Menomonee Valley will close by the end of May, and the move will result in more than 200 people losing their jobs. The soon-to-be-closed facility produces fresh, ground beef and value-added meat products for some of the largest grocery retailers and will be fully closed on May 31.
- **On January 27, a proposed [settlement](#)** was filed in federal district court in response to a class-action lawsuit against Tyson Foods. The class action claimed the company conspired to "artificially constrict" the pork supply in the U.S. since 2009. Under the proposed settlement, Tyson Foods will pay \$48 mil. to be distributed to the members of the certified class. The certified class is defined as entities that purchased pork products between June 28, 2014, and June 30, 2018, for use in commercial food preparation such as uncooked pork bacon, loins, shoulder, ribs, hams, or pork chops (either fresh or frozen) from Tyson Foods. The proposed settlement currently awaits approval by the federal district court, according to the National Ag Law Center.

- **USDA announced the completion** of the U.S.-based sterile fly dispersal facility in Edinburg, TX. The facility expands the USDA’s ability to disperse sterile flies along the border and into the U.S., if necessary. It is designed to conduct extensive trapping and surveillance along the border, increase U.S. response capacity, and encourage innovative solutions.
- **Brazil surpassed the U.S. as the world's top beef producer last year**, [according to market estimates](#), after the South American country beat output forecasts by hundreds of thousands of tons, easing a global supply squeeze and helping limit a surge in meat prices. Brazil was already the biggest beef exporter, shipping meat worth almost \$17 bil. in 2025, according to government trade data released on Tuesday. Beef production numbers are not due until February, but analysts have recently raised their estimates. Farmers have been sending more animals to slaughter, cashing in on high export demand from countries including China and the U.S., where low supply has [pushed beef prices to record levels](#). Rabobank, which had expected Brazil's beef production to decline in 2025, now sees 0.5% growth to 12.5 mil. tons carcass weight equivalent. The U.S. Department of Agriculture in December raised its estimate for Brazilian beef output by 450,000 tons to 12.35 mil. tons. If the official numbers confirm market estimates, 2025 will be the first year that Brazil's output will have surpassed U.S. production, which fell 3.9% to 11.8 mil. tons in 2025, according to USDA estimates, [following years of drought](#).

Taking the crown

Brazil produced more beef than the United States for the first time in 2025, becoming the world's biggest supplier



Farm and Check-off Organizations —

- **U.S. Grains and BioProducts Council** members were in Panama City, Panama, for the 23rd International Marketing Conference and the 66th Annual Membership Meeting. The meeting spotlighted important conversations around new markets, the Panama Canal, and discussions about the Council's upcoming global trade strategy in Latin America and the Asia Pacific. "My theme for this year is 'The Time is Now,' which reflects both the opportunities and challenges in the current trade environment," said Mark Wilson, USGBC Chair, of Toulon, IL (left), who said, "Not only did attendees hear throughout this conference about the recent trade victories we've had during the last year, but they also got the opportunity to meet and speak directly with members of the Council's staff who are strategically placed around the world and working for them." →



- **Well, isn't this a coincidence!! What are you doing here in Panama??** When U.S. Grains & BioProducts Council (USGBC) members gathered in Panama City, Panama, last week for the organization's 23rd International Marketing Conference and 66th Annual Membership Meeting, it was a global audience. Wednesday morning featured an address from the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Panama and the Panama Canal Authority Administrator before a ceremonial Memorandum of Understanding cover



letter signing between USGBC and the Panama Canal Authority. Attendees joined a boat tour of the Panama Canal on Thursday morning and participated in Council programming conversations on Latin America and Asia. At the meeting in Central America, USGBC Chairman Mark Wilson, former chair of the IL Corn Marketing Board, (left) just happened to run into Rod Weinzierl, Exec. Dir. of the IL Corn Growers Assn. (right.) (Agriculture is a small world!)

- **The United Soybean Board has reorganized for the year.** [19 newly appointed members](#), including Rob Shaffer of El Paso, were seated. 21 members were reappointed for a second term, including David Wessel of Chandlerville. There are 77 members on the USB serving 3-year terms, and along with 48 staff members manage the soybean checkoff program. KY farmer Brent Gatton is the elected chairman. At the meeting, Darryl Chatman, the Executive Vice President for Compliance was named interim CEO. He replaces Lucas Lentsch, who is no longer with the USB, after serving 2 years. No reason has been announced for his departure.

- **Differences of opinions**, but what is their interest in IL Corn Growers?

- ✓ **Tim Thompson, Chair of the [IL Corn Marketing Board \(ICMB\)](#) says**, “I’ve seen what happens when farmers pool resources and think long-term. No single farm can open global markets or fund cutting-edge research alone but together, we can. Every dollar we invest is about creating opportunity,” he says. “Whether that’s export markets, ethanol, sustainable aviation fuel, livestock feed, or telling our story better - the checkoff works to make sure corn has a future beyond the bin.” Thompson, a lifelong farmer himself, views the checkoff not as a fee but as an investment. Corn Marketing board members are elected by fellow farmers and serve unpaid terms, making decisions grounded in real-world experience. They know firsthand that demand doesn’t happen by accident - it’s built through strategy, research, and relationships.



- ✓ **Mark Bunselmeyer, President of the [IL Corn Growers Association \(ICGA\)](#)**, has a different perspective. “As farmers, we don’t have the luxury of sitting out policy decisions,” Mark says. “If we’re not at the table in Springfield or Washington, D.C., someone else is making decisions for us. I farm because I believe in this way of life,” he says. “ICGA gives our farmer members a unified voice so we can protect our independence and keep farming viable for the next generation.” ICGA ensures lawmakers hear directly from farmers not just lobbyists or headlines. It’s about telling the truth of modern farming and fighting for policies that let farmers operate freely, responsibly, and successfully.”

Technology—

- **Many farmers have made a trek** to Brazil to see crops, and particularly soybeans. But that is not necessary anymore. [Dr. Kaiyu Guan, a Univ. of IL specialist in agricultural ecosystems](#), has taken the fun out of such trips. He has created a new AI-based system which can generate high-resolution soybean yield maps across Brazil using only limited local data, improving yield estimates for this key agricultural region and potentially providing strategic benefits to global soybean markets. It is an innovative approach that enables high-performance national yield estimates for Brazilian soybeans, even in areas where directly reported local yield data are very limited. By leveraging knowledge learned from earlier U.S.-based work through so-called “AI transfer learning,” the research team was able to make detailed yield predictions at the municipal level using Brazil’s state-level soybean yield data. It’s one of the first successful nationwide applications of cross-scale AI yield predictions for Brazilian agriculture. High-resolution yield data for Brazilian soybeans remain largely unavailable. The IL research team developed a new framework to predict national soybean yields at a finer level by integrating satellite observations, climate data, and state-level yield statistics, leveraging AI transfer learning techniques with the knowledge learned from their U.S. based models.

- **The Environmental Protection Agency** issued guidance that advanced American farmers and equipment owners' lawful right to repair their farm and other non-road diesel equipment. The EPA guidance to manufacturers clarifies that the Clean Air Act supports, rather than restricts, Americans' ability to make repairs on their own. It also makes clear that manufacturers can no longer use the Act to justify limiting access to repair tools or software. Zeldin said equipment trouble can squeeze a farmer's already tight bottom line, "For farmers, timing is everything. When equipment breaks down during planting or harvesting, delays can result in thousands of dollars in lost productivity." When a tractor or combine goes down in the middle of planting or harvest, farmers don't always have the luxury of waiting days or even weeks for repairs. That's why federal officials say new guidance issued on Monday could make a major difference for farmers across the country. The Environmental Protection Agency and the USDA announced new guidance reinforcing farmers' right to repair their own non-road diesel equipment, including access to repair tools and software that manufacturers have often restricted. Zeldin says equipment makers have wrongly used environmental law to block common-sense fixes, "Unfortunately, equipment manufacturers have misused the Clean Air Act by falsely claiming that environmental laws prevented them from making essential repair tools or software available to all Americans." Zeldin says those restrictions have forced many farmers to haul equipment long distances to authorized dealers, pay higher prices, and wait in line, all while valuable field time slips away, "Being forced to haul machinery to a certified dealership, pay higher prices for repairs, and wait in line — it's not just inconvenient. It can prove to be very economically damaging." The new guidance clarifies that the Clean Air Act allows farmers and equipment owners to temporarily override emissions systems for repair, as long as the equipment is returned to compliance. Zeldin emphasized the guidance does not weaken environmental standards or change the law. USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins framed the move as a property rights and food security issue, saying farmers should not be forced into costly repairs when they're capable of fixing equipment themselves, "Every single day, our farmers feed us, they fuel us, they clothe us by the sweat of their brow and with the help of mechanical equipment that has become practically indispensable in the modern day. But when that equipment breaks down and remains out of operation, it means crops aren't planted or harvested, mouths aren't fed, and America's economic growth and national security are put at risk." The Small Business Administration estimates the change could save farmers up to \$48 bil. nationwide, cutting repair costs and reducing downtime during critical weather windows. Rollins said it shouldn't be a challenge for farmers to get their equipment repaired promptly, "In America, the timely, affordable maintenance of agricultural equipment should not be a luxury. It should be a given." Federal officials say the guidance takes effect immediately, giving farmers more flexibility to get equipment back in the field — when timing matters most. (KWMT radio) →

- **But anyone working on their exhaust system** should know the fine print in the rules set out by the EPA and the Dept. of Justice. The National Ag Law Center, in support of farmers, has issued the following advice: "Both the Department of Justice (DOJ) and EPA have made recent announcements regarding the scope of the Clean Air Act (CAA). First, in late January, DOJ announced on social media that it would no longer criminally prosecute those who manufacture, distribute or use "defeat devices," which are used to disable air emissions control systems in diesel-powered vehicles. The text of the CAA makes use of a defeat device a felony, and as recently as last year, those convicted of using a defeat device have been sentenced to prison. However, DOJ has chosen to pause criminal prosecution, based on an argument that the use of such devices may be exempt from such penalties. Civil penalties, however, are still an option. Following DOJ's announcement, EPA issued a guidance document of its own, clarifying that anyone who disables an emissions monitoring system in a diesel vehicle to make a repair will not face penalties under the CAA. According to EPA, manufacturers of diesel-powered vehicles such as John Deere had previously claimed that the exemption applied only to repairs performed by the vehicle manufacturer. However, EPA has concluded that the exemption applies to anyone who makes a repair so long as the emissions monitoring system is only temporarily disabled for the amount of time necessary to make the repair and the system is functional after the repair is complete. For more information, click [here](#) to view NALC article "DOJ & EPA Clarify Stance on Diesel Vehicles Under the CAA."

Farm Family and Rural Life Issues—

- **As farmers face mounting economic pressures**, Univ. of IL Extension reminds agricultural producers and families that free help is available wherever you are. Assistance resources range from mental health vouchers and crisis support lines to comprehensive financial planning tools. Economic stress takes a personal toll. Financial uncertainty and farm-related stress can increase the risk of mental health challenges among producers and their families, with farmers experiencing suicide at over three times the rate of the general population. "The farming and ag sector is facing many challenges when planning farm operations for 2026," says Travis Burke, assistant dean and program leader for agriculture and agribusiness at IL Extension. "These resources are here to help and support the individuals feeding our world." Tight margins, unpredictable markets, and rising input costs can make it harder to carry out day-to-day farming operations. Visit go.illinois.edu/ExtensionOffice to find an Extension office near you. Farmers dedicate so much of their livelihood to providing for others. Especially in these difficult times, remember to check on the people in your life and share these resources with those who call agriculture home. Resources include:
 - ✓ [Farm Stress and Mental Health Website](#)
 - ✓ [Mental Health Vouchers for Ag Producers](#)
 - ✓ [Illinois Extension Farm Coach Blog](#)

- **Significant negative reaction** from Members of Congress has been directed toward 3 Members who called FFA upon the Congressional carpet for accepting financial donations



from Syngenta. A trio of conservative Midwest Congressmen claim Syngenta is a tool of the Chinese Communist Party wanting to influence FFA members. But after their lightning strike on FFA 2 weeks ago, plenty of supporters have come to the aid of the Blue and Gold. [One of those was Michele Payn](#), (left) who wrote, "Targeting FFA because Syngenta is a sponsor is crazy – and unfair in these difficult times. I'm sorry, but if you think the Chinese are

infiltrating our classrooms or blue & gold jackets, you don't understand how it works. Leadership programs, new agriculture education curriculum, career development programs, and scholarships for young people happen because companies INVEST in FFA – not INFLUENCE it. I know this personally because I managed 15 states in the Southeast for the National FFA Foundation and raised millions of dollars from corporations, large and small. One of my greatest achievements was taking Novartis Crop Protection and then Syngenta from a relatively small sponsor to investing in the state officer leadership development program (which I had personally benefited from) after years of visits and discussions. I clearly remember the day they committed to sponsoring the program because I was visiting with a senior executive who handed over their \$35,000 check – which had never happened in hundreds of sponsor visits. It was one of my most meaningful moments in selling sponsorships. That check never once changed the direction of the leadership program, even when they became Syngenta. FFA owns the program. It is their intellectual property, so to speak. It is unethical and unprofessional for a not-for-profit to allow sponsors to control or influence programming. I'm sure there are exceptions to that rule, but it has always been FFA's policy to control the INFLUENCE of any sponsors who want to INVEST in agricultural education. I left many sponsorships on the table because of that integrity - and I stepped in to inform executives when they were out of line once we had established a sponsorship, if necessary. Because that's business. It doesn't matter where a company is owned – FFA's policy remains true today. However, let's call this what it is – unnecessary political posturing that will only hurt an organization that has served so many of us. Unless you sat in the chair and sold the sponsorships, I'm not interested in debating this. Because I did – and I know that FFA's integrity is intact. Why don't we focus on the things that are breaking our ag economy instead of an organization serving the future of agriculture?" A commenter, Sarah Schwartz Gideon, wrote, "The other side of this equation is the issue these legislators have with diversity, equity and inclusion that FFA embraces. I'm including a picture of how that played out in my own child's experience with FFA, including her visually impaired teammate and the young women in leadership roles."



- **Just out of curiosity**, is your farm one of those which uses electricity? If so, are you in one of the red areas on the map below? If so, you may want to be concerned, says [Tom Halverson, CEO of CoBank](#), who has taken a personal interest in the reliability of electric power across rural areas of the US, and even Canada. The map is the capacity map for the

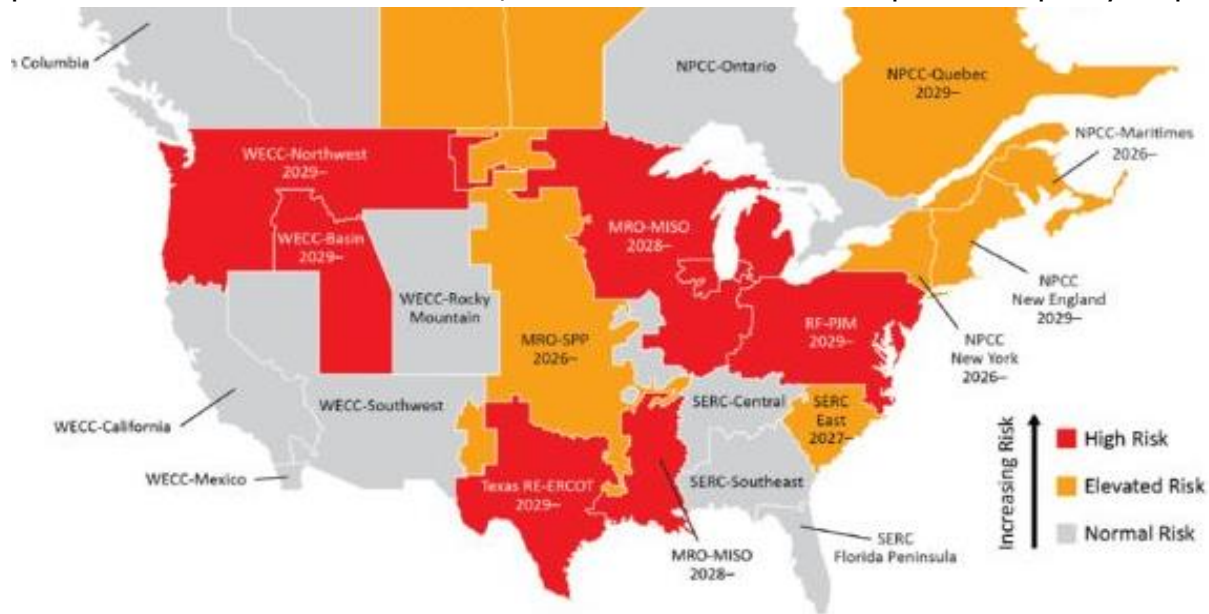


Figure 1: Risk Area Summary 2026–2030
Shows highest risk classification that occurs in the first 5 years and states initial year of occurrence

American and Canadian power grid from the [North American Electric Reliability Corporation](#). Regions marked in red on the online map found on page 7, which denote areas at “high risk” for capacity shortfalls over the next 5 years even under normal demand conditions. Regions marked orange indicate where there is elevated risk for capacity shortfalls during more extreme weather events. The year listed for each area on the map is when the capacity shortfall is predicted to occur. The overall supply-demand picture here is significantly worse than what NERC portrayed in its last report issued in July 2025. Increased demand for electrical power from data centers combined with planned retirements of generation facilities are key drivers of the grid’s capacity constraints. Halverson says he is in agreement with [Jim Matheson, CEO of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association](#), who says, “This report clearly highlights the need for smart, swift actions and serious conversations about how we will meet tomorrow’s energy needs as a country. Reliable and affordable electricity is the cornerstone of America’s national security and our economy. As electricity demand skyrockets, we urge policymakers to continue working with electric cooperatives to prioritize grid reliability and pursue smart energy policies that help set our nation on a more stable path.” Two primary factors contribute to this forecast: the growth in electricity demand from data centers and the continued retirement of always-available energy resources (wind, solar, hydro). NERC forecasts the loss of nearly 100 GW of always-available generation in coming years, energy to power up to 100 mil. homes.

And finally, these—

- **CASE IH drew the typical large crowd** at the National Farm Machinery Show, with the introduction of 2 new tractors and a patriotic paint job on an eye-catching tractor. CASE IH Vice President Kurt Coffey described the new products and conversed about the impact of the farm economy on the company and how it has responded to political challenges. [His comments are in this 9-minute video.](#)
- **Eastern IL farmer John Miller** noticed his nitrogen was not making its way to the knife slit and dissipating atop the soil. So, he fixed that and is selling his attachment to other farmers with the same problem. Miller makes coulters that ensure the nitrogen knife slit is covered to prevent it from dissipating. He was drawing attention at the National Farm Machinery Show. Contact John Miller at 217-304-1109 at Catlin, IL, for more information. [His comments are in this 9-minute video.](#)
- **Duo and Smoke** are the new spray partners created by PTx for better weed control in field crops. Duo provides residual control as well as spot spray with a dual tank and nozzle system. Smoke rides the end of the boom and controls weeds at the field edge. Gavin Burgess, a PTx regional manager, provides the details for the new technology. [His comments are in this 7-minute video.](#)
- **The farm economy is tough all over.** In the eastern Cornbelt, Hart Fledderjohann of Mid-America Farm Credit says he's seeing clients better prepared for loan renewals by improving their liquidity and being more aware of financial yardsticks that help them survive the current downslide. He was meeting with farmers recently at the National Farm Machinery Show and provided these [comments in this 4:30 min. video.](#)
- **Ryan Harbur, a regional manager for Big Iron auction services,** says the market is hot for the used equipment market. But he adds that on-line auctions will outperform local in-person auctions because someone across the US somewhere will outbid a neighbor wanting that piece of used equipment. [His analysis is in this 3-min. video.](#)
- **There are many terms for managing manure:** "Throwing," "shooting," and many others. But the Bazooka Farmstar folks have one with extra horsepower. Marcus Davis, National Sales Manager for Bazooka Farmstar, describes their high-tech solution to a years-old challenge. [His description is in this 4 min. video.](#)
- **Creator, inventor, call him what you want;** Greg Sauder is continually producing new farm technology. His BIGGEST (by physical size) is 360 Rain, which changed irrigation technology. Sauder's technicians now have been able to apply dry fertilizers to the water stream. Sauder explains that during his time at the National Farm Machinery Show, [in this 6-minute video.](#)

Mark Your Calendar! --

- **Pesticide safety education programs** are underway and extend through April 8 at numerous locations around IL. The [Illinois Pesticide Safety Education Program](#) is for those needing an operator or applicator license, with on-line access. [Private applicator training clinics are in-person at these locations and dates.](#) [Commercial Applicator/Operator In-Person Clinics](#) are underway and will be held through March 10.
- **If you are a candidate to be** a Certified Crop Advisor, [CCA information is here.](#) [Registration period](#) extends through Jan 26, for the exams conducted Feb. 4-18.
- **Extension Agronomy Summits** will be in 8 locations, until Feb. 24. Speakers will provide research updates from university experts to gain insightful tips for making informed decisions around farm management. [Dates, locations, and registration details.](#)
- **Precision Conservation Management** has scheduled 6 bi-monthly webinars to help farmers leverage field data for profitability, and how PepsiCo is rewarding conservation practices like reduced tillage, cover crops, and nutrient efficiency. [Registration here.](#) The first will be February 3, and all are from 11 am to 12 noon.
- **Feb. 3 begins month long opportunities** for livestock producers needing certification for livestock management. The Livestock Management Facilities Act requires facilities designed for 300 or more animal units to have at least one employee certified in environmentally aware manure management techniques. Facilities with more than 1,000 animal units must have a certified livestock manager attend a workshop and pass the IDOA exam or complete the online training and pass the online test. [Details, dates, and locations.](#)
- **IL Farm Bureau's Governmental Affairs Conference** is set for Feb. 17 at the BOS Center in Springfield, from 8 am to 2 pm. County Farm Bureau Offices have details.
- **The IL Pork Producers Assn.** has its annual meeting Feb. 17 at Springfield. Top leaders of the National Pork Board and National Pork Producers Council will speak, along with US House Ag Chairman Rep. Glenn Thompson. [Registration is required for the Swine Mixer.](#)
- **The IL Soybean Growers** will hold a marketing webinar on Feb 17 from 10 am to 11:30 am. Univ. of IL Farmdoc ag economist Joe Janzen and Barchart senior economist Darin Newsom will discuss margins, price dynamics, and suggest marketing strategies. [Details.](#)
- **2026 USDA Agricultural Outlook Forum** will be Feb. 19-20. USDA's annual Agricultural Outlook Forum—this year themed “Meeting Tomorrow’s Challenges, Today”—offers opportunities for exchanging ideas, information, and best practices among producers, processors, policymakers, government officials, and nongovernmental organizations. [Details and free registration, with participants in person and on-line.](#) [Program details.](#)

- **The Illinois Beef Expo** is set for the [IL State Fairgrounds, Feb. 19-22, 2026](#). The IL Angus Assn. will hold its Annual Banquet and Conf. Feb. 20 at the IL Building, IL St. Fairgrounds.
- **The AISWCD** will be hosting an Advocacy Day on behalf of the Soil and Water Conservation Districts at the Capitol on Tuesday, February 24, 2026. For all registration-related questions, please reach out to rebecca.sadaj@aiswcd.org.
- **Commodity Classic** is set for February 25-27 in San Antonio, TX, with a 30th birthday celebration. [Details \(to date\) and registration information are here](#). The 2026 catch phrase is: "3 days. Thousands of farmers. 1 goal: leaving with strategies that actually work."
- **Extension's Crop Management Conf.** will be on-line this year, and available from Mar 1-Apr. 30 with the latest research updates to improve productivity and output of crop science experts. Full event details and registration are available at go.illinois.edu/CMC.
- **Sustaining your farm legacy** will be the focus of several 2026 meetings beginning Mar. 2 and on-line programs, being jointly presented by Extension and IL Farm Bureau, for IL farmland owners and agricultural stakeholders. [Details, dates, and registration are here](#).
- **Farmdoc ag economists** will be the featured speakers at the WILL Agriculture Day Mar. 3 to be held at the Beef House in Covington, IN. Program from 7:30 am Central time to 2:30 pm. Topics cover: Weather, Markets, South America, Weeds, Budgeting, Crop Insurance. [Details and registration here](#).
- **The Central IL Marketing Club** will hear from Dr. Joana Colussi of Purdue Univ. about Brazil's ability to supply all of China's soybean needs at its Mar 3 meeting. The Brazilian native, formerly with the IL Farmdoc staff, will address the Marketing Club via a video link at 6:30 p.m. Anyone wanting to view/listen, send a request to: StuAgNews@aol.com.
- **IL State Ag Product Expo** will be March 7 & 8 at the IL State Fairgrounds in the Expo Building on Main St. [Details and registered exhibitors are located here](#). Event also features IL winemakers.
- **The Center for Digital Agriculture** at the Univ. of IL will hold its 2026 conference on Mar. 9 at the I Hotel in Champaign. The focus is on how cutting-edge AI technologies are transforming the future of farming. [Details and registration are here](#). 9 am to 4:30 pm.
- **The Ag Tech Summit** is set for March 10 at the IL Conference Center at Champaign, from 9 am to 5 pm and features speakers, panels, fireside chats, networking and exhibits. [Details about the free event are here](#).



- **Cornbelt Update is a weekly service of the Illinois Soybean Association and provided to Illinois Soybean Growers.**
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