

*Cornbelt Update*  
*February 2, 2026*  
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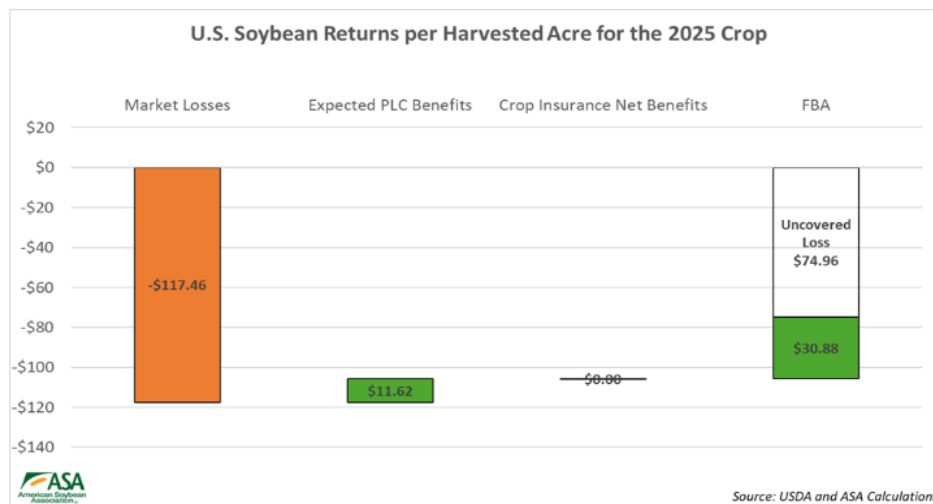


*A weekly Cornbelt digest of marketing, economic, agronomic, and management information.*

### ***Commodity Market Drivers—***

- **US corn and soybean futures slipped again** last week as traders weighed ample global supplies against sluggish export demand, according to market analysts and federal data. The USDA said recent export inspections for corn and soybeans fell below last year's pace, adding pressure to prices already near multi-year lows. Analysts at commodity research firm StoneX said large South American harvests and rising global stocks are limiting near-term upside despite seasonal demand. Currency strength in Brazil has encouraged aggressive farmer selling, further swelling global supplies. At the same time, US farmers continue to face elevated input costs, squeezing margins as planting decisions approach. Market analysts said weather risks later in the growing season could still inject volatility, but near-term sentiment remains bearish. USDA will release updated supply and demand estimates Feb. 10, which traders say could provide clearer direction for spring markets.
- **That did not last long.** China is ramping up its orders from Brazil to fill its soybean needs after it met the initial shipment volume from the US as part of a trade truce with Washington. Over the past week, [Bloomberg said](#) Chinese importers have booked at least 55 mil. bu. of beans for loading mainly in March and April. "At the same time, state-owned companies in China have appeared to refrain from taking American cargoes," Bloomberg said. "US soybeans delivered to China on a cost-and-freight basis are at a steep premium over comparable beans from Brazil for February, so crushing them will likely incur heavy losses for processors." Over the long term, the US said China has committed to buying at least 25 mil. tons of US soybeans annually through 2028, which means the nation may actually come back for more American cargoes later in 2026.

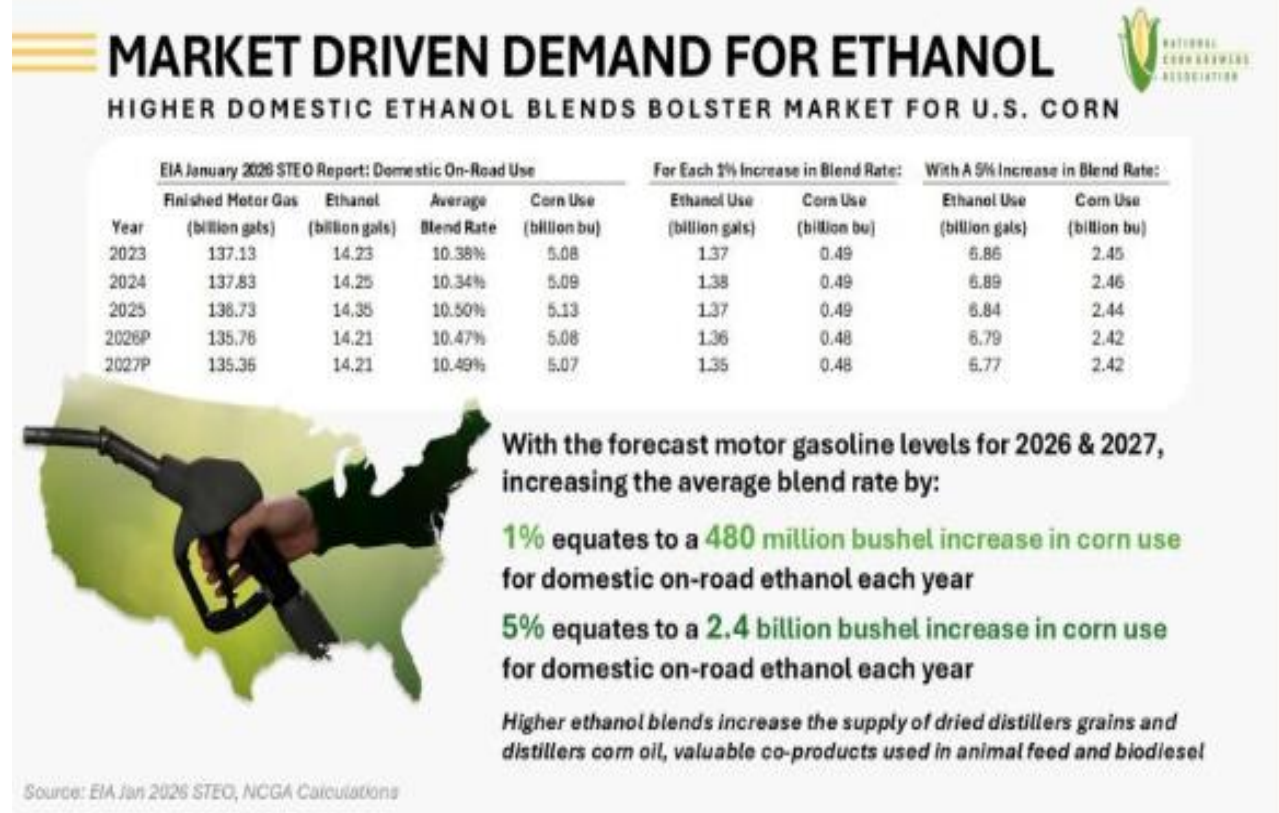
- Soybean producers in the US** have faced an extremely difficult crop year in 2025, with USDA projections suggesting it is the most expensive soybean crop per acre. [American Soybean Assn. economist Scott Gerlt](#) says, "Beyond direct assistance, strong Renewable Fuel Standard levels and finalized biofuel tax credit guidance would bolster domestic demand. Growing domestic biofuel use has been a bright spot for the soybean industry. The U.S. crush industry has expanded by [several hundred mil. bu.](#) over the past few years to supply increasing amounts of soybean oil. However, the biomass-based diesel industry faltered in early 2025 and soybean oil used in biofuel production dropped by about half. EPA estimates their proposal would [increase minimum BBD blend levels by 67%](#) from 2025 to 2026. If achieved, this increase would energize biofuel markets with robust demand. It would also provide certainty for the same markets for the next 2 years. Restricting credit for foreign fuels and biofuel feedstocks helps restore



domestic soy as a preferred feedstock. A study funded by the United Soybean Board showed that removing the proposed half Renewable Identification Number (RIN) credit restriction would reduce soy farmer cash receipts between [\\$500 mil. and \\$2.1 bil. per year](#),

depending on the year and how EPA handles adjusting the corresponding obligations. Soybean oil use in biofuels would also fall between 200 mil. lbs. per year to 3.3 bil. lbs. per year. Imports of UCO and tallow would increase by more than 2 bil. lbs. in all cases. Strong biofuel policies can help dampen the lost export opportunities but cannot fully absorb the loss of soybean sales to China. Even when total market losses, upcoming farm bill Price Loss Coverage (PLC) payments, crop insurance, and Farmer Bridge Assistance are included, soybeans still face a loss of \$75 per acre. It is important that total assistance being given to farmers doesn't exceed their losses for soybeans. Record high input prices will not recede in the face of excess payments. Just as importantly, it is critical to balance payments across crops. The FBA is the second year in a row that *ad hoc* is tied to actual plantings. Persistently low payment rates for soybeans create disincentives to plant soybeans if farmers believe they will not receive adequate support if the downturn continues. Even if these factors are considered, they still don't account for the lost trade with China. Economic losses only consider financial statements, not opportunity costs. If soybean farmers had a profitable year with normal trade, economic loss assistance will never compensate producers for the lost profits due to geopolitics. Finalizing the proposed RVO and 45Z guidance will dampen the loss by growing an alternative, domestic market. Time is of the essence as the year has started without final blending levels. Even with strong RVOs, soybean farmers face large losses this year that are uncovered by the FBA program and upcoming farm bill payments."

- Year-Round E15:** A key piece of the corn demand puzzle, says [Krista Swanson, chief economist for the National Corn Growers Assn.](#) "A puzzle is always in progress at my home in the winter. Some pieces take forever to find, but once they're in place, they unlock the next section – even though they don't complete the puzzle. That's exactly how E15 feels right now. E15 isn't the whole corn-demand puzzle. But it is a difficult, high-impact piece – one that creates meaningful, near-term opportunity for growth. Earlier this week, President Donald Trump reiterated his commitment to delivering year-round E15. Naturally, farmers and industry partners are asking, "What does this really mean for corn?" The U.S. is projected to use 135.4 billion gallons of finished motor gasoline in 2027, with 14.2 bil. gal. of ethanol blended in – still mostly as E10. Year-round nationwide E15 opens a door to higher blending. Every 1% increase in the national average blend rate represents roughly 480 mil. bu. of corn used in domestic on-road ethanol annually. A 5% increase? 2.4 bil. additional bushels of potential use. But use is not the same as demand. True demand reflects consumer behavior, market incentives, and industry capacity. In our joint E15 economic impact study with RFA, we modeled full E15 adoption alongside realistic shifts in other uses resulting in a 1.4 bil. bu. increase in total net use. Considering anticipated change in production, we estimated a 35¢ per bu. bump in corn price. Assumptions matter – and results will vary depending on assumption – but the direction is clear: E15 grows demand. The timeline depends heavily on infrastructure. EPA's 2021 efforts to update E15 labeling and underground storage tank rules stalled, but revisiting and finalizing those changes could accelerate adoption significantly. Bottom line: Year-round E15 doesn't complete the corn-demand puzzle. But it's a critical piece – one that creates real, near-term opportunity to grow ethanol markets and expand demand for corn."



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

- ✓ **Soybean market drivers:** Soybeans posted weakness to close out Friday, with contracts 8 to 10¢ in the red. That pushed March lower on the week by 3½¢. The CmdtyView national average [Cash Bean](#) price was 7½¢ lower at \$9.98½. Soymeal futures were \$2.40 to \$3.00 lower, with March down \$6.30 this week. [Soy Oil](#) futures were 52 points lower on Friday and down 48 points this week in March. CFTC Commitment of Traders data showed spec funds in soybean futures and options adding 7,261 contracts to their net long soybean futures and options as of January 27. They took that net position to a net long of 17,321 contracts, USDA Export Sales data for from Thursday took soybean export commitments to 1.244 bil. bu. as of January 22, 20% below last year. That is 79% of USDA's export estimate and behind the 87% average sales pace. USDA will release crush data on Monday, with traders looking for 230.4 mil. bu. of soybeans crushed during December. Buenos Aires Grains Exchange data showed 47% of the Argentina soybean crop in good/excellent condition, down 6% from last year but up from the 24% rating in the same week last year. [Mar 26 Soybeans](#) closed at \$10.64¼, down 8¢, [Nearby Cash](#) was \$9.98½, down 7½¢.

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- ✓ **Corn market drivers:** Corn futures closed the Friday session with contracts pulling off midday lows but still down 2 to 4¢. March was down 2¼¢ this week. The CmdtyView national average [Cash Corn](#) price was down 2¢ at \$3.93¼. Outside markets played a role on Friday, with the dollar index up \$0.893. Commitment of Traders data from CFTC showed managed money speculators in corn futures and options trimming 9,274 contracts from their net short in the week ending on January 27. That mainly came via new longs, as the net short was at 72,050 contracts. Commercial saw some long reduction, with the net short rising 17,381 contracts to 187,342 contracts. Export Sales data now has corn commitments at 2.27 bil. bu., which is 33% above the same period last year. That is also 71% of the USDA export projection, ahead of the 67% average sales pace. The Buenos Aires Grains Exchange estimates the Argentina corn crop at 46% good/excellent, lagging the 52% from last week but better than the 31% rating last year. [Mar 26 Corn](#) closed at \$4.28¼, down 2½¢, [Nearby Cash](#) was \$3.93¼, 2¢.

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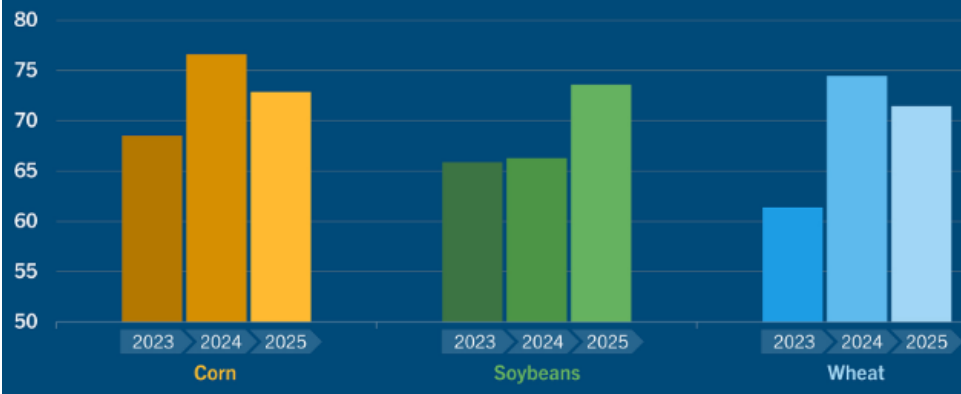




- **US farmers were aggressive sellers of soybeans** last fall as prices climbed after trade tensions eased between the US and China. With higher prices and a swifter pace of sales, commercial ownership of soybeans rose sharply while use of delayed pricing programs and basis contracts fell. [A new report from CoBank](#) said off-farm grain storage hit record levels

### Company-owned bushels in commercial storage

Percentage on Nov. 30



last fall, with farmers shifting more soybeans and wheat to commercial storage to free up on-farm space for the record corn harvest. Grain company ownership of soybeans in commercial storage jumped to 73.6% as of November 30, up

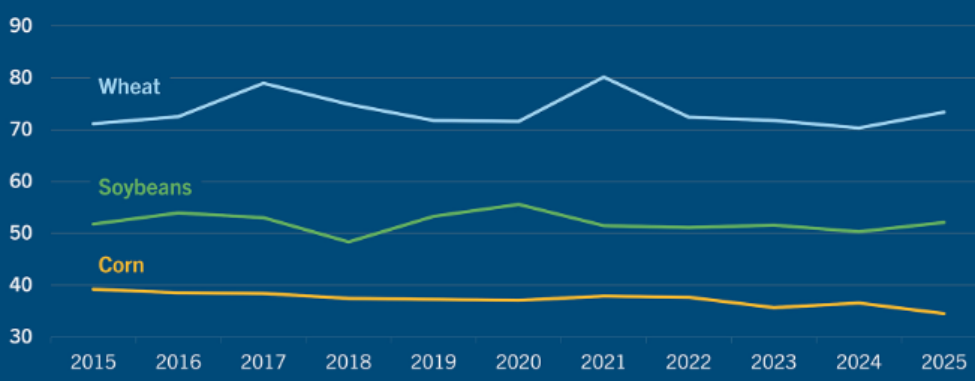
from 66.3% the previous year as farmers sold soybeans at a faster pace. "Any material increase in corn and wheat prices will likely be met with heavier selling pressure compared to soybeans, which already experienced a higher level of farmer selling last fall," said Tanner Ehmke of CoBank. DP participation in soybeans also fell partially as a result of farmers' concerns of market uncertainty ahead of the trade truce on Oct. 30, and with elevators also limiting DP programs due to the risk of owning unpriced bushels in a carry market. Lack of farmers selling corn and wheat has supported cash basis in some regions, but the increase in the amount of bushels waiting to be priced implies greater selling

pressure lies ahead for corn and wheat. CoBank's data reveals that farmers have been patient sellers of corn and wheat. Any material increase in corn and wheat prices will likely be met with heavier selling pressure compared

to soybeans that already experienced a higher level of farmer selling last fall. The increase in on-farm storage for corn in particular implies there is more corn in the countryside also waiting to be priced, pressuring both flat price and basis.

### Share of U.S. stocks stored off-farm

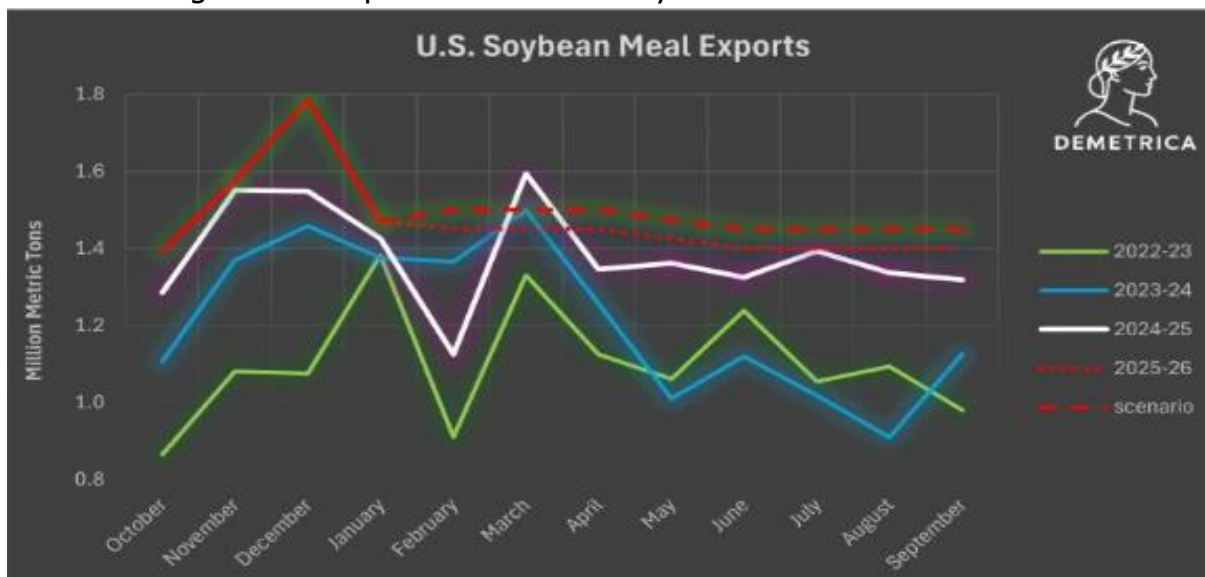
Percentage on Dec. 1



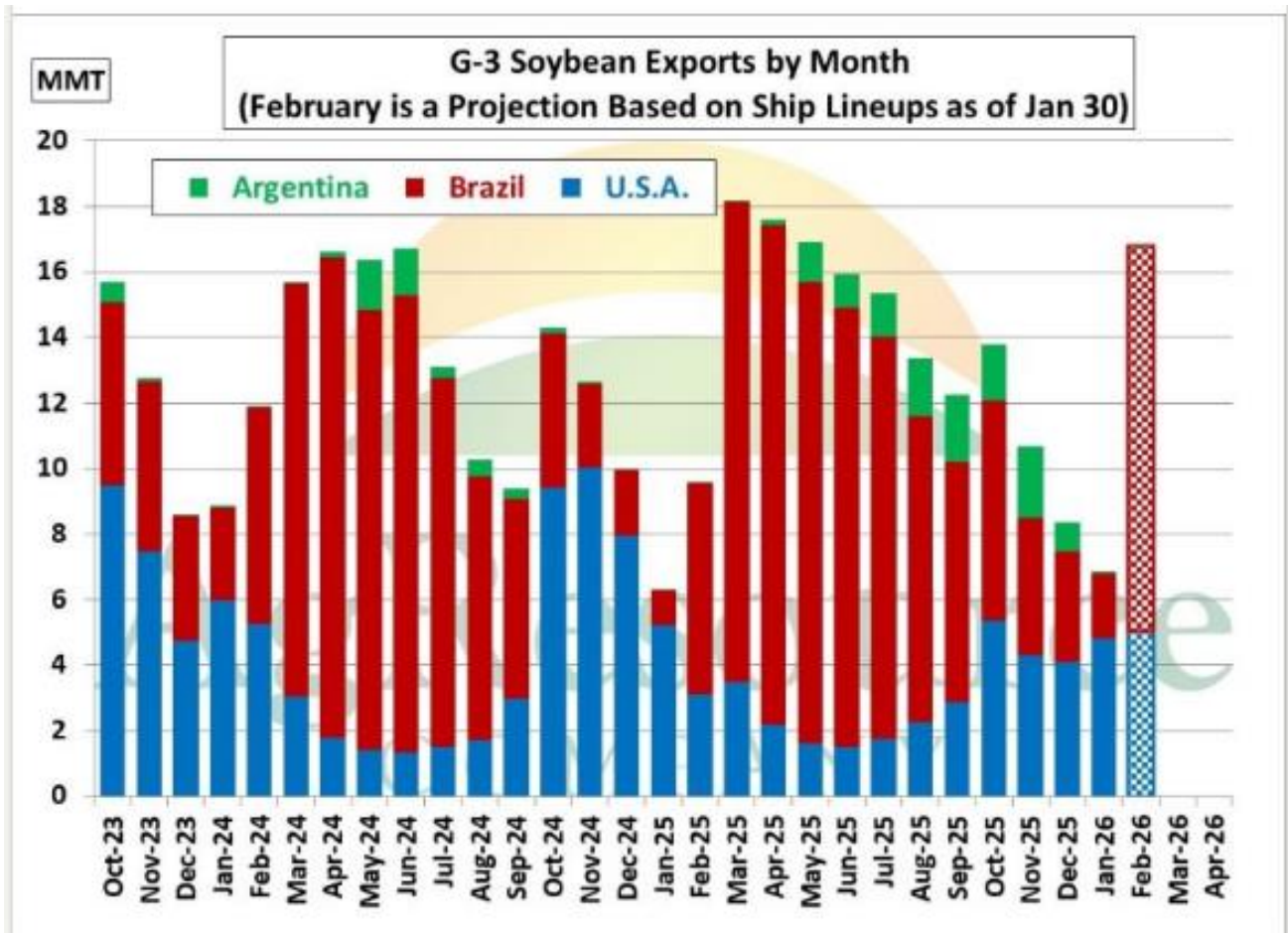
- **The latest USDA Export Sales report** shows another solid week, with ~330,000 metric tons of soybean meal exports, says former USDA ag economist Agata Kingsbury. Major destinations included the Philippines, Mexico, Colombia, and Morocco. This brings cumulative 2025/26 exports to nearly 5.5 MMT as of January 22. “If the final week of January holds a similar pace, monthly shipments could reach ~1.5 MMT. Looking at combined GATS and Export Sales data, October-January exports are running near 6.2 MMT, compared with 5.8 MMT over the same period last year, already ~7% year-over-year growth. SBM exports continue to impress. Funny how that works when prices are competitive, and global demand for protein feed remains strong. As I’ve written in my latest report, global SBM demand appears stronger than USDA currently projects, and the current U.S. export pace supports that view. At this point, USDA’s export forecast of 17.6 MMT for 2025/26 may prove slightly conservative, but it’s a solid projection.” From here, the math is as follows:

- ✓ Average ~1.4 MMT/month (Feb–Sep) meets USDA’s number
- ✓ ~1.47 MMT/month gets the U.S. to 18.0 MMT
- ✓ ~1.5 MMT/month pushes exports closer to 18.3 MMT

“Those are not aggressive assumptions; however, this matters in the broader global context. China is clearly buying fewer U.S. soybeans than it used to, and that is structural, not temporary. At the same time, Brazil is once again staring at a massive crop, with early projections pointing toward another “big crop, big tails” scenario (some say 180-182 MMT): large production followed by heavy export pressure well into the U.S. selling season in the fall of 2026. That combination will put ongoing pressure on U.S. soybean exports and reinforce the need to absorb more domestic supply through crush. The challenge, of course, is that crush capacity doesn’t expand overnight. These are long-term, capital-intensive decisions that require stable policy signals for both agriculture and biofuels. Without that stability, we risk revisiting the same conversation year after year, especially as Brazil continues to grow and capture incremental soybean demand.



- **What dynamics are shaping up** for February in the soybean market? That question is facing farmers and the grain market as January WASDE report is in the rear-view mirror. Offering his forecast is Bill Tierney, chief economist for Ag Resource. Tierney says about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the January WASDE's projected soybean exports are now destined for China.



- **USDA's unexpected jump in soybean ending stocks** in January caught market analysts by surprise and triggered an immediate market reaction. Brooks Schaffer, southeastern US grain marketing advisor, says he's also keeping a close eye on South America, "We really need demand. After the extra stocks that USDA found on the last report, we need demand more than ever. We're still watching how South America finishes the growing season. The soybean crop is big and, on the way, but it's not in the bin yet. So, we've lost a lot of crops down there to too much rain during harvest. So, as we all know, in agriculture, it's not made til it's in the bin." Schaffer says this all means trade is as important as ever in 2026, "We've seen China buy over the last few weeks, despite price advantages to Brazil, they are buying US beans. So that's a positive thing. We're setting records on corn exports, too. Beans are the big headlines, but we are exporting a lot of corn. Most of that has been going to Mexico, but we're also seeing corn going into some nontraditional destinations as well. So, trade is going to be big. Look for these, these loadings to continue. We need all the demand that we can get." (NAFB News Service)



- **U.S. soybean exports** to non-China markets are the 2nd largest ever, but it's not enough to make up for dismal sales to China, says [Bill Tierney, chief economist for Ag Resource](#).

"The chart to the right shows the history of U.S. export

commitments to non-China as of mid-January.

This year's export commitments have accounted for 85% of projected annual exports

However, the ratio has averaged 80% over the last 5 years.

USDA's "implied" projection for exports to countries "other than China" is 1,025 Mil Bu vs 953 Mil for 2024/25.

The chart to the bottom right plots export commitments to non-China vs U.S.

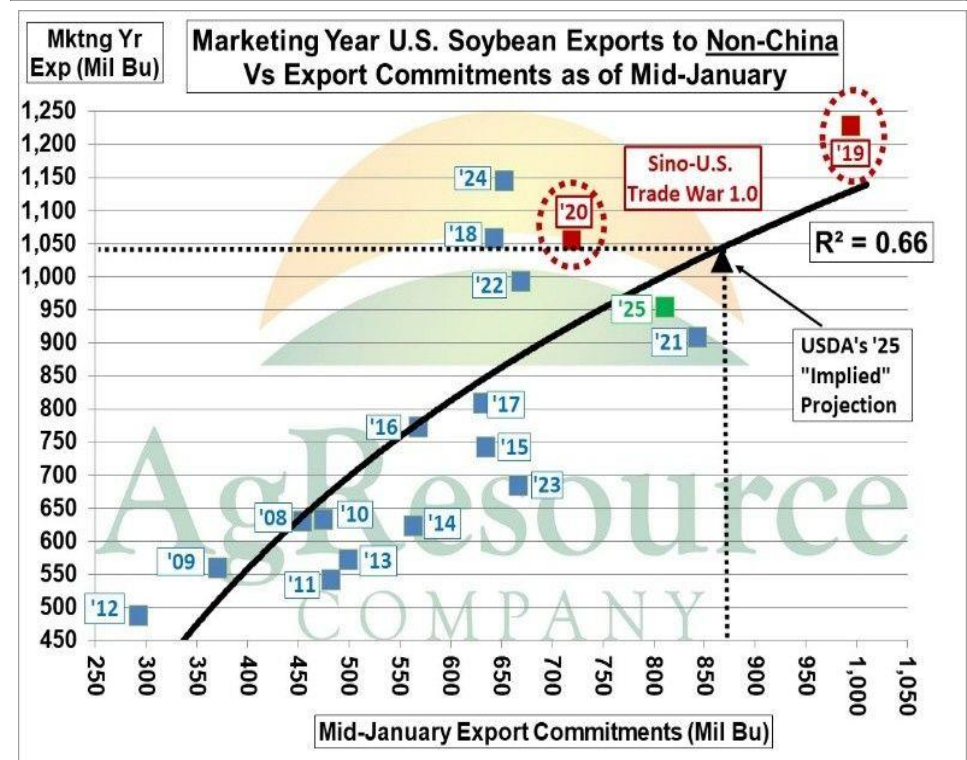
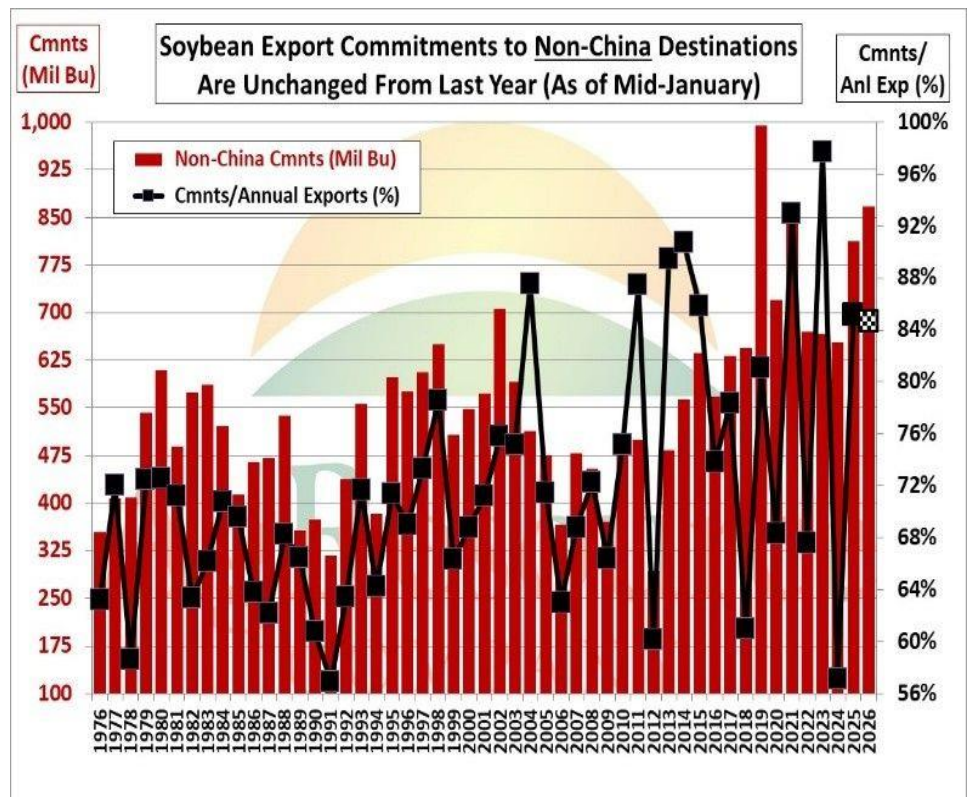
marketing year total exports. The green square denotes last year's commitments and annual

exports. The black triangle denotes USDA's "implied" projection of 1,085 Mil Bu.

Notice the exports in 2019 and 2020 were years of trade conflict with China.

Commitments are in agreement with the regression estimated pace what would be needed to meet the USDA's

projection."



- **"The January Crop Report invoked *fear* amongst many traders and producers,"** says the Brock Report, "The main market drivers are always the fundamental changes that we don't see coming." With this news known, and the supply situation essentially locked in, the odds are reasonably high the seasonal bottom in both corn and soybeans is in. There were many panic sales made following the report. It is not easy to try to stay calm in that type of market, with that kind of news. Two days following the release of that Jan. 12 report, corn and soybean prices both made bottoms, as well as wheat. Another strong indication is that the news is now built into those price levels. On Friday of the week the report was released, March corn futures charted a five-wave buy signal. A very bullish technical signal. Since the release of the report, open interest in corn has been rising sharply, as has the open interest in soybean futures. There are some key fundamentals that are changing in a very subtle way. Consider the following:

- ✓ Crude oil prices since the first week in January have risen by 12%. Similar increases have occurred in diesel fuel and gasoline.
- ✓ The U.S. dollar has dropped sharply (effectively also adding to inflation pressures) making agricultural commodities shipped from the U.S. much less expensive.
- ✓ The Brazilian real has rallied sharply making their soybeans more expensive.
- ✓ Corn exports are insanely strong.
- ✓ Year-round 15% ethanol is likely going to happen.
- ✓ Ethanol export demand has been very strong.

In 2 months, odds favor the balance sheets looking different. They are constantly changing. In the case of soybeans, while the export pace was abysmal until 3 weeks ago, the last few weeks really increased the odds of getting to 1.6 bil. bu. This includes last week's sales that were the highest for any week since November 2023. If exports hit 1.6 bil. and crush reached our forecast of 2.6 bil. verses USDA is 2.570 bil. that takes the carryover to 295 mil. bu. That may be wishful thinking, but we believe the odds are better than 50/50 that could occur with continued counter seasonal demand from China. The important piece of information to remember in all of this is that the bearish supply numbers are obvious, well known and almost certainly built into the current price structure. Old news is no news. It's the news that we don't know that's going to drive prices. The bearish fundamentals to watch out for in corn are acres and feed and residual. With current price ratios, odds favor the same or actually more corn acres this coming year. With the government payments favorably impacting the financial picture of many farmers, and current price ratios favoring corn, the odds of lower corn acres are further reduced. We're likely to see a slight increase in corn acres and a slight decrease in soybean acres. The potential bearish news for soybeans is that exports fall farther. We've been saying for months that the USDA was too high, and, in the latest USDA report, they did lower exports by 60 mil. bu. Since then, as mentioned above, the picture has improved. Just too early to call the ball game on this one. A lot can change here." For the complete commentary and charts go to [The Brock Report](#).

- **Marketing.** "The corn and bean markets both lost a couple cents on the week." -- [Matt Bennett](#).
  - ✓ **Corn—futures.** March '26 corn was up for some time then moved lower on Friday, cementing a small loss for the week. March settled at \$4.28¼, down 2½¢. This was 3½¢ off the high and 3¢ off the low. March lost 2¼¢ for the week. Technically, we were in a nice uptrend, but that looks a bit subsequent as of Friday's close.
  - ✓ **Corn—cash and basis.** Basis was steady/improved. St. Louis terminals were 30¢ over March (10¢ improved). While the river has a hot basis, likely due to a strong export market, interior basis levels haven't followed along much just yet.
  - ✓ **Corn—marketing strategy.** It's a tough time to expect basis to work higher, even if we see the board work lower. Cash corn is moving right now, even with inclement weather in the Midwest, so basis isn't likely to improve anytime soon. We typically see basis improvement from this winter rush into the spring/early summer, so I'm going to give this cash corn a chance for now.
  - ✓ **Corn—2026 crop.** December 2026 corn ended the week at \$4.56, up ¼¢. Dec26 held together a little better than old crop, and I'd imagine some of that has to do with the trade knowing we need to have decent corn acres. The best thing for the market would be to see acres under 95 mil. acres, but that may be a tough task.
  - ✓ **Beans—futures.** Beans were continuing their little rally before Friday took the gains away. On Friday, March beans settled down 8¢ at \$10.64¼. This was 9¾¢ off the high and 3¼¢ off the low. Beans lost 3½¢ on the week. March meal settled \$6.30 lower on the week at \$293.60, while soy oil ended the week at 53.51¢, down .48¢.
  - ✓ **Beans—cash and basis.** Basis was steady. At St. Louis, terminals were bidding 30¢ over the March (2¢ improved). Cash beans also gained some value on the week with the rally on the board and basis holding together.
  - ✓ **Beans—marketing strategy.** weather issues in Argentina typically produce some strength in the market. With crop ratings dipping a ton for beans as well, a person should assume some support for beans could continue-especially if they stay dry. What matters most is having your break-even dialed in as good as possible and marketing based on that level. I'd use a yield that is believable, conservative and something you'd give to the banker for cash flow.
  - ✓ **Beans--2026 crop.** Nov 2026 beans settled at \$10.79¾, down 2¼¢ on the week. New beans are still close enough to \$11, I know some people can make it work. I like locking in a floor as high as possible. While I could see beans falling if we see Brazil's crop as good as expected, there is plenty that can happen in the next few months, so if you're not able to make this price work, I'd be patient for the time being.
  - ✓ **Price ratio—2026 crop.** 2.37/1, beans to corn, based on fall futures, -1/week.

- **Market advisor's thoughts/suggestions:** [Matt Bennett](#). "It was quiet overall, with gains



up until Friday, when we saw them evaporate in a risk-off day. With Argentina still dry, concern about production is still present. While corn bounced above the 5-day moving average and tested the 10-day, we settled the week just above the 5-day. This corn market likely had some tailwinds of late due to a weak dollar, but in the last half of the week, the dollar worked back higher. To get a real nice move higher, we'll likely need some help from South American weather, while Argentine dryness would support, any issues with the *safrinha* crop in Brazil would be much more

impactful. Overall, corn seems to have some support, but it's tough to be bullish this time of year with these fundamentals. I'd keep offers current and keep your flexibility, especially with regards to new crop. Given the ability for growers to insure more revenue with crop insurance on less dollars, it seems many of the growers I've been in front of so far this winter are looking at staying heavy corn in some areas especially in the western Cornbelt. In IL and east, I expect plenty of corn-to-beans and vice versa with some growers opting for heavier beans due to the lesser outlay of money it takes to plant beans. I still like a strategy to lock in a strong floor with a chance to participate in upside. I also like a true hedge with the thought of rolling to the July with what we assume is a good carry next fall....The bean market continues to struggle with the thoughts of a big crop out of Brazil, and while Argentina received some rain this past week, it wasn't enough to take away the dryness they've created. This issue is Brazil is likely to raise 3-4 times the size of the Argentine crop and Brazil looks excellent still. While crush remains strong, bolstering domestic demand, exports are backing off as Chinese purchases are getting less frequent than we'd become accustomed to. The bean market is going to struggle if corn can't get a rally put together, in my opinion. Given the fundamentals, it's tough to expect a rally for beans with world supply likely steady to improved, while US exports are likely to be disappointing this year. I'm not giving up on beans getting some life, but at the same time, I still feel like selling incrementally, IF we see a rally would be wise for both old and new crop. As always, I want some flex for new-crop beans. I like locking in a floor as high as possible, so a three-way options position makes some sense here. Selling a call is marginable, but IF we'd have to pay a margin call on a short \$12 or higher call option, I personally would be happy about that. Regardless, what matters most is having your break-even dialed in as good as possible and marketing based on that level.....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.](#)

- ✓ "This week on the podcast we went over a ppt detailing the latest with our markets. Here is the new episode [Grain Marketing Update with Matt Bennett \(1/27/2026\)](#)."



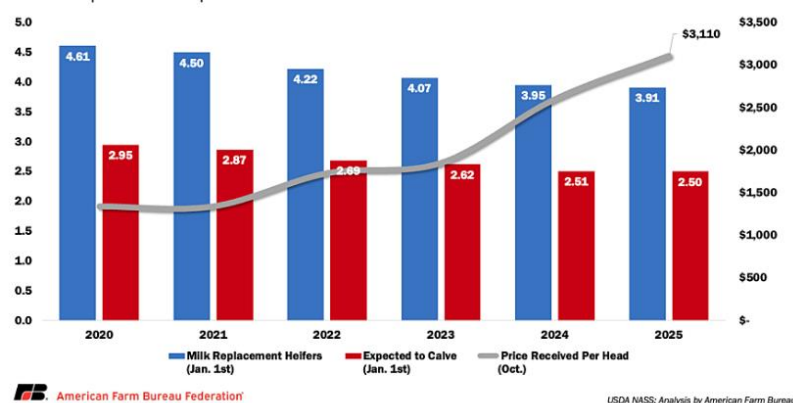
## ***Farm Economy—***

- **The Rural Mainstreet Index** climbed above growth neutral 50.0 for January, according to the latest [monthly survey of bank CEOs in rural areas](#) of a 10-state region dependent on agriculture and/or energy. The region's overall reading for January climbed to 52.0, its highest reading since July 2023, and up from December's 50.1. The index ranges between 0 and 100, with a reading of 50.0 representing growth neutral. "More than 1 of 3 bankers, or 34.7%, indicated that their local economy was currently in a recession. Another 26.9% expect their local economy to experience recession conditions in the first half of 2026," said Ernie Goss, director of the Creighton University survey. Regarding President Trump's imposition of tariffs, almost 4 of 10 bankers, or 38.4%, support pulling back on tariffs. An officer of a small-town IL bank said, "We are still dry in Central IL. We probably have sufficient moisture to plant 2026 crops but will need timely rains as subsoil is depleted." As stated by a bank CEO in the December survey, "Low grain prices and higher input costs continue to plague our area farmers. The Trump \$12 bil. payment to producers will help but is not a cure." The Federal Reserve's interest rate setting committee, the FOMC, met last week to consider changing rates. Almost 1 in 4 bankers, or 23.1%, recommended reducing short-term interest rates by .25%. Approximately 73.1% advocate no change, while the remaining 3.8% support a rate increase. Jeffrey Gerhart, former Chairman of the Independent Community Bankers Association said, "Interest rate changes by the Fed should pause for the time being. The lag is 'long and variable,' meaning policymakers must act with foresight. The economy's response isn't immediate, making it challenging to perfectly time monetary policy." After rising above growth neutral in December, the farm and ranchland index fell below the threshold for January with an index of 46.0, which was down from 52.5. According to trade data from the International Trade Association (ITA), regional exports of agriculture goods and livestock for the first 10 months of 2025, compared to the same period in 2024, fell from \$9.9 bil. in 2024 to \$9.7 bil. in 2025 for a decline of 2.4%. The farm equipment sales index sank to a very weak 18.8 but was up from December's even weaker 15.0. "This is the 29th straight month that the index has fallen below growth neutral. Lower interest rates and the impending \$12 bil. of federal farm support have yet to stimulate farm equipment purchases," said Goss. Rural bankers remain pessimistic about economic growth for their area over the next six months. The January confidence index rose to 44.0, its highest reading since February 2023, and up from 40.9 in December. "Despite \$12 bil. of federal farm support, weak grain prices and negative farm cash flows, combined with tariff retaliation concerns, continue to weigh on banker confidence," said Goss. The IL January Rural Mainstreet Index (RMI) declined to 50.1 from 53.4 in December. The farm and ranchland price index for January fell to 46.0 from 53.2 in December. The state's new hiring index for January improved to 50.0 from December's 46.9. According to the latest trade data from the ITA, IL exports of agriculture goods and livestock for the first 10 months of 2025 stood at \$2.8 bil., compared to \$3.8 bil. for the same period in 2024, for a 27.5% decline.



- **As farmers and ranchers work to adapt** to changing economic conditions across the farm economy, one sector in particular is undergoing significant shifts. [Danny Munch, an economist with the American Farm Bureau](#), said that US dairy production is reaching record levels but warns that trend may not last long, “That output is being propped up by older cows staying in production longer, not by new herd growth. At the same time, the pipeline behind the herd is shrinking. Replacement heifers are at their lowest levels since 1978, and the number expected to calve in the future has fallen sharply. So, while milk supplies are high today, the system supporting that future supply of milk is thinner.” He said one of the factors driving trends in the dairy industry is beef economics, “So, strong beef prices and beef on dairy premiums have encouraged dairy farmers to breed more cows to beef genetics and keep those milk cows in production longer. That boosts short-term revenue for

**REPLACEMENT MILK HEIFERS AND EXPECTED CALVINGS DOWN – COW PRICES UP**  
 Million head | Price received per head



calf sales. We see about \$4-to-\$5 per cwt for dairy farmers, but it also means fewer dairy-bred heifers entering the replacement pool (left). So, the result is higher milk output now, but greater risk of sharper adjustments later in the milk markets.” Munch says one factor to keep an eye on is the global milk supply, as the US has some

tough competition, “So just like the United States, we’ve seen increases in milk production in some of our competitors, like the European Union, New Zealand, and Argentina, and that has weighed heavily on milk prices at home as well. The US all-milk price fell more than \$4 a hundredweight throughout 2025 but making US dairy competitive overseas.” (American Farm Bureau)

- **USDA's annual Rural America at a Glance Report** series usually contains a specific topic of focus, along with traditional offerings about population, income, and economics. Tracey Farrigan, a research geographer with the Economic Research Service, says for this year's edition, debt-to-income in rural areas was studied, which she pointed out is another measure associated with buying power, similar to income itself. She looked at what the rural debt-to-income trend over the 2-plus decades indicates, “Rural areas have consistently had relatively low debt-to-income ratios, as measured by the share of rural counties that have low debt-to-income relative to the share that have high debt-to-income.” That trend is opposite in urban areas, which is a positive thing for rural America, “Part of that is that if you have low debt-to-income, it can impact things like access to credit, which can allow households to smooth economic shocks. A lower overall debt-to-income ratio may make rural counties more resilient to economic shocks and stresses, such as those brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.” (PNW Ag Network)

- **When it comes to the farm economy**, emotions can run high. But the numbers tell the real story. Jackson Takach, chief economist at [Farmer Mac](#), spends his days analyzing those numbers and what they mean for producers, landowners, and rural lenders. During a recent presentation at the Land Investment Expo in Des Moines, Takach broke down the forces shaping agriculture today and the trends that will influence decision-making in the years ahead. [Here are key takeaways from his outlook](#) on some of the most pressing economic issues facing farming:

- ✓ **Soybean Market**

- The U.S. is coming off several strong years of soybean production.
- Brazil continues to expand soybean output, adding pressure to global supplies.
- Current supply levels are limiting price strength.
- A poor production year in Brazil, increased biofuel demand, or stronger buying from China could quickly change the price outlook.
- While prices remain constrained, the market is closer to upside pressure than it may appear.

- ✓ **Corn Market**

- Brazil is becoming a major competitor to the U.S. in corn production.
- Improved growing practices are allowing Brazil to produce more corn each year.
- Increased global supply from Brazil continues to weigh on U.S. corn prices.

- ✓ **Gov't. support and bankruptcy**

- Farm bankruptcies eased during the third quarter of 2025.
- Government support programs have improved liquidity and cash flow.
- Federal assistance is expected to help balance financial stress in 2025 and 2026.

- ✓ **Alternative crops and biofuels**

- New sources of demand are critical for corn and soybeans.
- Soybean crush for fuel is expanding.
- New domestic demand is coming online for soybeans and some corn.
- Processing crops domestically keeps more value in the U.S. economy.
- Increased investment is being made in biodiesel mandates, support programs, and new processing plants.
- Expanded crush capacity also helps offset reduced soybean demand from China.
- U.S. soybean crush capacity has nearly doubled over the past five to six years.

- ✓ **Inflation**

- Inflation currently sits at around 2.7%.
- While higher than ideal, it is far below recent peak levels.
- Inflation supports commodity prices, farm income, and farmland values.

## ***Farm Programs—***

- **US farmers are bracing for a shifting economic landscape** as significant changes are coming to federal farm programs that could reshape the bottom line for farmers and ranchers. Dr. Amy Hagerman, (right) the extension specialist for agriculture and food policy at OK St. Univ., said many of the biggest program changes will depend on how fast they're implemented, "I think a lot of it is going to be the implementation timelines for the One Big Bill changes for our crop producers, who are probably going to get pushed out for what they're traditionally used to seeing. A big reason for this is the possibility for an individual producer to actually add crop base to their operation. That's that historic production acreage number that they have with Farm Service Agency that they use to apply for programs like ARC and PLC over time." She said producers have a unique opportunity to make changes to their acreages, "So, there's a one-time opportunity across the entire nation to add 30 mil. acres of new base. This isn't taking away the old base. This isn't reassigning old base. It's if your operation is producing on more acres than the base that you have, you may have the opportunity." For producers used to living under the 2018 Farm Bill, she talked about the biggest change that could affect the bottom line in 2026, "I think the big change for us, especially in this current commodity price market, is that those baseline reference prices increased for most of our major commodities. So, if we're thinking about wheat, that previous price, that reference price at which the Price Loss Coverage Program would have triggered, was \$5.50 a bu. The new reference price is \$6.35 a bu. So, whenever we look at our kinds of price expectations in the coming year, it's likely that not only are we going to trigger a PLC payment in the current market environment, but then it will be larger than it would have been under the previous bill. When we reflect on where this current market situation is going, that's a really powerful change for producers in terms of this safety net." There's another one-time change coming to PLC and ARC, "Also, and this is a one-time thing for the 2025 crop year, which payments will come out at the end of 2026 for 2025 crop year programs, producers are going to get the highest of the PLC and ARC payments for their base acres. It's a one-time thing. You don't have to go back in time and redo your election or anything like that. But if you add new base acres, you won't get the opportunity to add those for your 2025 crop year. It will only be for your 2026 crop year going forward." (Radio Oklahoma Network)



- **What Expanded Base Acres Could Mean for ARC & PLC.** An additional 30 mil. acres will be added to the FSA base, which was the result of Congress wanting to put more money into the farm economy. Farmers will have the opportunity to sign up, USDA will allocate acreage per commodity, per state, and per farm. But the [ag economists at KS St. Univ.](#) were curious where those acres might land.

Key findings:

- ✓ Crops ~30 mil. additional base acres nationwide. Projected total additional base acres range from ~29.97 to 30.0 mil., depending on how "noncovered commodities" and "total acres on the farm" are defined. After converting existing unassigned base acres, net additional base acres total ~28.4 mil.
- ✓ Where the biggest gains occur: ND, SD, and KS see the largest net increases in base acres. IL would get 429-437,000 additional corn base acres and 443-449,000 additional soybean base acres.
- ✓ Which commodities benefit most: Corn (37%), soybeans (32%), and wheat (~20%) account for nearly 90% of additional base acres. MO is projected to be the top recipient of additional soybean base acres. Corn would get 11.1 mil. and soybeans 9.6 mil.
- ✓ Policy details still matter: Final outcomes depend heavily on how USDA-FSA ultimately interprets total acres on the farm and noncovered commodities, particularly for perennial and specialty crops.
- ✓ Why this matters: Expanded base acres could significantly reshape the farm safety net for many producers in 2026 and beyond. These projections offer an early look at who stands to gain—and highlight why implementation details will be crucial.

Composition of the Projected Change in Base Acre Totals  
(million acres)

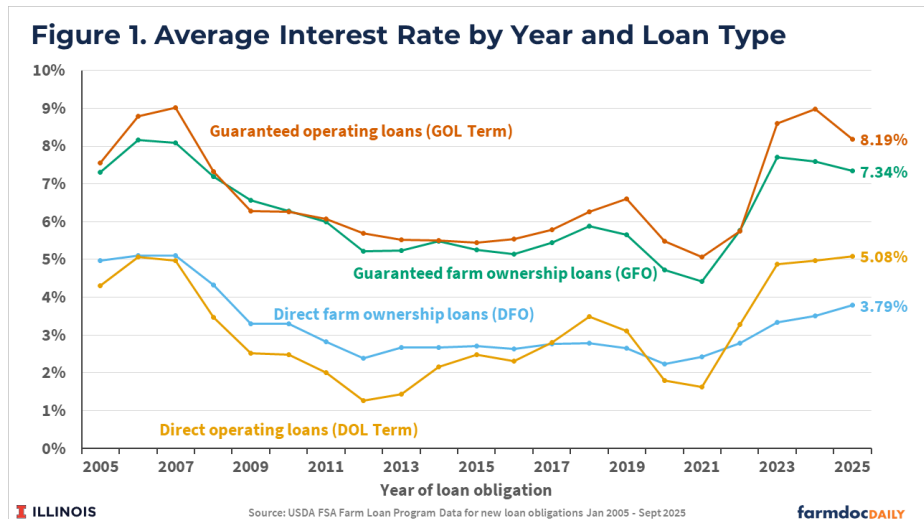
Base Acres	Scenario 1	Scenario 2
Current Covered Commodity Base Acres	270.85	270.85
Current Unassigned Base Acres	3.16	3.16
Additional Base Acres	29.97	30.00
Net Additional Base Acres	28.44	28.44
Unassigned Base Acres Converted to Covered Commodity Base Acres	1.53	1.56
Remaining Unassigned Base Acres	1.63	1.60
<b>2026 Base Acres</b>	<b>300.92</b>	<b>300.90</b>

Scenario 1: no trees, bushes, or vines are categorized as noncovered commodities.  
Scenario 2: only trees, bushes, and vines that are not intended to be harvested as specialty crops are classified as noncovered commodities.

## The Business of Farming—

- **There are tens of thousands of banks** serving hundreds of thousands of farmers. All their loan amounts, loan lengths, and interest rates could never be quantified, but when farm credit arrangements are provided by USDA and managed by FSA, farm lending is more clearly defined. That is the focus of an [IL Farmdoc examination of farm loan levels and rising interest rates](#). And many of those match commercial banks. Guaranteed loans (at banks guaranteed by USDA) and direct loans (from FSA) have trends in interest rate

movements between the 2 programs that are fairly similar. “The average guaranteed farm ownership loan interest rate had risen to 7.2% by 2024, just slightly under its 2006 peak of 8.2%. The average direct farm ownership loans interest rate had risen to 3.8% by the end of



2025, under its peak level of 5.0% in 2025 but still significantly above its 2.2% low in 2000. The increases in interest rates starting in 2021 and continuing through 2022 and 2023 were largely due to increases in the prime rate as set by the Federal Reserve. These patterns are not unique to FSA farm loans. The Kansas City Federal Reserve also observed similar jumps in farm loan interest rates starting in 2021. According to data from the Kansas City Federal Reserve National Survey of Lenders Dataset, between the first quarter of 2022 and the first quarter of 2023, the median interest rate for farm operating loans nearly doubled, reaching slightly below 8% by the second quarter of 2025. Guaranteed operating loans increased the most, more than tripling from \$141,000 on average in 2005 to \$458,000 on average by 2025. Guaranteed and direct farm ownership loan amounts more than doubled, from \$321,000 for guaranteed farm ownership loans on average and \$126,000 for direct farm ownership loans on average in 2005, to \$673,000 and \$306,000 on average respectively in 2025. Direct operating loans experience the smallest increase in average loan amounts, increasing from \$59,000 on average in 2005 to \$97,000 on average by 2025. One of the most significant driving factors behind the constant increase in average FSA loan amounts is likely the increasing costs of farming inputs, including production inputs, machinery, and farmland. According to USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) Farm Income and Wealth Statistics data, total production expenses increased 25% between 2016 and 2025, with interest expenses increasing 53% on average, labor expenses increasing 45% on average, and intermediate production expenses increasing 30% on average. Those factors caused loan amounts to increase as well as loan length.”



- **Offer #1 for IL farmers.** If your farming business could morph from a full corn-soybean rotation to include a more edible and higher value food products, there is [a new program that might be of interest](#). Beginning Feb. 6 the IL Dept. of Human Services is initiating the Farm to Food Bank Capacity-Building Grant Program designed to strengthen the state's local food system and expand access to fresh protein and produce. And the state has funding to help farmers get started. "We're looking for farmers, ag producers, food banks, food pantries and community partners all looking for help with infrastructure," said Sharon Dodd, an administrator of the program, about who can apply for the \$1,000–\$100,000 grants. The goal is to help farmers and food providers build the capacity they need to move more IL-grown, raised or processed agricultural products to "neighbors" facing food insecurity, especially in underserved areas and communities. The set of grants is part of the IL Farm to Food Bank (IL-F2FB) Program, supported by funding from the State of IL through the IL Department of Human Services (IDHS). Originally developed through state legislation in 2017 and 2018, the program evolved into a statewide pilot by 2020 and laid the groundwork for partnerships that helped Illinois move surplus food from farms to food banks. In its first 3 years, from 2020 to 2023, the program helped move 3 mil. pounds of food that otherwise might have gone to waste, according to Feeding Illinois. Hayworth area farmer Jim Toohill, who raises hogs and cattle, and sells frozen meat at his Clinton outlet, says, "That's awesome that there's that much money being floated to this kind of stuff," he said. "Whoever gets this grant is going to put it to some good use. That's what farmers do. It is "nice to finally see" a program like this becoming a priority." Dodd said the effort proved farmers were willing to participate, but many lacked basic infrastructure needed to harvest, store, process or transport food destined for donation. Those capacity gaps are what the new grants aim to address. Eligible projects focus on infrastructure that improves the movement of Illinois-grown food, including:

- ✓ refrigerated vehicles or trailers,
- ✓ cold storage,
- ✓ racking,
- ✓ temperature-monitoring systems,
- ✓ packaging equipment
- ✓ scheduling or traceability tools that reduce waste and improve flow.

Frequently asked questions and detailed guidelines can be found here: [feedingillinois.org/capacitygrant](https://feedingillinois.org/capacitygrant).

Feeding Illinois will host 3 virtual office-hour sessions on its social media channels from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. Feb. 11, 18 and 25, where participants can ask questions about the capacity-grant process, eligibility, timelines and allowable costs. Additional questions may be directed to [grants@feedingillinois.org](mailto:grants@feedingillinois.org).

- **Offer #2 for IL Farmers.** If you want to engage in production, processing and purveying food for human consumption, the IL Dept. of Agriculture also has an offer for you. IDOA plans to distribute \$3.6 mil. in fiscal year 2026 to support local food processing, aggregation, and distribution. Grants will be available for collaborative projects from \$1,000 to \$250,000 and for individual projects from \$1,000 to \$75,000. "Strong agriculture depends on strong infrastructure," said IDOA Director Jerry Costello II. "The Local Food Infrastructure Grant program gives IL farmers the processing, aggregation, and distribution capacity they need to ensure IL-grown food can reach consumers." Applications for grant funding will be available February 18, 2026, on the [IDoA website](#).
- ✓ State Senator Doris Turner, Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, said, "By fortifying the food system, we are supporting our local farmers and mitigating food insecurity. This funding will expand access to fresh, local foods, strengthen the local economy and grow the food supply chain."
- ✓ "When we say farm-to-home food, we forget about the critical infrastructure in between," said State Senator David Koehler, member of the Senate Agriculture Committee. "This investment ensures that our food makes it from farm to local food processor, with distribution safely and cleanly to your plates at home."
- ✓ "With food prices rising across IL, investing in local food infrastructure is no longer optional, it's essential," said State Representative Sonya Harper, Chair of the House Agriculture and Conservation Committee. "We created this program to strengthen our farmers, shorten the supply chain and ensure IL families can access affordable, locally grown food."

Eligible applicants include IL residents who store, process, package, aggregate or distribute value-added agricultural products or plan to do so. These entities must meet one of the following criteria:

- ✓ an IL farm with fewer than 50 employees
- ✓ an IL cooperative with fewer than 50 employees
- ✓ an IL slaughter and/or processing facility with fewer than 50 employees. Slaughter and/or processing facilities must be USDA or state licensed or be a custom exempt slaughter and/or processing facility
- ✓ an IL food business with fewer than 50 employees
- ✓ an IL food hub with fewer than 50 employees
- ✓ an IL nonprofit organization
- ✓ a unit of local government in IL
- ✓ To encourage further expansion of the local food industry, all grant funding must be used for purchasing, leasing to own, renting, building or installing infrastructure related to the processing, storage, aggregation, or distribution of value-added agricultural products.

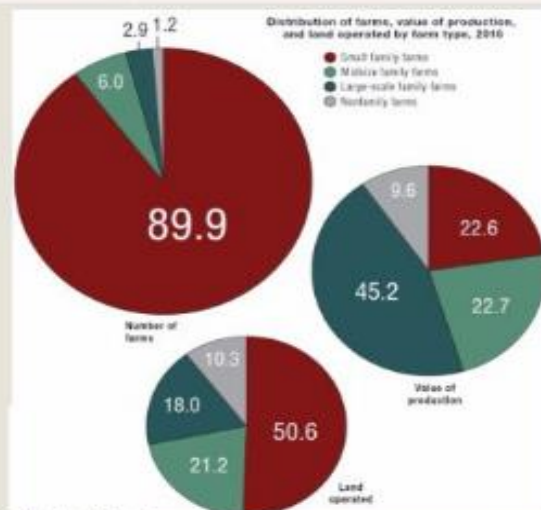
## ***Land Prices and Farmland Issues—***

- **The farmland market in 2025** was influenced by many factors, says [farmland specialist Randy Dickhut of AEI.org](#), but what about 2026? Dickhut says, “Despite low crop farm incomes, a continued margin squeeze, trade restrictions, and uncertain federal farm policy, the price of good cropland was stable across most regions. Following are thoughts on a few of the factors that will influence the farmland market in 2026.”
  - ✓ Liquidity: “Working capital for crop farmers continues to decline. Less cash in hand brings a bit more caution to a farmer’s buying decisions. Will there be additional ad hoc payments or not?”
  - ✓ Supply: “The expectation for 2026 is for the somewhat slower pace of sales to continue as landowners hold onto a safe asset. There is also the potential for a small increase in farms on the market due to financially caused stress sales initiated by a farmer or a lender, which is normal during low farm income periods. The extent to which there is an increase in stress sales will not be known until late winter or early spring after the financially challenged producer has exhausted other options to shore up their finances or satisfy their lender. At this juncture, the expected increase in sales due to financial stress is not likely to be enough to alter the equilibrium of supply and demand in the farmland market.
  - ✓ Interest Rates: “The outlook for how interest rates will influence farmland prices is clouded by three issues. On one side, many expect the Federal Reserve to lower its rates during 2026, but this is not for sure given the uncertainty of forthcoming economic signals. Secondly, bond markets may or may not follow the Fed if its rates go lower. With challenges facing U.S. government debt needs, AI growth financing, and business debt financing, a risk premium may get added to bond and loan rates which may keep ag loan rates steady. The third issue is that ag debt is increasing as farm incomes and working capital decrease. The result for many farmers is that they will have less borrowing capacity to finance a farm purchase.
  - ✓ Cap Rates: “The usually close relationship between farmland cap rates and the rate on 10-year Treasuries has been a consistent one since the mid-1980’s until the low to zero interest rates post 2008 financial crisis. Currently, Treasury rates have surged upward while the cap rate on farmland has continued to slide lower. Low cap rates have provided a lot of support to the higher land prices experienced during recent years. Can 2% returns on farmland continue in the light of higher interest rates on other investments? Farmer buyers are not typically as concerned about cap rates as they have multiple other reasons for purchasing a farm. Many individual investors accept the current low cash return on farmland as they opt to prioritize the desire to have a safe, long-term appreciating. Individual and institutional investors will be answering the cap rate question in the coming months and years.”

- **The National Young Farmers Coalition** expresses deep concern over the continued delay of the USDA's 2024 Tenure, Ownership, and Transition of Agricultural Land Survey, originally scheduled for release on October 31, 2025. The survey aims to provide important insights into the trends and patterns of ownership of agricultural land across the US "Without the TOTAL Survey, we're flying blind on one of the most urgent issues in agriculture, which is land access," said Vanessa Garcia Polanco, the government relations director with the National Young Farmers Coalition. "This delay prevents policymakers, advocates, and farmers from understanding the scale of farmland loss, speculation, and consolidation, and from acting to keep farmers on the land." The Coalition calls on the administration to release the critical information they're looking for, and they had planned to hold a congressional briefing upon the Survey's release to discuss how the data should inform proactive federal policy. [NASS does not have any scheduled release of the data.](#)
- **The next USDA date to address farmland issues will be Feb. 14.** That will be the release date for "Farms and Land in Farms." This annual full-text file presents data on the number of farms in operation, land in farms, and average size (acreage) of farms for individual states and the U.S.; includes economic sales class estimates for number of farms, land in farms, and average of farms for U.S. and selected states. Note: Issues released between 2005 and 2013 included Livestock Operations in the title. Beginning in 2014, livestock operations data will be available in the Census of Agriculture.
- **What category includes your farming operation,** rhetorically [asks John Osthus?](#)

Farm Size	% of Farms	% of Land	% of Production \$
Small	89.9%	50.6%	22.6%
Mid-Sized	6.0%	21.2%	22.7%
Large Scale	2.9%	18.0%	45.2%
Non-Family	1.2%	10.3%	9.6%

- Most of the Farms and Land are small family farms
- Large scale family farms use 18.0% of the land to produce 45.2% of the production value
- Small family fames use 50.6% of the land to produce 22.6% of the production value



Source: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/86198/eib-185.pdf>

- **"There is ongoing, structural change in agriculture,"** according to Bruce Sherrick, a professor of farmland economics at the Univ. of IL. He said questions of new entrants into the sector are his number one call. "I don't know if you call that mergers and acquisitions. But the new changing sources of capital that are looking, and new structures that are looking next door right now...the interest in the asset class has actually gotten much greater, not much less," Sherrick said. "As we've gone through the change for some structural readjustment, the thing that's been very constant is the performance of the asset in-portfolio has become much more attractive to the larger investors." Sherrick added. Because of interest and inflation rates, more people are interested in buying land. Sherrick said inflation has been higher and more tied to wages, so land becomes a good hedge. That is a similar point to what People's Company Director of Capital Markets Dr. Dave Muth pointed out in a trend of capital looking for safe harbor, resulting in a lot of growth for institutional funds. "A lot of mechanisms in that institutional space emerged, getting money into farmland. And a lot of those structures are in that kind of 10-year type of time horizon and how they were put together, certainly some that were structured a little bit differently," Muth said. The structure itself is changing, especially from a federal investment perspective, according to Harrison Pittman, director of the National Agricultural Law Center. He has concerns for the future in what he calls "a century of political clout" for in-built federal programs like the Farm Credit System and the USDA. Pittman said that there was enough momentum to compel taxpayers to keep investing. "A lot of this, I think, is changing in an environment where it's difficult. If you look at just a map of the U.S. House of Representatives, there's not very many members of the House who are strictly in an ag district anymore," said Pittman.

### ***Fertilizer, Fuel, and Other Inputs—***

- **Deputy USDA Secretary Vaden** said 2 companies have been working together to control the price of fertilizer in the US by limiting supplies. Agri-Pulse said Vaden's collusion accusation against Mosaic and Nutrien could suggest the administration may take future steps to inject more competition into the markets, if it becomes necessary. During a webinar hosted by the National Agricultural Law Center, Vaden (left) said, "This administration is going to do everything it can to ensure that farmers have the fertilizer they'll need and at a price they can pay. We're not going to permit these companies to do anything that might undermine that." He also said Nutrien and Mosaic were responsible for over 90% of phosphate fertilizer and potash production in North America during 2024. Farm Action, an ag industry accountability group, said only 7 companies control 70% of crop input sales, including Nutrien Ag Solutions, the retail business of Nutrien.





- **DTN retail fertilizer prices** continue to be mostly cheaper compared to last month, [according to prices for the third week of January 2026](#). For the second week in a row, seven fertilizers are slightly lower while just 1 is higher looking back a month. None were up or down a sizeable amount. The nutrients lower were DAP with an average price of \$843/ton, MAP \$863/ton, potash \$482/ton, 10-34-0 \$665/ton, anhydrous \$856/ton, UAN28 \$409/ton and UAN32 \$464/ton. The 1 fertilizer slightly higher was urea. The nitrogen fertilizer has an average price of \$574/ton. On a price per pound of nitrogen basis, the average urea price was \$0.62/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 1 year earlier: MAP by 7%; 10-34-0 8%; potash 9%; DAP 14%; anhydrous 16%, urea 17%; UAN28 25% and UAN32 by 27%.
- **What happened to urea prices climbing so fast?** [Josh Linville of StoneX](#) (below) says, "In December the Price dropped down to \$350 a ton. As of this Jan. 26, we're sitting at \$430. In less than a month and a half, we are up \$80. And when you start to compare us to last year, it's like you said, 15 to 20% higher than the same time frame. And I still have questions as to why. And I understand there are concerns when you look out there. Iran is basically one of the leading ones right now as far as one that we didn't have in a slide deck expecting to see problems. But you have the domestic uprising. You have outer parties starting to look at trying to participate in these uprisings. We wonder how much more production could be harmed, how much more supply could be harmed because of it. The gas supply has continued to be low. That's going to affect fertilizer production. And a lot of people sit there and say, "Well, Iran doesn't matter. I don't buy from them." It does matter. You need to pay attention to them. They're the third largest dairy exporter in the world as of 2024 data. So, whether you buy directly or not, they absolutely matter to the supply and demand for the globe. So that's one major thing. Obviously, the Russia Ukraine war adds a little bit of uncertainty out there. European production remains low with some questions as far as what that looks like going forward. There are problems in the world and the biggest thing that has helped urea prices go higher. It continues to get just enough strength, just enough demand out there to keep pushing it. A little bit of European buying here, a little bit of sales out of the Middle East. And one of the big things maybe we see India stepping back in here sooner than later for their next purchase tender. However, the thing that we continue to struggle with is it just feels better than it was last year, same time two years ago. When you look at global manufacturers, all these sales that they're making, they're still making it for February. These guys are not sold out 2, 3 months in advance like they normally are the last few years for this time." →



- **The highest priced fertilizer is phosphate.** [Josh Linville of StoneX](#) says, "Now,



obviously, I'm a corn guy. This is the biggest comparison that I typically make. But when we look at the price of phosphate and you look at the price of corn today, which took a pretty big hit again last week, we are starting 2026 with the highest ratios for this time of year. Now, let's be clear, we have had higher. In fact, we just had higher back in August, September of 2025, but to start the calendar year

where we are today, we have literally never started as high as we are. And farmers around the world, it doesn't matter what crop that you grow. You're looking at the phosphate price and you're looking at your grain price and you're saying this doesn't work out. This does not make sense. I'm paying far too much for fertilizer to raise a crop that I'm not making nearly enough for. And that's why we look at this comparison. Unfortunately, when you start looking around the world of phosphate, we still don't expect to see China as far as a massive exporter much of any of an exporter until at least August of 2026. It's really hard to see why the market should see prices fall at that time. Until China comes back, it's going to be very hard to lower those price ideas. So, unfortunately, I think this is just something that's going to be kind of quote unquote normal for the 2026 calendar year." →

- **Potash is Canada, and it is in the middle of a trade dispute.** [Josh Linville of StoneX](#)

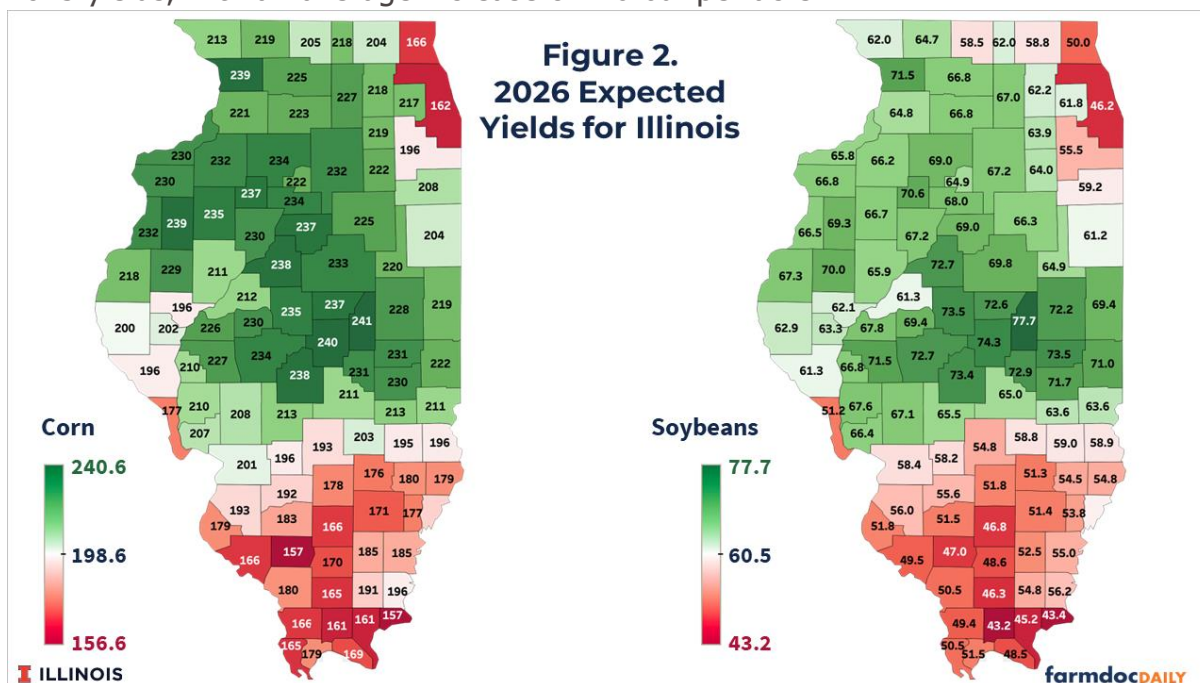
says, "We've seen a lot more threats in terms of Canada. Canada's been trying to do some more deals with China directly and Trump administration, the US is not looking at that lightly. He's now sitting there threatening 100% tariffs and let's go ahead and look at it. When we look at nitrogen, okay, there's going to be a little bit of flow back and forth, but it's not hugely detrimental.



Phosphate, there's no phosphate that comes from Canada and comes down south. Potash is a story we must pay attention to. And U S farmers are sitting there saying, "Dear US government, please stop helping. We can only handle so much." Potash is the only fertilizer when you look as far as a major fertilizer that's well priced. You look at it versus its history. You look at it versus grain values, it's decently priced and the manufacturers have done a great job of keeping that at a solid value. If he goes ahead and he puts these tariffs in place and it does include fertilizer. It does include potash. I'm afraid the US farmer is going to be the one that pays that tariff price. Politicians in DC are absolutely correct. They will get money from the Canadian companies. The problem is those Canadian companies will pay it using the higher price that US farmers are paying to get their hands on because 88% of the US imports which highly reliant on imports to meet our demand. 88% of that comes from Canada."

## Risk Management and Crop Insurance—

- **USDA is picking up a bigger share of the premium** for ECO and SCO crop insurance options for 2026. With seemingly lower costs, many farmers have planned to take advantage of the reduced premium. But [IL Farmdoc ag economists](#) have expressed concerns that other aspects of the 2026 ECO and SCO plans may put some farmers at a disadvantage. "In many counties, the Risk Management Agency (RMA) increased the expected 2026 yields significantly above 2025 levels. Still, we find many of the expected yields for IL counties are below what one should expect given the crop's recent historical experience, particularly for soybeans. In counties where the expected SCO and ECO yields are perceived to be too low, producers may find the supplemental programs less attractive." This means that yields should be expected to be above the expected yield slightly more than 50% of the time, and yields should be below the expected yield slightly less than 50% of the time. For many counties in IL, actual yields have exceeded expected yields in most years. RMA establishes expected yields using statistical methods to fit a line to the actual yields, with restrictions to control for potential anomalies in the data that may result in adjustments to an otherwise smoothly fitted line. RMA increased many of 2026 expected yields over 2025 levels. Across all counties in IL, the 2026 expected soybean yield averaged 0.8 bu. higher than the 2025 expected yield. Panel B shows 2026 expected yields for non-irrigated corn. In most counties, the 2026 expected yields average considerably higher than 2025 yields, with an average increase of 4.6 bu. per acre."



"While

RMA has been raising expected yields, the above results suggest they may still not accurately reflect the yield potential typically observed in IL counties. This fact is particularly true in central IL and for soybeans. This could reduce the attractiveness of SCO and ECO more than if expected yields more adequately reflected recent historical experience of actual yields. Still, farmers are still encouraged to consider SCO and ECO for 2026 because of their high premium subsidy levels."

- **National Farmers Union** submitted comments to the USDA to restore crop insurance buy-up coverage for acres prevented from being planted. NFU warned that recent changes weaken a critical risk management tool for farmers facing mounting economic pressure. [Farmers Union President Rob Larew](#) said farmers and ranchers are facing some of the most challenging economic conditions in decades. "The decision to eliminate the option to purchase additional coverage for prevented planting only deepens that strain," Larew said. "When high input costs, volatile markets, and extreme weather converge, farmers need every risk management tool available to protect their operations, and we strongly urge USDA to restore prevented planting buy-up coverage." Doing so would mean farmers can continue to manage risk and remain economically viable. When weather conditions prevent timely planting, buy-up coverage provides critical protection for producers of covered commodities in all 50 states, helping them manage financial losses and maintain stability. The Secretary of Agriculture ordered the insurance cancelled saying it was only used for the Prairie Pothole area of the Dakotas. But farm organizations have said it is used on millions of acres across the nation.

### ***Transportation Issues—***

- **NOAA's official forecast for water levels at St. Louis** shows the level declining in late January and dropping below the low water threshold on Feb. 1 and holding steady until mid-month. At the moment the Illinois River's pretty much shut from Havana, IL, to the north, which significantly slows down loading," said [Guy H. Allen, senior economist with the International Grains Program at KS St. Univ.](#) "The locks will ice up and significantly slows locking through the lock and dams there. If logistically your pipeline shut down because of transportation problems, interior prices of grain become depressed relative to your destination CIF (cost, insurance and freight) New Orleans price, so that's going to weigh on the Chicago price, the nearby price there as well. Shippers can move commodities by train, but it's a bit more expensive and it's not as efficient as the river, particularly with the big demand, so that's really what we're seeing. Lower internal basis, higher export fob basis and then a lower flat price also internal relative to international or world price." As of Jan. 28, river freight "is a disaster," said a trader who noted near-stoppage of loading commodities was delaying shipments of corn, soybeans and soft red winter wheat. Shippers were exploring workarounds to the river traffic jam. For corn, some capacity may shift to the strong export program to Asia out of the Pacific Northwest ports. Some river freight capacity has shifted rail markets, resulting in increased rail car costs. In the secondary rail freight market, BNSF shuttle trains that were bid \$400 over tariff for January increased to \$900-over-tariff bids on \$1,400 offers, per car as of Jan. 24. Union Pacific shuttle trains were bid \$100 per car over tariff on \$400 offers for last-half January and bid \$200 per car on \$500 offers for February. "The rail car market, like the barge market, trades so that when demand goes up, prices go up, both in barge and rail freight, though barges are probably more the dynamic, liquid market," Allen said.



- **River barges do not have a tall profile**, subjecting them to windy conditions, but the recent winter blast and subzero temperatures has limited grain barge operations, says the [USDA Grain Transportation staff](#). "Ice accumulation, as well as extreme cold, have continued to limit barge movements on the Mississippi River System. One barge operator, American Commercial Barge Line (ACBL), temporarily suspended fleeting operations at St. Louis, MO, and the Illinois River earlier this week. While operations have resumed in most areas, ACBL notes that customers should expect significant delays. Extreme cold has also contributed to low-water levels on the lower Mississippi River. Currently, river levels at St. Louis are -2.1 feet and expected to fall below the low-water threshold (-3.2 feet) in the coming days. As a result, the U.S. Coast Guard has restricted draft and tow sizes for much of the lower Mississippi River. Between Cairo, IL, and Beulah, MS, the Coast Guard restricts drafts for southbound tows to no greater than 10.5 feet and tows, to no more than 6 barges wide." →
- **An "old timer" took the opportunity** to share his experience with ice-bound grain barges while he was working with ADM/GROWMARK. [Jim Voight \(Grain Guy Fifty\)](#) said, "Glad it's not my problem anymore. Back in the day—many years ago now—this time of year always put a knot in my stomach. Having the responsibility for loading barges for ADM/Growmark in the dead of winter was no small thing. Cold, ice, low water... or all three at once. Every day brought a brand-new "opportunity" to figure out how to get export barges loaded and headed downriver. It didn't matter what it was— a barge frozen solid at the dock, Peoria Lake locked up with ice, Missouri River ice floes smacking our barges in STL, or locks jammed up and barely moving— there was always something. And then there was the part that really kept you up at night: trying to keep the operation running and keep



people safe. The cold and wind were brutal. Ice on the docks, ice on the barges, frozen winch lines, frozen ropes, equipment locking up... it was nonstop. And the worst fear of all—someone slipping into that water. That thought alone could make you lose sleep. We did everything we could: training, gear, tools, preventive maintenance, and the backbone to say "no" when the hazards were just too much. But the real reason

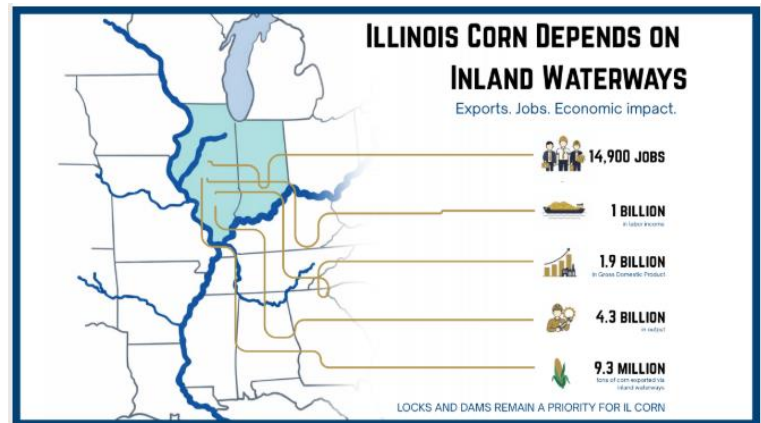
we made it through was the people doing the work. The heroes. They showed up, didn't complain, worked hard, worked smart, and watched out for each other. That's what made the whole thing work. So, my hat's off to the folks who did this work with me back then, and to the crews out there right now in this weather, keeping America's grain moving. Be safe out there. And thank you for what you do." (Thanks Jim, for sharing what it was like.)



- **The severe weather also impacted rail operations,** slowing the movement of grain cars around the country, say USDA grain transportation economists. "Following the storm, Class I railroads issued service advisories on their progress to restore operations. BNSF Railway (BNSF) lifted cold weather restrictions on its southern network on January 27 and expects to lift restrictions on its northern network by tomorrow (January 30). By midweek, traffic movements were normalizing on BNSF's Southern Transcon, but a full network recovery is not expected until early next week. On January 25, CPKC reported slowdowns on its south-central U.S. network caused by freezing rain and ice, as CPKC crews worked to clear fallen trees. Norfolk Southern Railway's Austell Intermodal Facility (in Atlanta, GA) was closed on Monday, January 26, but reopened on Tuesday. On January 27, CSX Transportation (CSX) said heavy snowfall and frigid temperatures had disrupted its Northeast operations, as bitter cold created ongoing challenges for crews in the Midwest. The railroad reported clearing over 500 downed trees in its Southwest network. By January 27, CSX operations in the Southeast were stabilizing, and all CSX intermodal terminals were open, with some operating at reduced capacity. →
- **Despite the severe weather impacting rail operations,** grain movement is ahead of last year. "U.S. Class I railroads originated 31,877 grain carloads during the week ending January 17. This was a 1% decrease from the previous week, 31% more than last year, and 26% more than the 3-year average," say USDA transportation staff. For the week ending January 24, barged grain movements totaled 567,800 tons. This was 27% more than the previous week and 13% less than the same week last year. For the week ending January 24, 409 grain barges moved down river—95 more than last week. There were 791 grain barges unloaded in the New Orleans region, 20% fewer than last week.
- **In the midst of defending its plan** to merge with the Norfolk and Southern, the Union Pacific will have to defend itself against allegations of impeding a short line railroad from operating. Colorado Pacific Railroad and Weskan Grain filed a federal court suit that alleges Union Pacific Railroad and regional railroad Kansas & Oklahoma have conspired to prevent westbound grain cars moving over the Colorado Pacific. The small rail lines allege they are being charged \$500 per car for transporting grain over UP tracks that prevents CO grain farmers from exporting grain. The dispute has also spilled over to the Surface Transportation Board, where the rail merger is pending. "Union Pacific denies the allegations of the lawsuit and will present the facts to the court and Surface Transportation Board who handles these issues," a UP representative said. "We have to have that western outlet for our grain," Steven Compton, a Scott City, KS, farmer, told railroad publication [\*Trains\*](#). "Transportation is vital. Feed and other costs have gone up, but grain prices are steady. Markets are being compressed. This is about more than money. It's about the survivability of the farm economy." The suit alleges violations of the Sherman Act that govern anti-competitive practices.

- **IL Corn continues to lead efforts** to strengthen the nation's inland waterways which play a vital role in moving IL corn to domestic and global markets. A recent USDA report highlights how reliable river transportation supports farmers and rural economies while easing pressure on roads and rail. For decades IL Corn has made investment in locks and dams a priority advocating in Springfield and Washington DC to modernize aging infrastructure and ensure farmers can efficiently move more than half of IL corn that is shipped out of state. Those big economics are:

- ✓ 14,900 jobs
- ✓ \$1 bil. in labor salaries
- ✓ \$1.9 bil. in gross domestic product
- ✓ \$4.3 bil. in economic output
- ✓ 9.3 mil. tons (366 mil. bu.) of corn exports



- **Nearly \$3.5 bil. in federal funding** has been earmarked for the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund—a \$702 mil. increase over fiscal year 2025—to [improve navigation by dredging ports and maintaining the nation's waterways](#). The historic amount of funds are included in a \$10 bil. package for the US Army Corps of Engineers. According to a bill summary by Senate Democrats, H.R. 6938 provides \$10.435 bil. in total funding for the Corps of Engineers, \$1.75 bil. above fiscal year 2025 enacted. "Importantly—unlike Republicans' yearlong continuing resolution for fiscal year 2025 that was signed into law—this bill delineates how funds for the Corps are to be spent, which projects are to be funded, and at what levels," the summary stated. "This ensures that vital projects to protect communities from flooding and other extreme weather will receive the funding they need, as determined by Congress in consultation with the Corps."

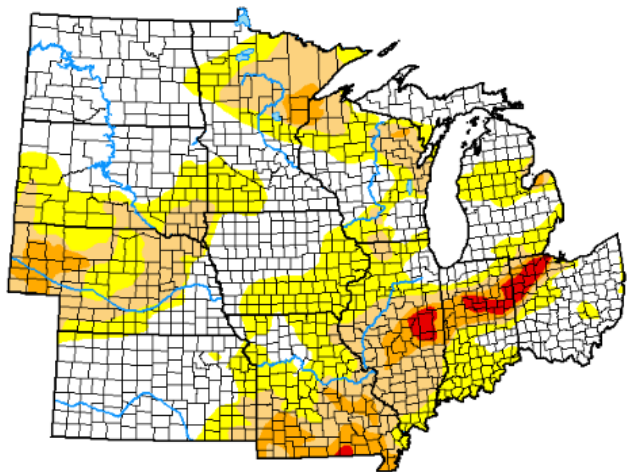
## Weather and Climate—

- **Enjoy the warm temperatures this week**, they won't last long. The Climate Prediction Center says, "Bitterly cold temperatures and dangerous wind chills target the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic, with a High Risk of much below-normal temperatures Feb 7-8, with record breaking temperatures possible for some regions. High winds are also possible over these areas Feb 7-10, creating dangerous subzero wind chills, with a Slight Risk covering the entire Eastern U.S. Feb 7-13. Increased probabilities for below-normal temperatures persist across the Eastern U.S. through the second week of February. Temperatures may moderate after mid-February as a pattern change is possible."



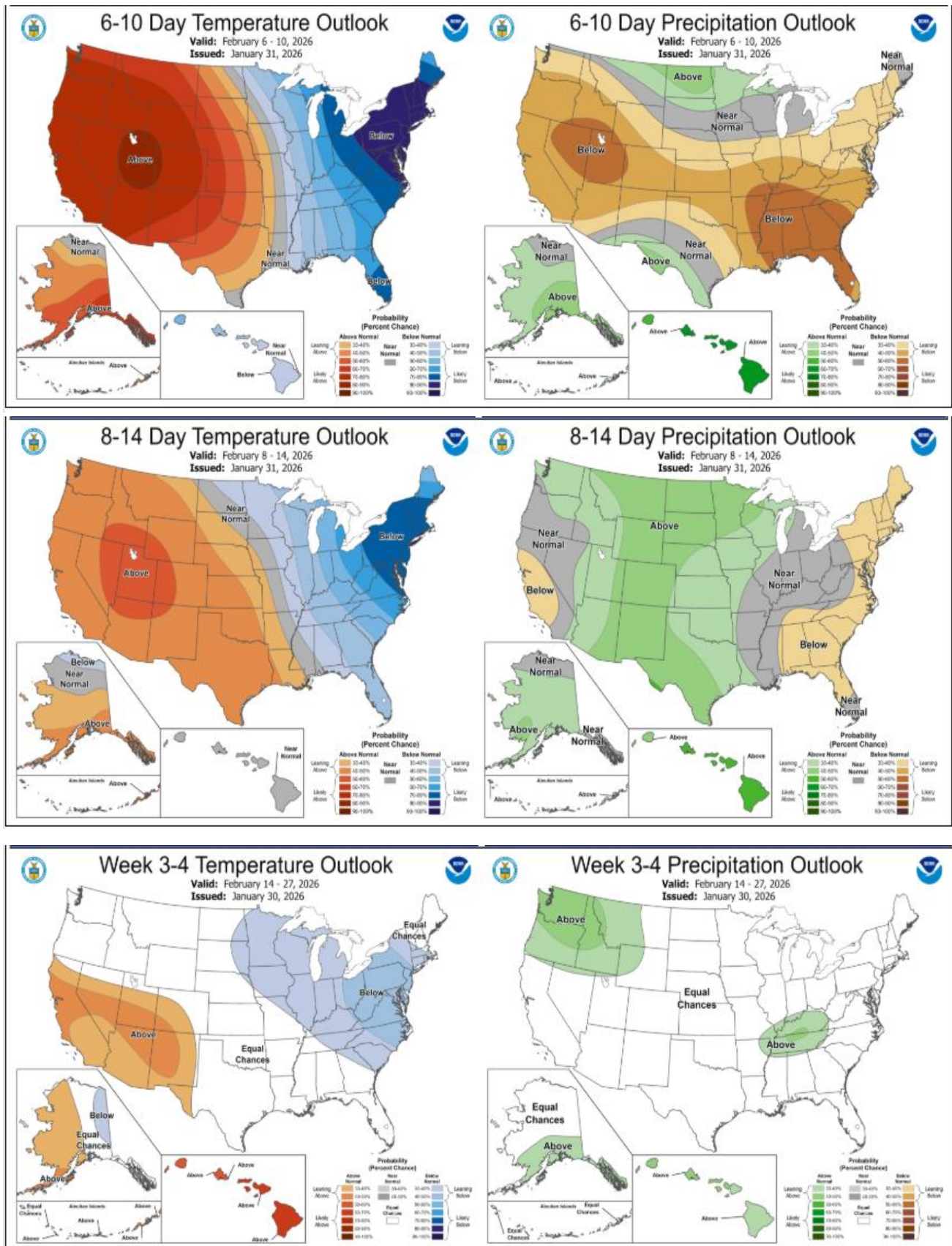
probabilities for below-normal temperatures persist across the Eastern U.S. through the second week of February. Temperatures may moderate after mid-February as a pattern change is possible."

- “Well, it’s cold.”** And that is the weather in a word, from IL State Meteorologist Trent Ford. But he also says, “Average temperatures this week ranged from the single digits in northern IL to the low 20°s in southern IL, between 12° and 20° below normal. Nighttime lows dipped below 0° across the entire state, including lows of -15° in Freeport and -13° in Danville. This past week was the coldest since 2018 in Champaign and Mt Vernon, and the coldest in Chicago since 2019. This past week was also very snowy, at least in southern IL. Total precipitation over the past 7 days ranged from less than .10 in. in northwest IL to nearly 2 in. in southern IL. A very strong winter storm moved through the mid-south on Saturday and Sunday, disrupting air and ground traffic virtually everywhere east of the Rockies. Snowfall totals from the storm ranged from 1-2 in. in far northern IL to over 15 in. in southern IL. Single day snowfall totals broke all-time records in 5 counties, including 13 in. in Hamilton County and 14 in. in Richland County. While the snow in southern IL was disruptive, it was nothing like the ice that areas farther south got, including nearly an inch of ice that pretty much shut down the city of Nashville. Looking ahead, temperatures moderate a bit through this weekend, and much of the state will see temperatures slightly above freezing by Monday. Don’t put the big coats away just yet, though, because another shot of cold air will arrive next weekend, dropping temperatures once again into single digits if not below 0°. Another winter storm will move through the southeast US next week, but impacts will stay south and most of our state will see less than .5 in. of total precipitation. Farther out, the outlooks for the second week of February show best chances of colder and drier weather sticking around.”
- Moisture is still in the “short” category for much of IL.** The current Drought Monitor reports, “The winter storm brought 1.5 to locally 3.0 in. of precipitation to most of KY and some areas near the Ohio/Mississippi Rivers’ Confluence, but amounts were much less impressive farther north. The southern tiers of IL, IN, and OH received near or slightly over an inch of precipitation while central and southern MO and the central tiers of IL, IN, and OH recorded 0.5 to 1.0 inch. The western Lower Peninsula of MI also recorded 0.5 to 1.0 in. for the week, most of which resulted from lake-effect snow downwind from Lake Michigan. Meanwhile, parts of the eastern Lower Peninsula along with a swath from northern MO through northwestern OH were on the periphery of the storm and recorded only a few tenths of an inch. Across the Upper Peninsula of MI, WI, MN, IA, and northwestern IL, little or no precipitation fell. Drought improvement was introduced in parts of KY where dryness was already waning when the storm hit, and also in a part of southern IL and adjacent MO where over 1.5 inches fell. Elsewhere, bitterly cold conditions kept the ground frozen and squelched both human and environmental moisture demands, so drought remained unchanged across MO and most areas north of the Ohio River this week.”





- The long-term outlook is for cold temperatures. Were you expecting otherwise?



- **A surreptitious climate group**, formed by the Dept. of Energy, has been pushing federal climate policy against the popular conception the climate has been changing. [After discovery of the unknown group](#), a federal court has ruled that the Energy Dept. violated the law by forming the anti-climate change group without required public disclosure. The 5-member panel, composed of climate change skeptics, was convened in secret and tasked with producing a report. The Environmental Defense Fund and the Union of Concerned Scientists filed the lawsuit over the violations of the law governing federal advisory committees. The DOE's Climate Working Group issued a report on July 29, coinciding with the EPA's proposal to repeal the endangerment finding, the legal basis for climate regulations. Environmental advocates criticized the report as biased against climate science. The repeal proposal remains under final review at the White House, delayed from its initial planned release.

### ***Agronomy—***

**Will you have the option of dicamba “over the top” this year?** The Environmental Protection Agency is slated to reapprove dicamba for genetically modified soybean and cotton crops, even while acknowledging continued concerns from some growers about spillover effects, according to two EPA staffers and a draft statement obtained by [The Washington Post](#). The EPA has approved dicamba twice before, and both times federal courts vacated those approvals, saying there was too much risk for the herbicide to drift and harm neighboring farms and gardens. In the unreleased statement seen Tuesday by The Post, the EPA characterizes the new use guidelines as “the most protective dicamba registration in agency history” and notes the inclusion of “several measures” to head off “ecological risks.” In the [proposed registration](#), released in July, the agency said it would address volatility concerns by requiring the inclusion of drift reduction agents, barring aerial applications and applications when the outdoor temperature is above 95 degrees



Fahrenheit, and insisting on downwind buffers and provisions to address runoff risk. The statement seen by The Post did not say which of those measures would be in the final version, but one employee said it would be very similar to the proposal. The statement also mentioned that the EPA’s review of dicamba found no risk to human health. The decision could cause

tension between the EPA and Make America Healthy Again activists who have advocated for more limits on herbicides and pesticides. Former American Soybean Assn. lobbyist Kyle Kunkler is now in charge of pesticide regulation within the EPA.



- **Seed corn with 3 poisons for corn rootworms.** That's the latest from Syngenta, and is called Durastak, it has a triple Bt-protein stack. Bruce Battles, the head of technical data for Syngenta Corn Traits, says, "Bt traits have been around for a while, right? And so, with the new triple stack that we're looking at with Durastak, we're hoping to offer next-level cornrow control with improved standability and top-end yield potential. The way Durastak hybrids do that with 3 BT traits is no different than individual traits. It's just compiling those together and piggybacking upon the success of that. So, you start with a trait that's inserted into a plant that carries an insecticidal protein. That protein is ingested by the insect. Once that's fed upon, the ingested Bt protein is converted and binds to specific receptors within the gut of the insect. After that, the enzymes transfer that into a toxin specific to that insect. What's unique about the 3 Bt proteins is that they all bind in slightly different spots." He said resistance to 1 trait means there are 2 more waiting to kill that pest. He talked about the biggest differences between Bt traits and RNAi traits in how they protect plants and yield potential, The biggest thing there, when we think about BT traits, they're very proven, right? They've been in the marketplace for a long time. They've been exposed to a lot of different populations of insects out there. And when you combine that with the fact that you have 3 unique BT traits combined together in a Durastak hybrid, we know what to expect from a performance standpoint. I think, with an RNAi type of product, it's an exciting new technology coming through, but it's really reliant on having effective Bt traits stacked with it in order for it to work. And so, as you're placing hybrids, it's really going to be important to understand the field history and know what you're going into and then match your traits with that. So, a hybrid like a Durastak traited hybrid is going to be an excellent option for those fields where we know there is a likelihood of Rootworm coming in. We've seen extended diapause in other fields that can kind of sneak up on you for Rootworm pressure. So, in those types of fields, that's going to require a lot of monitoring early in the season to understand what's going on in those fields, digging some roots, and looking at the actual feedings. Those are the big things. Know what you're going into and then monitor early to take appropriate action." (Syngenta)

### ***Conservation, Environment, Carbon—***

- **CF Industries Holdings**, a manufacturer of hydrogen and nitrogen products, and POET, the world's largest producer of biofuels, have launched a pilot project to develop a low-carbon fertilizer supply chain. The project, which includes other major agricultural cooperatives, is designed to demonstrate how the use of low-carbon nitrogen fertilizer can substantially reduce the carbon intensity of corn and enable the production of low-carbon ethanol for use in motor fuels and exports. Participants will track the carbon intensity certification of the low-carbon fertilizer produced by CF Industries and sold from its distribution network through retail distribution channels and finally to corn growers across IA, Minnesota, Missouri, and Nebraska for ethanol production. POET expects to use the corn grown with low-carbon ammonia to produce an estimated 5-to-6 mil. gal. of ethanol with lower carbon intensity. "Collaborating on this pilot program was an immediate yes," said Paul Barr of WinField Crop Nutrients.

- **Several major conservation programs** have been secured through the end of the decade, while uncertainty surrounds the Conservation Reserve Program. Because the CRP is only extended through September, thousands of acres across the country are at a

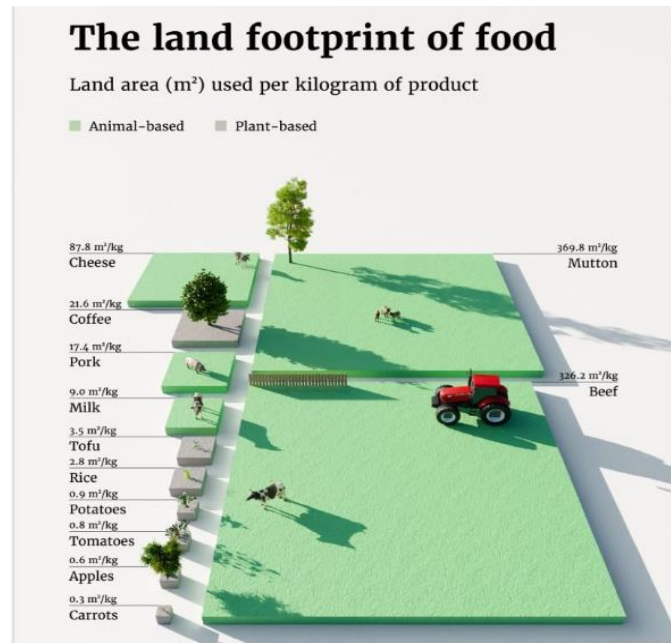


crossroads of either staying retired or returning to active production. Univ. of IL ag economist Natalie Loduca, (left) addressed some policy changes related to CRP, "EQIP, RCPP, CSP, which have been reauthorized until 2031. "CRP was extended until September 2026, so currently it's in an uncertain state. After September 2026, it's uncertain whether that will move forward, given that the Farm Bill is now kind of split up, I'm not sure if renegotiations will be able to occur regarding that." She said the potential long-term effects of

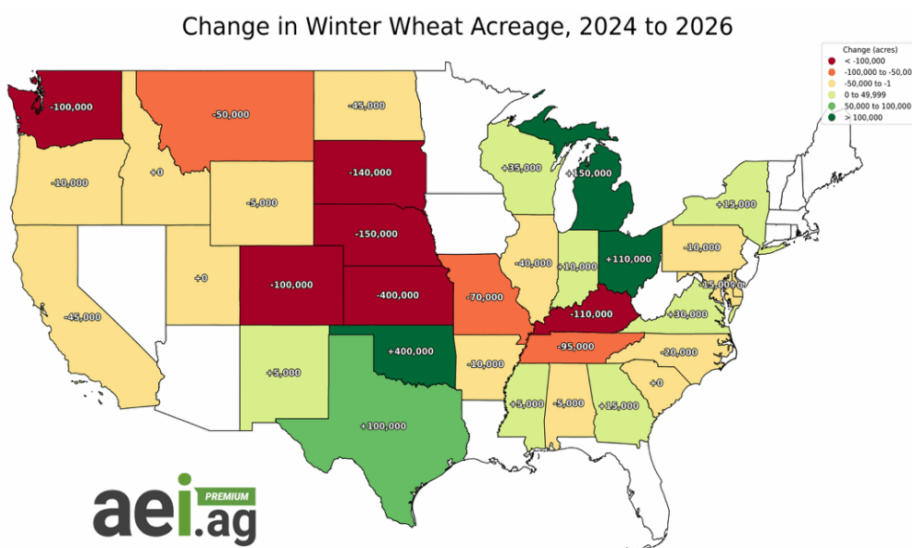
no CRP could be felt after September, "Farmers who are currently enrolled or have contracts, those contracts should be honored. You have a contract with the government, so my understanding is they need to honor those payments for the remainder of your contract, but if your contract expires, I don't know if you'll be able to renew as a farmer or enroll new acres. And so, the recent numbers that I have looked at were that, as of September 2025, about 800,000 acres were enrolled in CRP, and so those potentially will come out of those contracts on a rolling basis. They're generally 10-to-15-year contracts, so it could take a while for all of those to expire. And over the past 5 years, there's been an average of \$170 mil. paid out annually to CRP payments. So, in terms of the long run, if CRP is not extended or reauthorized again, we're going to see, obviously, those payments disappear, and, slowly, those acres are going to come out of those programs." Farmers would have decisions to make about those acres, "What the farmers do with those acres moving forward, we'll have to see. Many times, CRP acreage is on marginal land, land prone to flooding, so if farmers want to put those back into production, that will obviously have additional impacts potentially on prices moving forward. And so, we're going to have to wait and see, ultimately, if it's extended, and what the final outcomes will be." (WILL radio) [She also offers her insight in this short video.](#)

- **The House Natural Resources Committee** advanced the Enforcing Safety for Animals Act of 2025 with bipartisan support. The bill would remove federal Endangered Species Act protections for the Mexican wolf, restore common-sense wildlife management authority and provide much-needed relief to cattle producers and rural communities across the Southwest. The National Cattlemen's Beef Assn. and Public Lands Council strongly support the bill, which would reduce regulatory barriers that have prevented effective management to safeguard livestock and rural communities from this abundant apex predator. "The Mexican wolf population has grown well beyond recovery goals, yet producers are left without the tools needed to protect their livestock, their families, and their livelihoods," said NCBA Policy Division Chair Skye Krebs. "When predators can't be responsibly managed, it puts people at risk and undermines the stewardship efforts of those who live and work on the land every day."

- The value of farmland is being questioned**, in a food production definition. [Food sustainability specialist James Yin](#) calculates [77% of global farmland produces just 18% of our calories](#). Despite livestock and dairy taking up the vast majority of our land, plant-based foods, using just 23% of available space, provide 82% of global calories and 63% of our protein. The environmental "price tag" of our current diet is staggering. Food production accounts for 26% of global greenhouse gas emissions. 70% of global freshwater withdrawals go to agriculture. Livestock now outweighs wild mammals by 15 to 1. The most land-intensive culprits are beef and mutton. These require massive amounts of grazing land and feed, often driving deforestation and habitat loss."



- Is your farmland better for producing wheat**, versus a corn and soybean rotation? That apparently changed recently. When USDA's Wheat Report was released in January, the total acreage was 33 mil. acres, not much change from 2025 in total acres, but a substantial change in where it is being grown, says [ag economist David Widmar of AEI.ag](#). "The 2026 national winter wheat acreage is only 500,000 acres lower than in 2024 (-1.5%), but state-level trends reveal a pullback in the Northern Great Plains. In KS, winter wheat acreage has fallen by 400,000 acres, or by 5%. Acreage in NE fell by 150,000, or 15%. MO (-11%), IL (-5%), KY (-20%), and TN (-24%) have also posted large declines. However, those declines were nearly offset by gains elsewhere. In the Southern Plains, OK added



400,000 acres, and TX added another 100,000 acres. In the Eastern Cornbelt, MI and OH have added considerable acreage. The first 2026 acreage data show that, overall, winter wheat is expected to remain consistent. However, state-level shifts could still

increase pressure to add corn acreage in the Northern Great Plains.

## ***Trade, Tariffs, (and USMCA!) —***

- **In Davos, Switzerland,** Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney (right) addressed global leaders about what he believes to be a new world order, and a future that, at least for Canada, must reflect a broader range of partners, economically and militarily. In his speech, Carney said the world is "in the midst of a rupture, not a transition" and went on to say that "Canada was among the first to hear the wake-up call, that geography and historic alliances no longer guaranteed security or prosperity." One year ago, when President Trump returned to office, he often referred to Canada as the "51st State" and threatened to join Canada and the US through economic force. The US has hit its closest ally, neighbor, and trading partner with some of the steepest sectoral tariffs. Michael Ignatieff, an international politics professor at the Univ. of Toronto and resident lecturer at Oxford for many years, analysed Carney's Davos speech, and thinks Carney nailed down some modern, and inconvenient realities that resonated with many, but angered some of the larger powers, "I think he got it right. We are in a new world in which all the rules of the international order have been replaced, essentially by a division of the world into 3 zones of influence that include Canada and Latin America for the United States. That includes East Asia for China. And then the big unanswered question is what is Russia's sphere of influence? Does it include Europe?" In his Davos speech and at other times, Carney has stated that Canada's upcoming USMCA review is not going to go smoothly. Ignatieff thinks that Carney has finally decided to stop 'being the nice guy' when it comes to Canada's overall stance on trade and sovereignty, "I think Carney has decided he might as well tell the Americans, right now, that Canada cannot accept a deal that's rammed down their throats. And that if we must live in a high-tariff regime with the United States, so be it. There is going to be damage. Trump is not going to give us Free Trade under any circumstances. There will be damage. Wake up, this is tomorrow. Carney spoke much about the Great Powers and Middle Powers in his address. Great Powers are often described as China, Russia, and the United States, among a few others, with economic and military dominance. Middle powers include such countries as Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and India. While Carney can only speak for Canada, Ignatieff said that Carney was laying out a broad roadmap for Middle Powers. And, while Ignatieff says time is not on Carney's side with such a huge shift in direction, generally, Mark Carney is on the right track, "Carney is saying, look, we can't do it on our own. We must look around, carefully, and find some new partners and actually build an alternative to trade dominated by the United States. Carney's problem is that all of this takes time. It can be done, but this is a 10-year, 15-year project." The immediate question is if agriculture can rely on the USMCA being re-authorized, with the White House and Canada at odds. (NAFB News Service) →



- **The U.S. and Canada** have long enjoyed an unusually close economic relationship, with integrated supply chains, aligned industries and decades of largely friction-free trade. But that era is ending, according to [Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney](#). “This decades-long process of an ever-closer economic relationship between the Canadian and U.S. economies is now over,” Carney said in Ottawa recently. He cautioned that many of Canada’s former strengths — built on its tight ties with the U.S. — have now become vulnerabilities. In particular, President Donald Trump’s tariff policy is jeopardizing Canadian jobs that depend on exports to the U.S. “The jobs of workers in our industries most affected by U.S. tariffs — autos, steel, lumber — are under threat,” Carney said, adding that uncertainty is causing Canadian businesses to hold back investments. Simply put, the good old days are gone — and won’t return.
- **President Donald Trump is raising tariffs** on South Korean imports by 25%. The BBC said Trump announced the move after accusing Seoul of not living up to the trade deal it reached with the US in 2024. In a social media post, Trump said he’ll increase levies on South Korea from 15% across a range of products, including cars, lumber, and “all other reciprocal tariffs.” Trump said South Korean lawmakers have dragged their feet in approving the deal, while the US government acted swiftly to reduce US tariffs in line with the transaction agreed to between the countries. South Korea said it hadn’t received an official notice of the US decision to raise duty fees on some of its goods, and asked Washington for urgent talks to rectify the issue. South Korea exported about \$123 bil. worth of goods to the US last year, making it the second-largest export market after China. For the current marketing year, South Korea is expected to be a \$1.1 bil. market for feed grains and ethanol, including 375 mil. bu. of corn and nearly 100 mil. gals. of ethanol.
- **The US Trade Representative’s Office** says the US has signed a trade agreement with El Salvador. The agreement commits El Salvador to addressing and preventing barriers to US agricultural products, such as fumigation requirements, facility registration, product registration, and acceptance of currently agreed certificates issued by US regulatory authorities. “US DDGS’ exports are up in the first quarter of the 2025-2026 marketing year, and with this agreement, we hope we will continue to see a rise in trade with those products and others the Council represents,” said [USGBC President and CEO Ryan LeGrand](#). “The US Grains and Bioproducts Council is pleased to see the first agreement on reciprocal trade in the Western Hemisphere.”
- **Guatemala** signed an agreement on reciprocal trade that increases U.S. market competitiveness and includes significant wins for the U.S. ethanol industry. The agreement eliminates non-tariff trade barriers, such as restrictions on discriminatory sanitary and phytosanitary measures, and commits Guatemala to an E10 ethanol blend mandate for on-road vehicles with the intent to purchase at least 50 million gallons of U.S. ethanol annually. Guatemala is an established market for U.S. feed grains, and this agreement further strengthens the bilateral agricultural relationship between the 2 countries, says the US Grains and BioProducts Council.

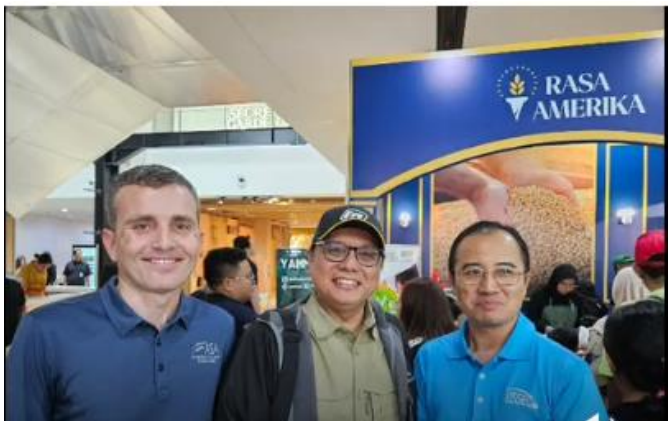


- **The USDA Under Secretary for Trade Lindberg** is in [Jakarta, Indonesia](#), to expand market access and boost US agricultural exports. The delegation includes 41 agribusinesses, trade organizations, and representatives from four state departments of agriculture. “While Indonesia was our 11<sup>th</sup> largest market in 2024, the opportunities here in the world’s fourth most populous nation cannot be overstated,” said Lindberg. Indonesia is an upper-middle-income country with a real GDP of \$4.1 tril., an annual growth rate of 5%, and a large, rapidly expanding middle class, the country offers strong demand for high-quality imported food and agricultural goods. Its young population is also driving a growing interest in innovative and convenient food products, reflecting new opportunities for U.S. exporters. This agreement eliminates tariffs on nearly all U.S. agricultural exports and reduces longstanding non-tariff barriers, unlocking more than \$1.6 bil. in US agricultural exports. →



- **US soybeans will be along for the ride to Indonesia.** CEO Jim Sutter of the US Soybean Export Council will be an important part of the delegation. He says, “During this mission, I’ll be joining [PT Malindo Feedmill, Tbk](#) and our partners to highlight a new poultry feed trial designed to generate practical, real-world data on how U.S. soybean meal performs in broiler diets, including consistency, digestibility, and feed efficiency. This work reflects our shared commitment to reliable, responsibly produced feed ingredients that help Indonesia meet its growing protein demand sustainably. I’m looking forward to several days of productive discussions in Jakarta and getting to know our Indonesian partners and customers better. Malindo has large feed businesses in Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam. A well-run company with professionals managing the business. Lindberg said, “Looking forward to highlighting how high-quality U.S. soy can be a win-win for the U.S. and Indonesia.”

- **Also getting a firsthand look** is IL Soybean Director Ryan Frieders, (below left) who says, “Sharing stories with others about food makes the world seem so much smaller. How I grow soybeans on my farm is important to consumers all over the planet.” The team also took part in a tempe-making demonstration, showcasing the craftsmanship and cultural significance behind this iconic food and how high-quality U.S. soybeans support Indonesia’s tempe heritage. These engagements reinforce the importance of continued collaboration to support long-term market development for USSOY in Indonesia.



- **Corn starch?** Yeah! It's a big deal, and that is the reason [a contingent of US corn processing experts](#) took their expertise to South Korea last week. The U.S. Grains & BioProducts Council (USGBC) and Korea Corn Processing Industry Association (KCPIA) hosted a conference in Seoul, South Korea for starch industry professionals to learn about the superior performance of U.S. corn in wet milling. More than 30 participants from Korea and Taiwan gathered for presentations and expert insight from USGBC members and consultants including IL Corn Marketing Board Member and USGBC Asia Advisory Team Lead Jon Rosenstiel (left); MO Corn Merchandising Council Vice Chairman and USGBC At-



Large Director Dylan Rosier; Univ. of IL Director of Integrated Bioprocessing Research Laboratory Dr. Vijay Singh (pictured speaking); and Global Process and Project Engineering Founder Ibrahim Yalgin. "These efforts by the Council have fueled the corn processing industry's purchase of more than 24 mil. bu. of U.S. corn in 2025, contributing to the \$2.3 bil. export success of corn and co-products."



- **Farmers for Free Trade announced** a national series of USMCA roundtables that will bring together farmers, trade experts, and elected officials to discuss the critical importance of strengthening and renewing the US-Mexico-Canada trade agreement. The first of 3 roundtables will be in San Antonio, TX, on February 24, La Crosse and Eau Claire, WI, and Southeastern IA in the Quad Cities region. Additional roundtable locations will be announced throughout the spring and summer. "USMCA is the foundation of American agricultural trade, supporting farmers in every corner of the country," said Brian Kuehl, executive director of Farmers for Free Trade. "Mexico and Canada are our top 2 agricultural export markets, accounting for over \$58 bil. in annual exports." He also said it's essential that farmers have an opportunity to share directly with their elected representatives how critical this agreement is to their operations and communities.

## ***USDA—***

- **USDA has appointed 5 farmers** to the [Farm Service Agency State Committee](#), with several quite familiar with the job. The 5 serving to make IL policy decisions for FSA are:
  - ✓ **George W. Obernagel, III, Chair** (Waterloo) - Obernagel owns and manages a large agricultural operation that includes acreage in IL, NE, and AR. The operation produces purebred Angus cattle and diverse row crops. He previously served as a member of the IL FSA state committee during the first Trump Administration.
  - ✓ **Alan G. Lyman**, (Cambridge) – Lyman is president and general manager of a multigenerational family farm producing corn, soybeans, and feeder cattle. He has held leadership roles in county, state, and national agricultural organizations, including the IL Beef Association and National Cattlemen’s Beef Association
  - ✓ **Cindy J. Myer**, (Lerna) – Myer manages a grain crop operation and works with tenant farmers across multiple counties. Myer previously served as a member of the IL FSA state committee from 2001 through 2008.
  - ✓ **Frederick W. Nessler**, (Springfield) – Nessler manages land in IL and TX used for hay, grazing, and row crops. He is the founder of Prairie Cross Christian Ministries and supports youth livestock education.
  - ✓ **Garry L. Niemeyer**, (Auburn) – Niemeyer is a third-generation farmer in Sangamon County for over 50 years. Niemeyer is past president of Sangamon County Farm Bureau where he served on the farm supply board. He is also a past President of the National Corn Growers Association, 2011-2012.

## ***Agri-Politics—***

- **President Trump pushed back against criticism** of his tariff policies during an IA stump speech last week. Campaigning to hold onto the House and Senate in the midterms, Trump told IA farmers his tariffs have won exports, including for corn ethanol, “Japan will now allow the US to supply up to 100% of automobile ethanol, automotive ethanol, and import large amounts of aviation biofuels from the US...that’s great for you...that’s part of the deal that we made.” Other countries, including Cambodia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia will eliminate duties on US ag, and Australia will allow in US beef for the first time in 20-years. Trump says others, like the UK, will also import US ethanol, “The United Kingdom will import nearly \$1 bil. of ethanol...that’s part of their deal.” The EU will sharply boost buys of US pork, dairy and soybean oil. Trump claims that despite initial farm losses to tariffs, the result is positive, “Your agricultural products had trade barriers that didn’t allow them to be sold in countries that are now saying, ‘Oh please, we’d love to accept your product.’” Trump added that China will buy \$40 bil. or more beans. Treasury Secretary Bessent’s earlier volumes would yield sales of a bit more than \$34 bil. over the next 3 years. (Berns News Bureau)

- **A top ethanol state lawmaker** is accusing oil refiners of 'moving the goal post' after a deal was worked out last week on year-round E15. Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-IA, blames refiners for the year-round E15 mess, "I don't think the goal post should be moved. When you've got a deal, you should stick to it. But now, that's no longer appropriate, because the deal fell through. We just have to work harder to make sure it's done. But that could be an uphill battle, "We had senators from WV, AR, OK, and MT raise issues that just stalled it." Grassley says Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-SD, met with various lawmakers to get year-round E15 in a spending bill, "Thune is fighting very hard to get this done, just like I am or Sen. Deb Fischer, R-NE is, but we're all frustrated, because we all thought, this was ready to go." But will that take too much compromise, even after concessions to small refiners? Grassley wouldn't say, but had this, "I never heard these complaints every year that the president gave a waiver from the small refineries. So, now that we're making a permanent law, what's any different than it's been for the last 6 years?" Adding to the mess, the American Soybean Assn. says that could weaken the Renewable Fuel Standard. (Berns Bureau, Washington)

### ***Farm Bill 2.0—***

- **Rep. Glenn Thompson, R-PA**, (below) the chair of the House Agriculture Committee, has tentatively set a Farm Bill markup for the week of February 23. [Politico said](#) that's according to 3 sources familiar with Thompson's plans. While the formal text of his Farm Bill has yet to be introduced, it will likely have the same priorities as the version that advanced out of committee in 2024 but never became law. "Committee staff is still waiting for the cost estimates from the Congressional Budget Office, which could delay the markup in February," [Politico](#) said. 2 people who were granted anonymity to discuss private details said that House Ag Republicans want to get a floor vote on the Farm Bill before the Easter recess. The 'Farm Bill 2.0,' as Thompson refers to it, will address multiple industry priorities like rural development and research plans, and could be a vehicle for year-round E15. "Ranking Member Angie Craig, D-MN, (right) referred to Thompson as the 'ultimate optimist' during a news conference Thursday," [Dorenkamp reported](#). "He's indicating a markup the last week of February I believe, but I wouldn't be surprised if the optimist timeline moves again either." Craig says the recent death of House Ag Committee member Doug LaMalfa, R-CA, will likely slow negotiations, and she is warning Republican members not to include 'poison pills' like preemption for pesticides that would force Democrats to vote against the farm bill." Additionally, [Politico reported](#) that "it's unclear how open Democrats will be to voting for Thompson's farm bill. While many of them haven't given up on negotiations, they have said they feel burned by Republicans' cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program."





- **House Ag Committee Minority Leader Angie Craig, D-MN**, introduced the “Farm and Family Relief Act,” saying the \$17 bil. plan would provide meaningful relief to family farmers. The bill would also help those getting crushed by inflation and higher costs caused by President Donald Trump’s tariffs and Republican cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. “Family farmers have been hit hard by tariffs and lost market opportunities,” Craig said when introducing the bill this month. “The Farm and Family Relief Act helps get America back on track by supporting farmers, foresters, and families together and putting an end to the president’s ill-conceived tariffs.” A new report from Joint Economic Committee Democrats said President Trump’s inflation cost the average family \$1,625 in the past year. Fruit and vegetable prices are up 5.3%, while hardworking Americans paid \$310 more for groceries in 2025 than the year before.

### ***Illinois Issues—***

- **Anyone in IL agriculture** should keep apprised of IL legislative information that may be disseminated by farm or trade organizations. Over 6,000 bills were introduced into the IL House and Senate last year. While thousands went nowhere, they could be called for committee action or floor votes again this year. And many lawmakers who were not successful in getting their bills passed, can make minor changes and re-introduce them in this 2026 session. The IL State Budget will be a major debate, because of a variety of issues. “Recent reporting and fiscal updates point to a growing structural gap, weaker corporate tax performance tied to federal tax changes, and rising uncertainty around federal funding and cost shifts. In the near term, the administration has already directed agencies to reserve roughly \$482 mil. in FY 2026 appropriations and limit hiring and other discretionary spending, with most of the holdbacks concentrated in health and human services,” reports one lobbyist. All farm groups, Farm Bureau, IL Corn, IL Soy, IL Pork, IL Beef, and dozens of others are tracking bills that not only benefit agriculture, but more so, bill that will hurt IL agriculture. Keep in contact with your state representatives and senators to let them know your concerns, because your call may be the only one received and they might have a tendency to vote averse to what you want. Below are important dates that lawmakers have on their calendar, and you may need to track an unfriendly bill.

#### **The session dates that matter most**

- Feb. 6, 2026: House/Senate - Introduction of Bills Deadline
- Feb. 18, 2026: Governor’s Budget Address
- Mar. 13, 2026: Senate - SB Substantive Committee Deadline
- Mar. 17, 2026: Illinois Primary Election
- Mar. 27, 2026: House - HB Substantive Committee Deadline
- Apr. 17, 2026: House/Senate - First Chamber - Third Reading Deadline
- May 8, 2026: House/Senate - Second Chamber - Substantive Committee Deadline
- May 22, 2026: House/Senate - Second Chamber - Third Reading Deadline
- May 31, 2026: Adjournment



## Biofuels News--

- **The White House says when an E15 bill arrives**, it will be signed. Though optimism is tempered by concerns that a Rural Energy Council will deliberate to hammer out a deal will further delay action or even undermine the Renewable Fuel Standard. But as soon as a bill gets to Trump's desk, "I will sign it without delay, okay?" Farmers, many now operating in the red for several years, have looked at permanent year-round nationwide E15 sales without summertime waivers for survival. Permanent approval could boost corn demand by more than 2 bil. bu., help soak up record harvests, and provide the desperately needed financial boost to keep farmers in business by raising corn prices. (Berns Bureau) →
- **But Congressional approval of year-round E15 stalled** because several lawmakers had concerns. They expressed concerns that the agreement between Republicans and Democrats, between the auto industry and the EPA, between biofuel makers and the petroleum industry just did not include "small" refiners who sometimes are overlooked when it comes to the EPA's Renewable Volumes and allocation of RINS (Renewable Identification Numbers). The lawmakers were concerned the "small refiners" would get runover because they could not defend themselves. That was hogwash to [Jan tenBensel](#), longtime chairman of the [NE Ethanol Board](#). He says, "Do these really look like "small refineries" deserving of a "hardship exemption" to you? HFS and Canadian-owned Cenovus alone had revenue greater than the value of the entire US corn crop!"

### Do these oil majors look like "small refineries" to you? Do they really need a bailout from RFS obligations?

*These are the oil refining companies that blew up year-round E15/SRE legislation in late January:*

	U.S. Refineries Owned/ Total Capacity	Headquarters	Ownership/ Top Stockholders	Fortune 500 Rank	Annual Revenue (Billion \$US)	CEO Pay (Million \$US)
 14th largest US refiner	4 302,000 bpd	Tel Aviv, Israel US: Brentwood, TN	Public NYSE:DK Vanguard, Blackrock, River Road, Rubric, Goldman Sachs	336	\$12.5	\$6.7
 9th largest US refiner	7 678,000 bpd	Dallas, TX	Public NYSE:DINO Blackrock, Vanguard, Insiders, TCTC Holdings	150	\$28.6	\$12.8
 11th largest US refiner	3 393,000 bpd (+1 in Canada)	Calgary, Canada	Public NYSE:CVE Insiders, Capital World Investors, Capital Research, Vanguard	391**	\$57.7	\$10.4
 11th largest US refiner	2 103,000 bpd (+3 in Canada)	Calgary, Canada	Public NYSE:SU Royal Bank of Canada, Vanguard, Elliott Investment	425**	\$54.9	\$36.8
 11th largest US refiner	2 206,500 bpd	Sugarland, TX	Public NYSE:CVI Carl Icahn, Blackrock, Vanguard	417*	\$10.0	\$4.7
 11th largest US refiner	4 219,000 bpd	Houston, TX	Public NYSE:PARR Blackrock, Vanguard, State Street	474	\$8.0	\$9.8

\*Ranking if for Icahn Enterprises, which owns 70%+ of CVR Energy; \*\*Fortune GLOBAL 500

- What is the Rural Energy Council?** Rural America is still trying to understand what this is and why there needs to be another council to discuss year-round E15, something that has already been agreed upon between the ethanol and oil industries. Pres. Jed Bower of the National Corn Growers Assn. says, "Well, I wish I had a little more, but I'll tell you what I know. And that is, we are going to continue to push with our coalition, which again includes oil, and help this committee understand and explain, potentially, we'll give them the benefit of the doubt that maybe they never took time to understand the bill that we introduced and how it was truly bipartisan, how it brought agriculture and oil together, and hopefully we'll get some headway there." Even if year-round E15 had gotten through the House, Bower said there may be another battle lurking in the Senate, "You know, we're hearing we had some issues potentially in the Senate and some of the members in their districts, and I respect the fact they're looking out for their constituents, had issues with it. But oil negotiated their side of it, and we negotiated our side of it. We felt it was all in good faith. And we feel this may be an overreach by some parts of that, trying to get more, but again, we're going to continue to push that." Bower said it's clear after so many years of pushing for it that year-round E15 is a win-win deal for everyone, "We need less government regulation to allow us into the market. We want consumers to have a choice. We're providing a cheaper fuel source. We're helping rural America. And this bill was going to save the government money. How many times have we had conversations about the national deficit? How many congressmen and senators have we heard talk about how that's an issue, and we're trying to help provide solutions? (Agriculture of America)"
- The Chair of the new Rural Domestic Energy Council** is vowing to make all efforts to secure a legislative deal on year-round E15 by late February. Rep. Randy Feenstra, R-IA, (right) told the House Rules Committee recently that he'll work with those on both sides of the year-round E15 issue to finally get the job done, "Today, we form the Rural Domestic Energy Council to work together so our members can come to a solution that will pass E15 by February 25." Later, President Trump endorsed the effort in Des Moines, IA, "I promise to support E15 all year-round." A boost that will be needed to help save a deal with oil refiners that fell apart the night before it would have passed as part of a House spending bill, the second disappointment in a year. But Feenstra told the Rules Committee that the stakes are just too great to fail again, "The situation has come to a head this year as the farm economy has entered its 3rd-consecutive year of economic losses. I have always been an advocate for new markets and for our farmers and for E15, which is our domestic energy solution." Addressing doubts that the new council will just 'kick the can down the road' again, Feenstra insisted lawmakers "cannot continue to move the goal posts while rural America struggles." He's running to be the IA Gov. and probably will not want his E15 project to fail. (Berns Bureau, Washington)



- **Top House officials are voicing strong support** for farmers in their time of need as efforts continue on year-round E15 and more farm aid. It's called the 'Rules Committee,' but it's really the Speaker's committee since it controls the flow of legislation to the full House. And it will be the last stop for a possible bid this month to salvage year-round E15 legislation and add farm aid. Heading the panel is Rep. Virginia Foxx, R-NC), who says, "All of us, I believe, feel very strongly about how tough it is for farmers out there these days. As somebody who used to farm and farm a lot, I understand how tough it is." And for good reason, "Farmers control almost nothing. They can't control the weather, they can't control the price, and they can't control much of anything at all. So, I am extraordinarily sympathetic to people who farm for a living. It is tough." Speaker Mike Johnson also expressed that same sympathy ahead of Congress providing farmers \$10 bil. in emergency aid last year, "If you have small family farms and ranches that go out of business so they can't make it one more year, and they can't get a loan to do it, they're gone. The kids move to the cities, and there is no more family farm. You might have noticed that very few people start family farms. These are third, 4th, and sometimes fifth-generation operations. You have to have them. You have to have diversification in the food supply. You have to have producers. We cannot rely on other countries for our food supply." But the questions now are, will an ad hoc study panel find a compromise with refiners on year-round E15, and will the money and votes be there for more farm bridge aid? Political support at the top is a good start. (Berns Bureau)
- **Back in late 2024,** year-round E15 was pulled off the table for Congressional approval at the 11th hour at the request of Elon Musk, and early this year, it happened again. Jed Bower, president of the National Corn Growers Assn., said his organization is extremely disappointed that year-round E15 was pulled at the last minute from the government funding package in the House of Representatives, "We got a call this fall from the White House saying, 'We know you guys continue to push for E 15. We need you to get together with the oil side and come to an agreement.' And so, obviously, we've sent a team to the White House. Growth (Energy) and the RFA were there, API was there and brought in a couple of big oil producers with them. We hashed this out, and I can tell you, unfortunately, corn didn't get everything it wanted, but in an agreement, that's kind of how it works sometimes. But I can promise all your listeners, oil didn't get everything they wanted, either." After all that, it looked like everything was in place for year-round E15 to cross the finish line, "After that, we presented it to all of our true champions on the Hill, saying, 'Hey, you know, we have this agreement,' and the champions understood that. I personally went to D.C. and had breakfast with the speaker, who said he wanted to get it done this year." While they are disappointed, Bower said the NCGA is not quitting. We are engaged. We are going to continue to push as they build out this committee, coalition team, however they want to word it, when we finally get the last of it. We're going to have some great biofuel champions on our side there. Obviously, oil is going to have some people there. We are still in communication with the American Petroleum Institute. We are still aligned together on the deal that we made, that brought agriculture and oil together." (Agriculture of America)

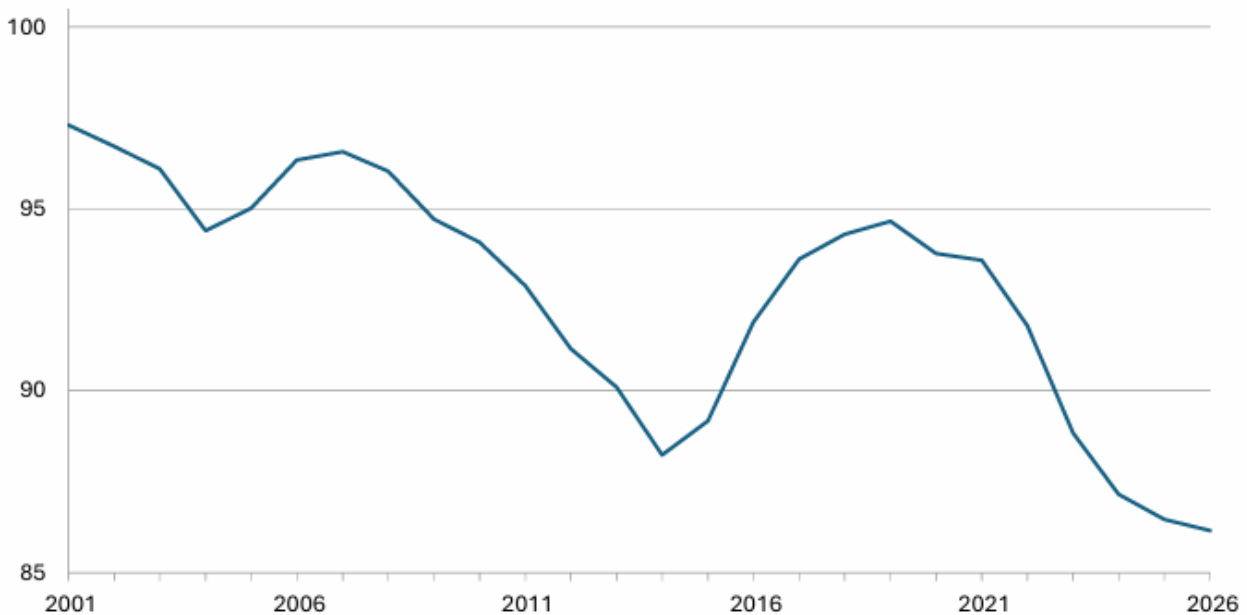
- **Both corn growers and ethanol producers** renewed calls this week for nationwide, year-round access to E15 gasoline, saying regulatory delays continue to hurt farm income. The Renewable Fuels Assn. said higher ethanol blends could boost corn demand and reduce fuel costs for consumers. IA Corn Growers Assn. officials cited USDA data showing large corn carryouts that continue to pressure prices. Oil industry groups remain divided, arguing that infrastructure and regulatory concerns must be addressed before broader adoption. Meanwhile, several Midwest governors are urging federal agencies to grant permanent waivers ahead of the summer driving season. Ethanol supporters say expanded E15 sales could provide immediate economic relief for rural communities while supporting lower-carbon fuel goals. Without action, farm groups warn that declining margins and limited market access will continue to strain corn-dependent regions.
- **Clean Fuels Alliance America** sent [a letter to the White House](#) highlighting the biodiesel, renewable diesel, and sustainable aviation fuel industry's contribution to US energy security and rural prosperity. The President is embarking on visits across the country to highlight economic conditions. The letter emphasizes that the industry's growth is at risk as farmers and fuel producers await regulatory rules, specifically the Renewable Fuel Standards for 2026 and 2027, and rules for the Section 45Z Clean Fuel Production Credit that were due under the prior administration. "Our industry has made substantial investments to meet America's demand for energy security and rural economic prosperity," CFA wrote. "Our progress is threatened by delays in policy decisions that should have been made in the previous administration, and we're hopeful you will quickly finalize these policies and secure your promise as the most pro-biofuel president in history."
- **The foundation is strong** for expanding biodiesel, renewable diesel, and sustainable aviation fuel in the US. However, to build on the growth of recent years, producers and stakeholders have to remain united. That's according to Clean Fuels Alliance America CEO Donnell Rehagen, who shared that message with attendees at the Clean Fuels Conference. Clean fuel producers persevered through a year that saw slower production amidst unsettled regulations, including questions about the 45Z tax credits and the possibility of Renewable Fuel Standard exemptions for small refineries. "Positive results from last year showed what happens when we set aside some differences and work together. When biodiesel and renewable diesel producers joined with oil and gas refiners investing in our space, and farmers, when we aligned on RVO goals, we saw something powerful emerge."
- **According to data from the Census Bureau**, 2025 US ethanol exports through November totaled 1.96 bil. gal., already surpassing the 1.94 bil. in 2024, which had smashed the previous record. With 1 month of data to go, exports were on pace to exceed 2 bil. gal. for the first time, which would represent 13% of US ethanol production, also a record. RFA CEO Geoff Cooper said, "Record exports not only highlight the growing global demand for affordable energy solutions, but also underscore the vital role trade plays in strengthening the American energy sector, driving innovation, and supporting economic growth." He also said 1 out of every 8 gal. of ethanol produced in the US is being exported, providing savings at the pump and cleaner air for drivers in dozens of countries across the globe.

## Animal Agriculture--

- **Nope. Not yet. Maybe next time.** That was the result of the [Jan 1 USDA Cattle Inventory](#), when everyone was watching for an increase in the breeding herd. Dr. Derrell Peel, a livestock market economist for OK St. Univ., was expecting the industry to finally be reaching the end of its liquidation phase. He was looking for a “very fractional increase in the beef cow herd coming into 2026.” Instead, beef cows and heifers were at 99% of last year, dropping from 27.89 mil. to 27.60 mil. from Jan. 2025 to Jan. 2026. If Peel’s “fractional increase” had occurred, “That would make 2025 the official cyclical low, and that’s because we reduced cow culling enough last year to stabilize the herd. We sort of stopped the liquidation, if you will, on the basis of less cow culling, you know, or a very low rate of cow culling, I should say. But we don’t have enough replacement heifers to grow in 2026.” We probably don’t have enough to grow much in 2027, so it’s going to depend on what we do going forward, I think, to do that.” There likely won’t be a large feeder cattle number on Friday, “Yeah, otherwise, you know, the feeder cattle supply will continue to get tighter, and part of that is a reflection of the smaller calf crop in 2025, but also the fact that we didn’t get those Mexican cattle in 2025 that would still be there, at least part of them, showing up in this report in the inventory categories.” (Radio Oklahoma Network) The Cattle on Feed Inventory was 13.85 mil. Jan. 1, compared to 14.32 mil. a year ago.

### All Cattle and Calves Inventory – United States: January 1

Million head



NASS reported, “The 2025 calf crop in the US was estimated at 32.9 mil. head, down 2% from the previous year’s calf crop. Calves born during the first half of 2025 were estimated at 24.2 mil. head, down 2% from the first half of 2024. Calves born during the second half of 2025 were estimated at 8.70 mil. head, 26% of the total 2025 calf crop.”



- **The 2026 Cattle Industry Convention** and National Cattlemen's Beef Assn. Trade Show is February 3-5 in Nashville, TN. State cattle organizations will work together on policy discussions for 2026, and one of them is the Texas Cattle Feeders Assns. Ben Weinheimer, the president and CEO, said shaping policy positions takes a lot of discussion, "We'll have quite a few discussions on policy-related issues. That is a big policy-level discussion for us, where all the state Assns. bring forward different ideas on things that need to be addressed in the National Cattlemen's Beef Assn. policy book.
  - ✓ So, we'll talk about a variety of things, lots of government-related program acronyms that many of us are accustomed to talking about, everything from the Conservation Reserve Program, on what can be done to incentivize grazing of those acres as those CRP acres come out of contract.
  - ✓ We'll talk some about the livestock risk protection program, potential additions and improvements to that. That's been a good risk management tool that's been available to a lot of folks throughout the country."
  - ✓ Accurate and timely market data will be another important topic. We'll visit a little bit about the livestock market reporting system and the market news division of the Ag Marketing Service of USDA, and look for some potential changes there that can, again, help us to ensure that we're getting good market data and market reporting across the board.
  - ✓ So, of course, a big part of the annual convention also focuses on the work of the Cattleman's Beef Board and the Beef Checkoff. A lot to celebrate when it comes to the Beef Checkoff. This is the 40th anniversary of the checkoff, if you can believe that it's been in place that long." There's a lot to celebrate when it comes to the Beef Checkoff, "The success is demonstrated through what we're seeing today. It's been around for 40 years, and we're currently experiencing a 40-year-high in beef demand, and all that collective work of research and promotion and improvement of the quality of the cattle that we produce, and sending that market signal of preference for more prime and choice beef, sending that signal all the way back to the front of the supply chain to give folks at the ranch level an opportunity to look at their genetic programs and figure out how they can contribute. And that continues to be done today, but it's clearly been demonstrated over the past 40 years that that feedback mechanism has been very successful." (KDHN radio)
- **Global dairy markets are sending mixed signals** as milk production remains steady while international demand shows signs of weakening. USDA data show US milk output holding near last year's levels, though regional variations persist. Meanwhile, slower import demand from Asia has weighed on global prices, particularly for skim milk powder. Dairy economists said feed costs have eased slightly, offering some relief to producers, but margins remain tight. Industry analysts noted that cheese demand has remained relatively strong domestically, helping offset weaker export markets.

- **The latest WASDE report** is already shaping the outlook for pork producers heading further into 2026. USDA boosted its forecast for US pork production by roughly 740 mil. pounds from earlier projections (chart, right). Lee Schulz, chief economist with Ever.Ag, says when you step back and look at the bigger picture, the real question becomes where does all that pork go, "I think about export markets, I think there are some expectations from USDA that we see a little bit of strength in exports because we have a little bit more production in 2026, and so we could even get back to rivaling that 2024 level of record volume and value going on the export market. And then I think there's some expectation that we will consume here more domestically, maybe get up to or over 50 pounds per person." When you factor in input costs like corn and soybean meal, which are both trading at relatively lower levels, Schulz says producers are still facing cost-of-production levels about 30 % higher

Year and Quarter		Beef	Pork
2024	Annual	26,984	27,789
2025	I	6,543	6,956
	II	6,453	6,706
	III	6,359	6,614
	IV	6,645	7,295
	Annual		
	Dec Proj.	25,950	27,462
2026	Jan Est.	26,000	27,572
	I*	6,460	6,975
	II*	6,360	6,865
	III*	6,345	6,900
	IV*	6,570	7,475
	Annual		
	Dec Proj.	25,725	27,475
	Jan Proj.	25,735	28,215

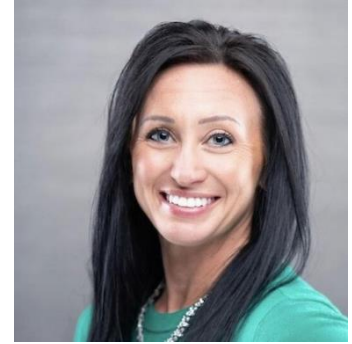
than they were in 2020, "So, what that means to me is, I think, you know, we've seen a lot of the inflationary costs be reflected in that cost of production. We've really kind of settled into this level, and so then as we look at margins for producers, that's going to really be driven by the hog price, as we've been in the mid to low 80s for cost of production. But yet, we've seen a lot of volatility in the hog price, even here for the roughly first 3 weeks of 2026, and that's really changed the margins for producers." Schulz says producers may see prices comparable to a year ago, but the real focus should be on what the third quarter of 2026 brings, "Those prices were almost 20 % higher than they were the prior year. But, kind of as we're looking at prices changing over the last 3 weeks, I think it's bringing into a picture that, you know, maybe we do see a little bit stronger prices as we get into the summer. And certainly, from a risk management standpoint, I think producers are staring at margins that are very good, right? And I think that the markets provided an opportunity to offset a lot of that risk." Schulz wants to remind pork producers that we have had the smallest December breeding herd since 2014, yet they delivered the largest September-November pig crop ever.

## ***Farm and Check-off Organizations —***

- **Corn creativity** is a basis for higher corn demand. [And IL Corn has new uses](#).
  - ✓ [Roof Rejuvenate](#) is made with corn oil from field corn and was recently added to the [USDA BioPreferred®](#) Program, earning certification for 95% biobased content. The program highlights products made mostly from renewable agricultural materials. Asphalt shingles naturally contain oils that keep them flexible. Over time, heat and sunlight cause those oils to dry out, which can lead to cracking, curling, and granule loss. Roof Rejuvenate works by reintroducing oil into aging shingles, helping restore flexibility and durability from the inside out. The corn oil formula also helps improve resistance to sun damage and makes conditions less favorable for mold, moss, and algae. The product is third-party lab tested, free of added PFAS, and carries a 5-year warranty.
  - ✓ [Aerterra](#)'s filters are designed to deliver the same (or better) performance as traditional fossil fuel-based materials, without the long-term environmental footprint. The process takes field corn through multiple value-added stages, including fermentation, fiberization, non-woven fabric production, and nanofiber technology, creating economic opportunities that can take place in rural communities across America. Aerterra co-founder Mike Malloy shared how the company produces renewable HVAC air filters using polylactic acid (PLA), a biopolymer derived from corn. By pairing improved indoor air quality with renewable materials and rural job creation, [Aerterra](#) demonstrates how corn can play a role in solving real-world challenges while strengthening rural economies.
- **2026 is the International Year of the Woman Farmer.** That is according to a [Congressional Resolution](#). "National Farmers Union is proud to celebrate the International Year of the Woman Farmer alongside many of our agricultural colleagues. Today's resolution reaffirms one of NFU's core values of gender equity and highlights the need for women to have equal access to land, capital, and resources," said NFU President Rob Larew. "NFU is grateful to Sens. Deb Fischer, R-NE, and Amy Klobuchar, D-MN, and Reps. Ashley Hinson, R-IA, and Chellie Pingree, D-ME, for sponsoring this resolution so that women farmers are able to get the recognition they deserve." "In the US and across the world, women farmers play vital roles in agriculture that are often overlooked," said OH Farmers Union President Bryn Bird (right). "Globally, women make up 41% of the agrifood workforce through all parts of the food chain and production lines and are often the head of their households at the same time. By celebrating IYWF 2026, we are taking steps towards a greater level of collective recognition for these unsung heroes who keep us all fed and clothed."



- **The National Assn. of Wheat Growers** elected Jamie Kress (below) as its new President during the 2026 Annual Conference in Washington, D.C. Jamie and her husband, Cory, own and operate an 8,500-acre dryland farm in eastern ID. They grow winter and spring wheat, plus a variety of rotational crops. Kress most recently served as president of the ID Grain Producers Assn., the first woman to hold the role. "It's an honor to serve as the president of the Wheat Growers at such a pivotal time for agriculture," Kress said. "I am inspired by the resilience and innovation of wheat growers across the country, and I am committed to leading with collaboration and purpose."



- **National Grange President** Chris Hamp (left) says there are many needs and challenges in rural America, and it's important that those rural voices are heard. Hamp is calling on Grange members to advocate on a wide variety of issues impacting everyone who lives in small-town America, whether those issues are agriculture, immigration, broadband, or essential programs, "Courage, civility, and service. If everybody made that a priority, we would be in a better place, and so I wanted to try to get across it. But yeah, the opportunities are maybe overwhelming to some, but they're opportunities to make a difference in a huge way." When it comes to healthcare, Hamp says, "In the last 2 decades, almost 200 rural hospitals have closed, and over 700 more are now at risk. You know, we're seeing this issue of you can't get help close to home." And Hamp said it's important that a stronger emphasis be put on mental health in rural America. She noted that suicide rates in rural counties are 60% higher than in urban areas, and 65% of all rural counties have no psychiatrist at all. (PNW Ag Network)



- **The IL Soybean Assn. is looking for a few good men....and women.** ISA is recruiting applicants for its Soy Envoy Program for the 2026 crop season. "An initiative of Field Advisor, the IL Soy Envoy Program runs from April through October and is designed to elevate trusted industry voices. The program provides a platform for sharing timely, unbiased, data-driven agronomic information and regional crop updates to help IL soybean farmers improve yields and profitability. Soy Envoys contribute monthly content to the Field Advisor Crop Report and the Field Notes blog at [FieldAdvisor.org](https://fieldadvisor.org). Participants may also appear on the Field Advisor podcast and serve as ambassadors for the IL Soybean Association at winter meetings, summer field days and other key events. In recognition of their time, expertise and commitment, Soy Envoys receive a \$2,000 stipend upon completion of the program. Selected participants will complete a training session in March and receive ongoing support from Field Advisor and IL Soybean Association staff throughout the program year. Industry professionals interested in sharing their expertise and supporting IL soybean farmers are encouraged to apply or reach out with questions at [fieldadvisor@ilsoy.org](mailto:fieldadvisor@ilsoy.org). [Applications for the 2026 program are now open](#), with a deadline of February 27.

- **One of the concluding speakers at the Soy Summit** last week was CEO Jim Sutter of the US Soybean Export Council. He says, "As I told Illinois soybean farmers and soy industry partners at the [IL Soybean Assn.](#) Summit in Champaign, IL, global trade yesterday – especially soy trade – isn't dead. But shifting trade patterns are creating opportunities for U.S. Soy and our customers around the world. Demand for soybeans and soy products is rising as a growing global population seeks more protein, energy and nutrition, and U.S. Soy is well positioned to meet that demand with consistency, quality and verified sustainability. U.S. Soy wins where global soy customers value reliable supply, strong protein and energy levels, and credible sustainability assurances like the U.S. Soy Sustainability Assurance Protocol and the Sustainable U.S. Soy label. As the international marketing arm for U.S. Soy, USSEC is working now in more than 90 countries, reinforcing the value U.S. Soy brings to the table and building the trust that creates new opportunities, cements long-lasting relationships and secures wins for U.S. Soy. But we couldn't do it without partners like the IL Soybean Assn.! Your checkoff investments are being put to work to help build long-term preference for U.S. Soy through market development, our Soy Excellence Centers, aquaculture and livestock nutrition work and targeted programs in key growth markets like the Americas, Nigeria, South Asia, Taiwan and Southwest Asia. Additionally, many IL farmers - like [Douglas Winter](#), [W. Stan Born](#), [Roberta Simpson-Dolbeare](#) and [Scott Gaffner](#) - are leaders within USSEC and across the U.S. Soy value chain, providing strategic guidance and on-the-ground perspective that keep us focused on delivering value to both farmers and buyers. To our Illinois partners and farmer leaders: thank you for your financial commitment, your vision and your personal engagement in making U.S. Soy the preferred choice around the world. The future of global soy trade is bright. Together, we will win it!"

**Global import demand for soybeans and soy products will shift from**

**247 MMT in 2024 to  
319 MMT by 2034.**

**- Dr. Jason Grant, Center for Agricultural Trade, Virginia Tech**



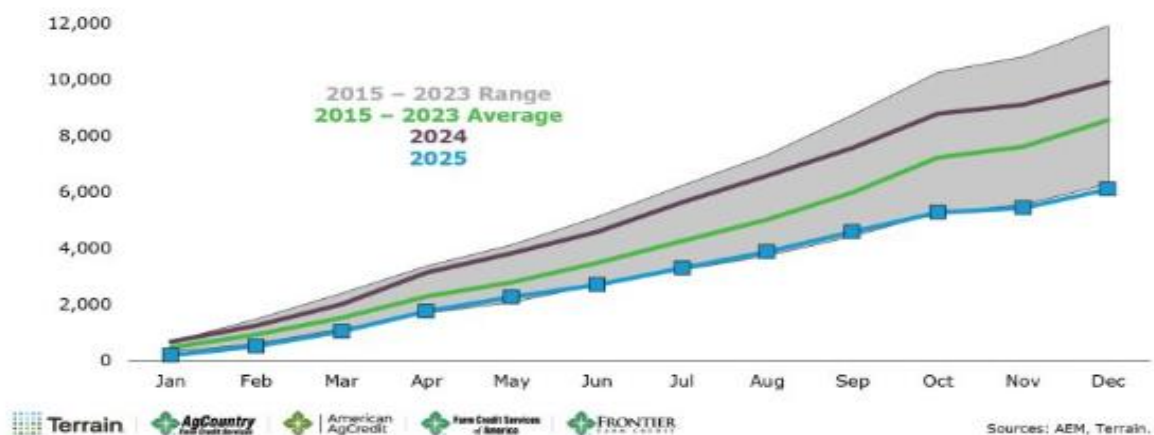


## Agribusiness—

- **Final 2025 sales of large tractors and combines** signal a sluggish grains economy, says Matt Clark of Terrain Ag. “I’ve often highlighted cumulative sales of four-wheel-drive tractors and combines—reported by the Association of Equipment Manufacturers—as a useful barometer for the broader grains’ economy. The pattern held again in 2025. In 2016, we saw the lowest inflation-adjusted net farm income (excl. gov payments) of the last decade, coinciding with the lowest cumulative sales of these machines. In contrast, 2022 and 2023 marked recent highs in both net farm income and equipment sales. Net farm income (excl. gov payments) in 2025 will be buoyed by strong livestock income, but inflation-adjusted receipts from crops are likely to hit their lowest value since 2007. Final 2025 cumulative sales of large equipment: Four-wheel-drive tractors & combines were 38% below 2024, 30% below the 10-year average; with October, November, and December all setting 10-year lows. 100+ HP two-wheel-drive tractors were 23% below 2024, 18% below the 10-year average, and only 644 units above the recent low set in 2017.” Clark says, “The bottom Line is that farmers scaled back big-ticket equipment purchases throughout 2025 to control costs amid tighter margins. With crop margins compressing further early in 2026, I expect that caution to continue.”

### 4wd Tractor & Combine Sales Hit Recent Lows

Cumulative 4wd Tractor and Combine Sales, Units



- **Agricultural equipment manufacturers** are taking a cautious outlook as lower crop prices and tight farm margins dampen new machinery demand. John Deere executives said recent earnings reflect softer equipment sales, particularly for large tractors and combines, citing reduced farmer purchasing power. USDA forecasts show net farm income declining from recent highs, largely due to weaker commodity prices. Dealers across the Midwest are carrying higher inventories as farmers delay upgrades. Analysts said elevated interest rates have also discouraged capital spending. Manufacturers are increasingly focusing on precision agriculture and aftermarket services as alternative revenue streams. Industry observers say equipment demand could rebound if commodity prices recover, but near-term uncertainty is prompting conservative outlooks across the sector.

- **Agriculture equipment dealers** are having a tough time, depending on their brand. [The Upstream Ag business outlook reports](#),
  - ✓ “Kubota dealers posted the least negative results, with a weighted average of –1.8%. Most Kubota dealers (71.4%) reported flat early orders, and while fewer dealers saw declines than last year, none reported increases for 2026.
  - ✓ AGCO dealers improved meaningfully year over year, with the weighted average improving to –4.0% from –8.0% in 2025. A small share (5.6%) reported increases, but roughly two-thirds still saw declines, mostly in the 1–5% range.
  - ✓ Case IH and John Deere dealers reported more pressure. While over 13% of Case IH dealers saw increases, more than 72% reported lower early orders, with nearly one-third down 10% or more. John Deere showed the greatest downside skew, with 50% of dealers reporting early orders down more than 10%, despite 16.6% reporting modest increases and 25% reporting flat orders.
  - ✓ New Holland dealers were the weakest overall, with no reported increases, nearly 30% flat, and more than 70% reporting declines, including over one-third down more than 10%.

Dealer Early Orders by Equipment Brand – 2026									
Brand	Up More than 10%	Up 6-10%	Up 1-5%	Same as Last Year	Down 1-5%	Down 6-10%	Down More than 10%	2026 Wtd. Avg.	2025 Wtd. Avg.
AGCO	0.0%	5.6%	0.0%	27.8%	27.8%	22.2%	16.7%	-4.0%	-8.0%
Case IH	0.0%	4.5%	9.1%	13.6%	27.3%	13.6%	31.8%	-4.8%	-6.5%
John Deere	0.0%	8.3%	8.3%	25.0%	0.0%	8.3%	50.0%	-5.3%	-5.3%
Kubota	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	71.4%	14.3%	14.3%	0.0%	-1.6%	-1.6%
New Holland	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	28.6%	21.4%	14.3%	35.7%	-5.7%	-7.8%
Independent	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	71.4%	14.3%	0.0%	14.3%	-2.0%	-2.5%

Source: Ag Equipment Intelligence Outlook & Trends survey

- **Good news for corn farmers in central IN** as [POET announces capacity increase](#) for its bioethanol plant. [POET](#) plans to double capacity at its Shelbyville, Indiana, US, bioethanol production facility. The expansion will double POET – Shelbyville’s bioethanol production from 98 mil. gal. to 193 mil. gal. The upgraded facility also will double its dried distiller’s grains and corn oil output, add 20 new full-time team members, and grow local grain demand for area farmers with an additional 32 mil. bu. of corn demand. Construction will begin in March 2026 and is expected to be completed in fourth quarter of 2027. “This expansion reflects POET’s confidence in the future of biofuels and our commitment to American agriculture and domestic energy production,” said Jeff Lutt, president and COO.

### ***The Labor Dilemma—***

- **Specialty crop growers** are voicing renewed concerns about labor availability as spring planting and harvest seasons approach. According to the American Farm Bureau Federation, labor shortages remain one of the top challenges for fruit and vegetable producers, particularly in labor-intensive crops. USDA surveys show farm labor costs continuing to rise, squeezing already thin margins. Reuters reported that immigration policy uncertainty and rising wage requirements have added complexity for employers relying on guest worker programs. Growers say delays in visa processing could disrupt planting schedules and reduce yields. Farm organizations are urging Congress to advance agricultural labor reforms, warning that prolonged instability could shift production overseas. Despite the challenges, producers said consumer demand for fresh produce remains strong, keeping pressure on growers to find workable labor solutions.

### ***Farm Family and Rural Life Issues—***

- ***Habla Espanol?*** Over 70 FFA student members serving as state officers in their respective states started the new year by exploring the history, culture, and agricultural practices of Spain through the National FFA's International Leadership Seminar for State Officers. The Seminar is an annual program designed to develop awareness of global agriculture and enhance the cultural competency of student members. The traveling state officers help lead more than 1 mil. members in over 9,200 local FFA chapters in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands. "During the trip, students had the opportunity to both demonstrate their knowledge and learn about diverse agriculture practices across the globe," said Joe Martin, program specialist with the National FFA Organization. "These experiences overseas help state officers share the unique agriculture practices of Spain with members of their home state Assns."

### ***Food and Nutrition Issues—***

- **Newly released dietary guidelines** are reshaping the food pyramid. American Farm Bureau President Zippy Duvall says a balanced diet shouldn't be about elevating one food group over another. "Nutrition starts long before food reaches your plate. It starts on the farm. There's no single food that covers all nutritional needs for every person. Balance matters. Farmers grow a wide range of foods that work together to nourish America's families. Milk, meat, grains, fruit and vegetables are not competitors, they're complements. That balance was reflected in a recent win to allow whole milk back in schools. Farmers grow the grains, fruits, vegetables and proteins families rely on every day. But farmers are facing one of the toughest economic stretches in years. If policymakers want Americans to have access to well-balanced diets, they need to make sure farmers can stay in business. Supporting farmers means protecting nutrition, food security, and America's future." (American Farm Bureau)

- **Have you noticed higher prices for dairy-based food?** Mike North, the president of the producer division with Ever.Ag, spoke to the WI Corn/Soy Expo and said the spike in dairy prices was driven by weather, "That opportunity came out of a big winter storm in the South. Around here, we all have snow shovels, snowplows, snow blowers. All our neighbors, in the county, the towns, all the municipalities, the state, we can manage a snowstorm. In the south, they can't. They don't have the equipment. They're not ready for it. They can't do what we (in northern states) can do in the wintertime. And so, when a big storm rolls in, and they're stuck, and milk gets dumped. Everybody got a little bit excited about the available milk supply, which then led to how much fresh cheese will we have in the pipeline? Eventually the snow and ice melts, and the trucks move." (WRDN radio)
- **Super Bowl parties** often feature takeout, delivery, and foods that are served over several hours. To help prevent foodborne illness, the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service is reminding fans to keep food safety in play on game day. "When food is served throughout the Super Bowl, it can be easy to lose track of how long it's been sitting out," said USDA Undersecretary for Food Safety Dr. Mindy Brashears. Many Super Bowl favorites shouldn't be left out for more than 2 hours, which is what the USDA calls the [Danger Zone](#). FSIS offers a number of safety tips on handling takeout and delivery safely. They encourage serving food in smaller batches. Bring one batch out in the first half and another in the second half to ensure that food doesn't stay out for more than 2 hours.
- **Steak cannot be grilled in a petri dish.** The Texas & Southwest Cattle Raisers Assn. President Carl Ray Polk, Jr., commented after a federal judge denied the State of Texas's motion to dismiss a lawsuit challenging the state's ban on cell-cultured protein. "We remain committed to preserving the reputation and integrity of Texas beef, a product our membership has spent generations perfecting," said Polk, Jr. "Our Assn. will not stand idly by while animal cells grown in a lab are fed to Texas consumers with no long-term health studies proving their safety." He also said the same industries, individuals, and organizations that promote and finance this unsafe product are the first to oppose or mount legal challenges against laws that require them to disclose to consumers that their product is cell-cultured.
- **Consumer demand for food and beverages** with high protein levels continues to surge as a growing percentage of Americans focus on increasing their dietary protein. The sharp rise in demand is shifting buying habits and could transform the retail grocery space. A new report from CoBank said the strong consumer demand for protein bodes well for the US dairy industry, given the high protein levels and nutritional qualities in traditional dairy products like milk, cheese, yogurt, and cottage cheese. "Dairy products have a unique advantage because they contain all 9 essential amino acids required in a human diet, making it a complete protein source," said Cory Geiger, lead economist for CoBank. "We expect more food and beverage manufacturers will take a cue from formulators that have already incorporated dairy-based ingredients into protein-centric product areas outside the retail dairy case." More studies show that almost all consumers now associate protein with expanded health benefits.

- **February 1 brought in new working requirements** for [recipients of USDA's SNAP food aid benefits](#). Nearly 42 mil. Americans, including low-income families and vulnerable households, rely on the federal program to help pay for groceries or other household essentials. "Millions of people will unnecessarily be kicked off the rolls," Joel Berg, CEO of the nonprofit Hunger Free America, [told ABC News](#). "They will lose the food they need, and sometimes family members need. ... More Americans will go hungry. Soup kitchens and food pantries and the food banks that supply them will not have the resources to meet this need." According to [August 2025 estimates](#) from the Congressional Budget Office, about 1.1 mil. people will lose SNAP benefits between 2025 and 2034. Exemptions were also removed for homeless individuals, veterans and young adults who were in foster care when they turned age 18 under the OBB mega bill. It could be very difficult for these populations to not only get jobs but provide documentation to prove to the government they are meeting work requirements. [Some food banks see up to 1,800% surge in demand since SNAP benefits were halted](#)

### ***Multi-Media Resources—***

- **Will spring planting be a challenge or uneventful?** Could dry portions of the Cornbelt remain dry into the spring planting season? That is a possibility says Matt Reardon, part of Nutrien's Meteorology team with Eric Snodgrass. Reardon says they are looking for parallels in past years to compare with current weather trends to provide guidance to farmers about their spring planting challenges. He spoke at the IL Soybean Summit and shared his perspectives [in this short video](#).
- **Farm Input Costs: Rabobank Research Results.** The cost of production agriculture is not going to be friendly in the foreseeable future, says Samuel Taylor, an agricultural economist with Rabobank. He spoke to farmers at the IL Soybean Summit, and indicated their costs for fertilizers, crop protectants, and other inputs will remain a challenge. His thoughts are [in this short video](#).
- **There's help coming for farmers frustrated with waterhemp.** With verified reports of waterhemp now being able to survive Liberty (glufosinate), there are growing concerns that mechanical (tillage and weed hooks) means may be the only way to grow soybeans. Soybean research Jason Carr, at Bayer's El Paso, IL, research farm says an herbicide product and a new variety of soybeans may be the answer for some farmers with waterhemp problems. [His suggestions are in this short video](#).
- **Washington and Springfield (IL) can impact soybean economics.** The soybean industry is getting nervous about what the new House "Rural Energy Council" will do to soybean oil-based biofuels, as it primarily looks at E15 ethanol. That was the word from Kevin "KJ" Johnson, policy lead for the IL Soybean Assn. Johnson addressed that, tariff impact, and what ISA wants from IL Legislators in the 2026 session [in this short video](#).



- **Thoughts on agriculture from the top crop consultant.** Dr. Matt Montgomery was the top IL and national crop advisor last year and now named tops internationally. But part of his recognition comes not just from his crop advising ability, but his personality, philosophy, and his perspectives. He shared some of those in a recent IL Soybean Summit and shares them [in this short video](#).
- **Fighting to get a stronger biodiesel market** is the job of Joe Jobe. With soybean exports becoming a political tool, soybean farmers will be relying more on non-traditional markets to support soybean prices. The growing demand for soy biodiesel has helped in that regard over the past several years. Now, the former head of the National Biodiesel Board, Joe Jobe, has formed a new organization to lead that charge. State soybean groups are climbing aboard SABR, his new organization. [His thoughts are in this short video](#).
- **After China, are there any new markets for soybeans?** New markets for soybeans won't happen during the next CME trading session, but they are developing rapidly says Todd Main, head of marketing for the IL Soybean Assn. China will be a declining market he says, but there are other global markets that are growing. Then there are new uses (soybean-based gun grease). And Main says transportation needs attention to get soybeans to markets. His perspectives are [in this short 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.
- **The IL Agricultural Summit** will be Feb. 3 at the I Hotel in Champaign, sponsored by the IL Agribusiness Network. Speakers will address farm economics, farm management issues, and women in agriculture. 10 am to 6 pm. [Register and agenda details are here](#).

- **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](#).
- **CattleCon 2026** will be in Nashville, Feb. 3-5. Programs will focus on government policy, and cattle family sustainability. National Environmental Stewardship Award and the Beef Quality Assurance Awards will be handed out. [Details and registration are here](#).
- **The IL Dairy Summit** will be Feb. 4 at Highland Community College in Freeport. This year's theme is Foraging Profitability. There is no fee to attend the summit, but registration is required. To register, visit [www.illinoismilk.org](http://www.illinoismilk.org).
- **IL Extension will host** the Dudley Smith Farm winter meeting Feb. 10 at the Christian Co. Extension office. Registration at 9 am, and program ends with lunch. Presentations will be on cattle production, profitability, market outlook, and a soil health panel. [Details here](#).
- **The National Farm Machinery Show** begins Feb. 11 at Louisville's KY State Fairgrounds. [Tractor pull ticket info](#). [Event details](#). [Exhibitor list](#). [60th anniversary](#). Show ends Feb 14.
- **Don't miss the Paxton-Buckley-Loda** Annual Farm Toy Show, set for Feb. 14, 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at the PBL Gym in Paxton. Exhibits, competition, trophies, pedal tractor pull. For more information, check out the [flyer](#)! FFA Show tractor is a Case 430 \$75, only 100 made.
- **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.
- **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](#).
- **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](mailto:rebecca.sadaj@aiswcd.org).

- **Commodity Classic** is set for February 25-27 in San Antonio, TX, with a 30<sup>th</sup> 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](http://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.](#)
- **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.](#)
- **The National Cover Crop Summit** will be an on-line event March 10-12 featuring presentations by cover crop adopters, researchers, and agronomists sharing proven seeding strategies, grazing and feeding tips, variety selection insights and more. No travel, or fee to register. [Details and registration information is here.](#)
- **The IL Ag Legislative Day is March 24** at the IL State Capitol. Details to come.



- **Cornbelt Update is a weekly service of the Illinois Soybean Association and provided to Illinois Soybean Growers.**
- [www.ilsoy.org](http://www.ilsoy.org)
- [www.ilsoygrowers.org](http://www.ilsoygrowers.org)
- [1108 Trinity Lane, Bloomington IL](#)