

FEBRUARY 2026

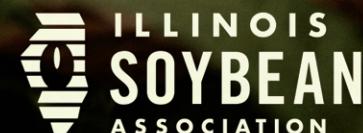
# Illinois Field & Bean

A PUBLICATION OF THE ILLINOIS SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION



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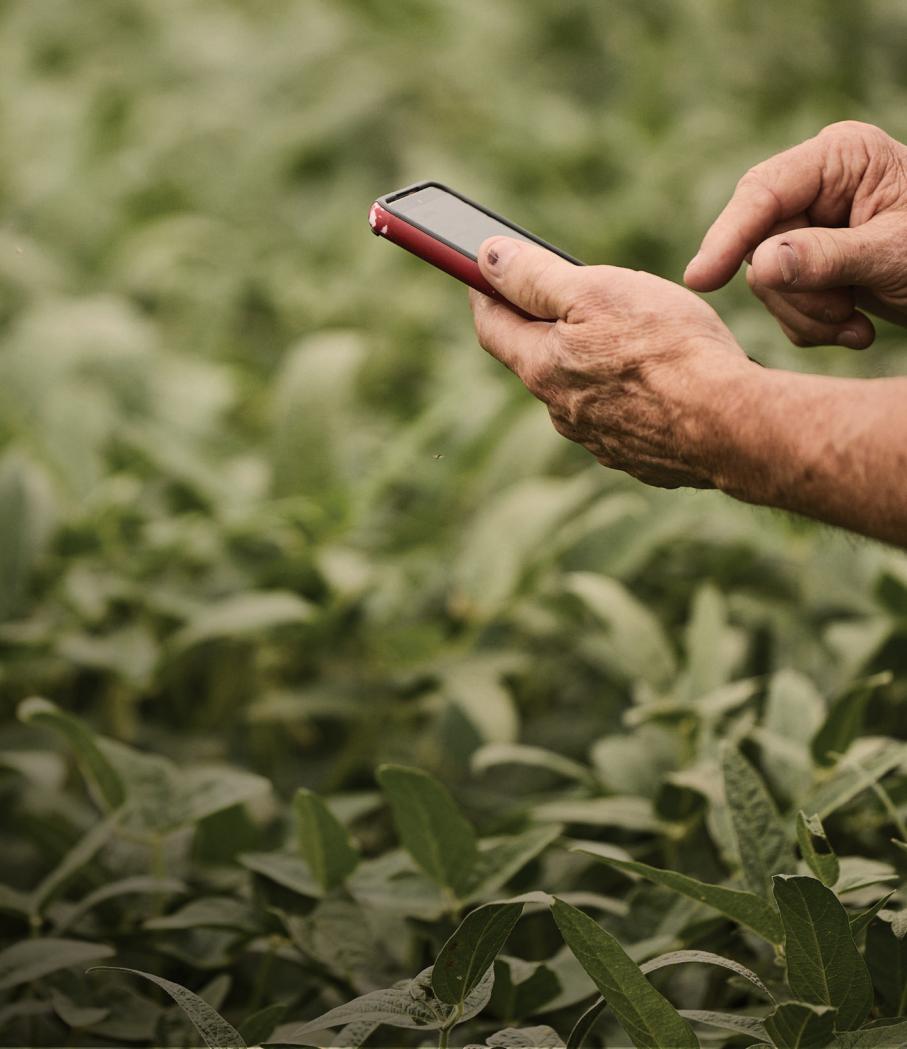
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**COVER:** This issue of Illinois Field & Bean spotlights the On-Farm Trial Network, highlighting how on-farm research drives real-world results for growers. Find key takeaways from 2025 trials and plans for 2026, as well as winter barley and wheat insights. Plus, don't miss out on the project and program highlights in the FY25 Year End Report!

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# Farmer-Driven Research in Action



**BRADY HOLST | VICE CHAIRMAN AND  
AT-LARGE DIRECTOR |  
ILLINOIS SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION**

Imagine a grain system with a rat problem. You can keep patching the holes they chew, or you can remove the rats so there is no damage at all. One option requires constant maintenance. The other solves the source of the problem. That is the idea behind a new direction in soybean cyst nematode (SCN) research. Instead of only improving soybean resistance, researchers are looking for traits inside SCN that can be edited to reduce or eliminate their effect on the crop.

Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) created the Adopt-a-Researcher Project to keep farmer priorities at the center of research. Each Soybean Production Committee member is paired with a project. Committee members are then provided with all progress reports and final reports related to their adopted project. The farmers are encouraged to send questions and start discussions with the researchers related to the research being done.

The program connects checkoff-funded work to what farmers see in the field. This approach helps bridge the gap between researchers and farmers.

SCN is still the top yield robber in soybeans, and SCN research is just one of the many studies being funded by ISA. A national survey and soil tests from the SCN Coalition and university partners estimate about 93 million bushels are lost to the pest each year in the U.S. Resistance sources such as PI 88788 work, but SCN adapts quickly.

We often think of genetic editing as improving soybean plants. This work flips the focus. Researchers are identifying SCN genes that control feeding, reproduction and pest interaction with the root. Tools such as CRISPR could edit those traits so a less harmful SCN becomes the dominant trait.

If successful, farmers could one day seed fields with beneficial SCN that outcompetes harmful SCN. Possible edits include traits that keep SCN from feeding on soybeans; traits that strengthen plant resistance by finding SCN with genes that respond more strongly to plant resistance; or gene drives that create only male offspring. Only females damage soybeans, so the population would fall over time.

Regulation will matter. Editing a pest is different from editing a crop, and the process might take longer. But the result could be a more durable tool that is not tied to yearly chemistry decisions. Farmers want long-lasting solutions to yield loss. This could be one such unlock or one such pathway or one such approach.

This project shows how farmer-driven research can move new ideas forward. SCN has stolen yield for decades. New genetic tools might help us reclaim some of it.





# Why On-Farm Research Matters



JOHN LUMPE | CEO |  
ILLINOIS SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION

Farming is a business. And like any business, farmers rely on vital information that becomes reflected in their decisions and best practices. While we're still in the thick of winter, it's the ideal time to gather insights and plan for the season ahead.

The Illinois Soybean Association's (ISA's) On-Farm Trial Network is one of the tools designed to help you do exactly that. With real data from fields across Illinois, the program provides practical, local information to guide your decisions for the 2026 crop year.

This issue of ***Illinois Field & Bean*** takes a closer look at how farmer-led, in-field research is delivering results that matter. From input trials to disease management strategies, this work is rooted in Illinois soil, funded by Illinois' Soy Checkoff, and focused on helping you make better-informed choices.

The On-Farm Trial Network starts with a simple idea: research should be useful. It should focus on questions farmers are already asking and provide results that fit your farm. Farmers in the network test practices side by side on their own acres, with support from ISA's agronomy team. The goals are to compare options, measure results and learn what pencils out. That approach keeps the research grounded and relevant.

## Trying New Things with Confidence

Whether they are evaluating nutrient applications or management practices, trials allow farmers to test ideas at field scale to evaluate what works and what doesn't.

Recent sulfur trials highlighted in this issue are a good example. The data coming from those fields are helping clarify when sulfur makes sense, where it fits and how it affects overall economics. Other trials are pointing to new questions that will guide future research. Each season adds another layer of understanding. That steady, data-driven process helps reduce uncertainty and supports better long-term decisions.

ISA is expanding the On-Farm Trial Network in 2026 because farmers continue to see value in local, applied research. Participation is open to operations of all sizes. Enrollment is open for a limited time, find more information on [FieldAdvisor.org](https://FieldAdvisor.org). What matters most is having a question worth testing and the interest to learn from the results. If you're curious about participating, reach out to Abigail Peterson, CCA and ISA Director of Agronomy, at [abigail.peterson@ilsoy.org](mailto:abigail.peterson@ilsoy.org). The

process is straightforward, and the support is there from start to finish.

## Your Checkoff Dollars at Work

The On-Farm Trial Network is funded by your soybean checkoff. That funding model matters because it means the research agenda is set by farmers. The focus stays on agronomic performance, economics and risk management.

Return on investment is a common commitment throughout our checkoff programs. We work hard to ensure that your trusted investment is used to develop new markets, provide timely information and deliver insights to support you every step of the way, from planting to marketing. Those are the kinds of returns that show up season after season.

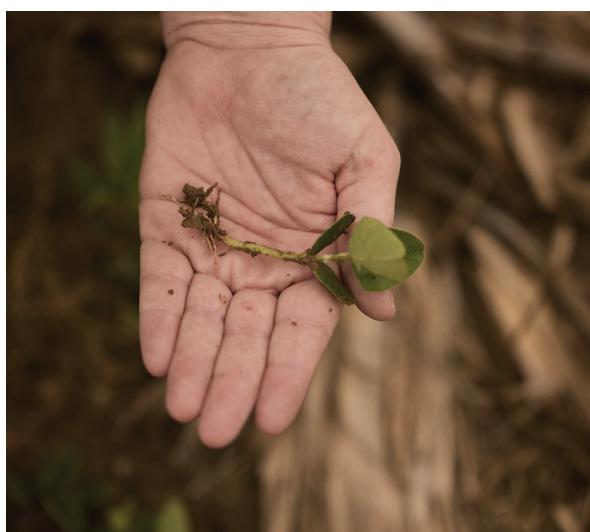
The FY25 Year End Report included in this issue provides a broader look at how your checkoff investments are being used across research, markets and policy education. Transparency and accountability are central to how ISA operates, and this report reflects that commitment.

As you plan for the season ahead, take time to explore the research in this issue and the annual report. If you're interested in joining the On-Farm Trial Network or learning more about what's coming in 2026, reach out. The more farmers who participate, the more value it brings to every acre in Illinois.





Funded by the Illinois Soybean Checkoff





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# The Economics of Soy and Sulfur

By Darby Danzl, Regional Technical Agronomist, Illinois Soybean Association

**S**ulfur has officially joined the conversation when we are discussing which macronutrients need to be applied to our corn and soybean acres to meet plant demand and support optimal growth. Historically, nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium were the only nutrients required in quantities large enough to justify supplemental applications, as Illinois soils were typically able to supply the other major macronutrients, such as calcium and magnesium. Sulfur, while essential for plant growth, is only just becoming a common addition to fertilizer management plans, and this shift to sulfur is no coincidence.

Prior to the 1970 Clean Air Act, coal-fired power plants, smelters, diesel engines and other industrial processes released large amounts of sulfur dioxide into the atmosphere. Once airborne, sulfur dioxide would react with water, oxygen and other compounds and then return to the surface through wet deposition as acid rain or dry deposition as particulate matter. Although harmful to many ecosystems, this atmospheric deposition of sulfate unintentionally supplied the Corn Belt with an estimated 10 to 30 pounds of sulfur per acre annually, which historically prevented the need for intentional sulfur applications.

Since the Clean Air Act began regulating sulfur dioxide emissions, they have been reduced by over 95%, according to recent

data from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. As a result, the atmospheric supply of sulfur has declined dramatically and is now estimated at only about 1.5 pounds of sulfur per acre per year.

This current sulfur supply is well below crop requirements based on research conducted in the early 2010s by Dr. Ross Bender at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. His work showed that a corn crop yielding 230 bushels will require about 23 pounds of sulfur per acre, and a soybean crop yielding 60 bushels will uptake around 17 pounds of sulfur per acre. The same research also showed that roughly 60% of the total sulfur taken up by both corn and soybeans is removed from the field with the harvested grain. Therefore, in the absence of atmospheric sulfur inputs, farm soils can no longer keep pace with the nutrient demands of these increasingly productive crops. As a result, many high-yielding cropping systems are now believed to be sulfur deficient for both corn and soybeans.

This shift in natural sulfur supply has prompted researchers and farmers to question if sulfur might be a key factor limiting yield potential in Illinois, particularly for corn, which has a relatively higher sulfur requirement compared to other row crops given corn's relatively high yield levels achieved in the Midwest. Research conducted at the University of Illinois, Iowa State University and Purdue University has shown that sulfur applications can significantly increase corn yields, prompting

many farmers to incorporate sulfur into their nutrient management programs.

Although sulfur responses in corn appear to provide a relatively consistent return on investment, soybean responses to sulfur are not as clear. However, Shaun Casteel, Ph.D., Professor of Agronomy at Purdue University, has observed promising soybean yield responses to sulfur applications in Indiana research trials. Casteel's research has shown an average soybean yield gain of 8 to 10 bushels per acre following sulfur applications, with some responses exceeding 20 bushels. Seeing these numbers has led many farmers to wonder if they should be supplying their soybeans with sulfur as well.

In response to this curiosity, the Soybean Production team at the Illinois Soybean Association initiated sulfur research ahead of soybeans through our On-Farm Trial Network (OFTN). Unlike traditional university research conducted in small, replicated plots at research centers, the OFTN recruits farmers from across the state to conduct replicated strip trials in their own fields. In 2025, this sulfur study enrolled 16 farmers statewide to evaluate two treatments: sulfur applied at 30 pounds per acre and an untreated control. This sulfur rate is notably higher than the estimated soybean requirement of 17 pounds per acre for a 60-bushel crop; however, current soybean yields are often higher than 60 bushels per acre, so this rate was selected to ensure sulfur would not be limiting in the treated strips.

One of the strengths of the OFTN is allowing farmers flexibility to adapt trials to their research interests and management systems. Participants were given the option to apply sulfur as either a dry broadcast application of ammonium sulfate (AMS) or a liquid application of ammonium thiosulfate (ATS), both applied preplant. Since both of these commonly used sulfur sources also supply nitrogen, farmers chose whether or not to apply an equivalent amount of nitrogen to the control strips to isolate sulfur effects. Most participating farmers selected ATS as their sulfur source and opted not to add nitrogen to the control treatments.

The team is still in the process of analyzing the overall results from soil and tissue samples as well as yield data from all trials. It plans to present key takeaways in spring 2026. In the meantime, we can still look at the preliminary results from individual locations from an economic perspective. Applying an additional nutrient to your field, especially if it requires an additional equipment pass, has obvious implications in terms of cost. Therefore, many farmers want to understand not only the yield response to sulfur but also the overall return on these applications. At the end of the day, farming is a business, and to justify the cost, sulfur applications need to pay.

For this preliminary economic evaluation, only factors that differed between treatments were considered, including soybean yield, the price of grain at the time of harvest, sulfur product cost and application cost. Soybeans in October 2025 were \$10 per bushel, ATS was priced at \$320 per ton and the estimated cost of the sprayer application was \$6.50 per acre (Table 1). All other management practices were consistent

Treatment	Yield bushels/acre	Product/ Application Cost		
		Gross Income	\$/acre	Net Income
Control	79.0	790.0	-	790.0
ATS	81.5	815.0	25.1	789.9

Table 1.

(See The Economics of Soy and Sulfur, page 8)



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## The Economics of Soy and Sulfur

(continued from page 7)

across treatments and therefore excluded from this analysis.

Yield results from one OFTN research site in Vermilion County showed a numerical increase in soybean yield of 2.5 bushels per acre, or about 3.2%, in response to the ATS application. Using the values previously described to estimate economic return, this yield increase was enough for the farmer to roughly break even, with the added revenue nearly covering the cost of the sulfur application itself (Table 1). Although this was not a large economic win, the response suggests sulfur might have contributed positively under these conditions.

One factor in this equation to call out is application cost, as farmers might not necessarily make a separate pass to apply ATS in the spring. Many already apply preplant burndown

herbicides, in which case ATS can be included in that application at no additional cost, effectively providing a "free ride." Additionally, ATS can be applied at planting with a 0x2 surface dribble or incorporated with a 2x2 band. Either way, removing the application cost from this equation would result in a modest economic return from the ATS application in the Vermilion County example.

This "free ride with your herbicide" approach can offer additional benefits in cover-crop systems, as ATS often increases leaf burn on green tissue, which improves burndown effectiveness. In addition, the nitrogen supplied by ATS might help stimulate microbial activity, accelerating residue breakdown and nutrient release in situations where nutrient immobilization or availability are concerns.

There are, however, important caveats to the "free ride" approach, as ATS is not compatible with all herbicides and might salt out in certain tank mixes. A jar

test should always be conducted before attempting any ATS and herbicide mixture to avoid compatibility issues. Furthermore, due to its potential to cause significant burn on green tissue, ATS should not be applied after crop emergence, nor should it be applied directly in-furrow, as it can cause seedling toxicity. Understanding these limitations is key to determining when and how ATS can be incorporated into a spring application program and avoid the cost of an additional application.

Part of making this decision also involves considering sulfur application costs, which can vary significantly from year to year. For the Vermilion County farmer, ATS prices increased from \$320 per ton in the fall of 2024 to \$400 per ton in the fall of 2025. At this higher price point, the sulfur application would not have been economical given the yield response observed in 2025.

For growers interested in trying sulfur ahead of soybeans, keep in mind that a 30-pound-per-acre

rate is not necessarily required to induce a yield response. In this case, sulfur cost the Vermilion County farmer approximately \$0.62 per pound of sulfur, resulting in a per-acre cost of about \$18.60. Further economic improvements and reduced financial risk could be achieved by reducing the application rate to match expected yields (0.28 pounds of sulfur per bushel) while considering soil sulfur availability, or by integrating sulfur applications into an existing field pass to avoid redundancy.

Overall, this represents only one site-year of data from a single Illinois farm and should not be interpreted as a definitive recommendation. However, it reinforces the importance of evaluating sulfur not only from a yield standpoint but also through an economic lens. Although sulfur applications might not result in dramatic 20-bushel yield increases in every field, smaller consistent responses can still pay when costs are managed and applications are integrated into existing field operations.

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# Calcium Clarified: Why Calcium is Vital for Your Soybeans



As growers continue to push the envelope to increase yields and improve ROI on soybean acres, a shift is underway in how the crop is managed, particularly with crop nutrition. The quest for higher yields is no longer just about nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. It's about a balanced crop nutrition program that includes often-overlooked secondary nutrients like calcium. While calcium often gets overlooked as a primary contributor to yield, it is necessary for developing a healthy and productive soybean crop.

## The Role of Calcium in Soybeans

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

## Addressing the Calcium Needs of Soybeans

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

## Get More from Every Acre with SUL4R-PLUS

Modern high-yielding soybean varieties demand more calcium than ever before. However, even when soil tests indicate high calcium levels, the nutrient isn't always readily available to plants. In many cases, less than five percent of the calcium measured in a standard soil test is plant available. This knowledge is important because soluble (plant-available) calcium is often a very small percentage of the overall total calcium reported on a soil test. Field test results illustrated in Figure 1 show soluble calcium only ranged between 1% and 2%.

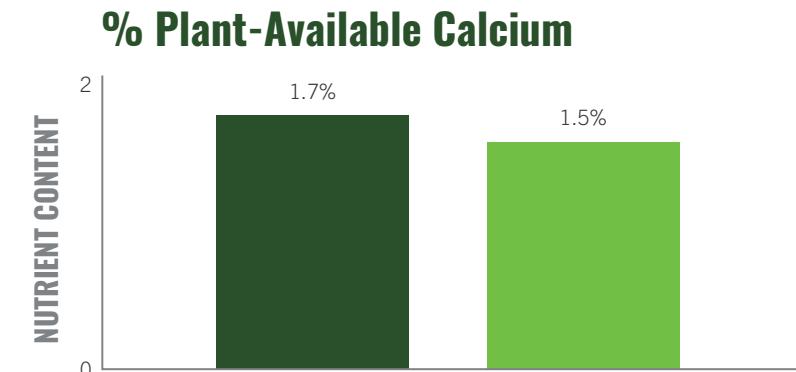


Figure 1.

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

## Grain Yield

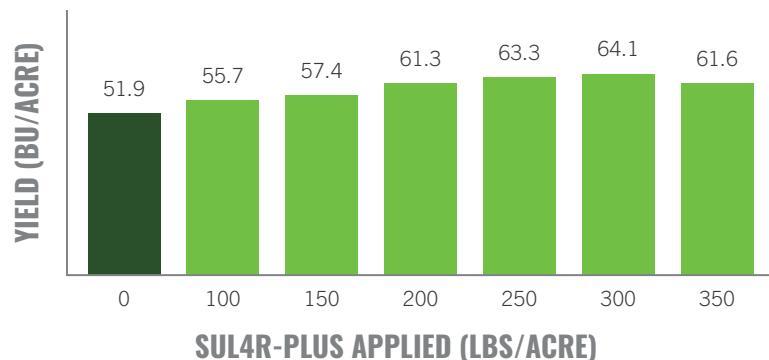


Figure 2.

## Secure SUL4R-PLUS from HELM

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

To secure your SUL4R-PLUS for the upcoming growing season, contact your local retailer.

**Discover more about SUL4R-PLUS at [sul4r-plus.com](http://sul4r-plus.com).**





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# FY25 YEAR END REPORT

## Chairman's Reflection

### KEEP MOVING FORWARD

"2025 was undoubtedly a difficult year for Illinois farmers. We faced a drop in commodity prices, concerning proposed policies, global trade tensions, increased input prices and, on top of it all, an extremely dry growing season. While we can all agree on how challenging last year was, one thing remains certain: We must keep moving forward, together.

The agriculture industry fluctuates like no other, and at the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA), it's our mission is to support you, the Illinois soybean farmer, through every challenge and every season. Over Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25), we remained focused on expanding both domestic and international markets, offering region-specific agronomic insights and amplifying your policy needs and concerns at the state and national level. Together, these efforts are designed to position our state's soybean farmers for long-term success.

Within this report are insights from our dedicated staff directors and details on a handful of transformative projects that are moving ISA's mission forward. Not only do these initiatives address current challenges, but they're also implemented to anticipate the needs of Illinois farmers. From innovative new uses and expanding new markets to farmer-driven advocacy and research, each project plays a vital role in moving our industry forward.

As Chairman of ISA, I'm extremely grateful for your hard work and dedication, which remain at the center of our mission. Even in a difficult year, your checkoff is at work, and ISA remains committed to standing beside you. I look forward to continuing this journey together as we build a strong future for Illinois agriculture."



BRYAN SEVERS, ISA CHAIRMAN

## Financial Snapshot

FOR THE YEAR ENDING AUGUST 31, 2025

### ON BEHALF OF THE ILLINOIS SOYBEAN BOARD (ISB)

ASSETS	\$22,929,564
LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS	\$22,929,564
REVENUE	\$19,245,434
OPERATING EXPENSES	\$18,164,135

For more information, contact Director of Finance, Kati Owen, 309-663-7692.



# Market Development



Funded by the Illinois Soybean Checkoff

## Reflection

"Despite it being a challenging and turbulent year for agriculture, ISA's Market Development team made significant advances in building new demand for soy in domestic and international markets. We continued building our relationships with global buyers through expanded outreach to Chicago consulates and by hosting multiple trade delegations. ISA Board Directors led a trade delegation to Indonesia, where they met with several leaders to discuss farming practices and opportunities to expand soybean meal imports. We also launched the International Commercialization Initiative (ICI) to strengthen collaboration between QSSBs and USB on emerging "New Uses" products and add them to USSEC's international portfolio of offerings.

Domestically, we hit significant milestones in market growth and innovation. We certified our 100th Sustainably Soy product, expanding the use of ISA's sustainability logo, and the Soy Innovation Center launched the SpringBoard Challenge to support research efforts around industrial soy-based products. Additionally, two ISA-developed technologies, biolubricants and xylitol, advanced to stage two commercialization, moving from the lab toward production, testing and market introduction.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to expanding markets for soy while building on this year's momentum. New initiatives are underway, including a transportation-focused effort to protect Illinois' competitive advantage and plans to work with USSEC to scale the successful Soy Excellence Centers through technology upgrades. 'Onward and upward!"'



TODD MAIN, DIRECTOR OF MARKET DEVELOPMENT

## SOY EXCELLENCE CENTERS:

The Soy Excellence Centers (SECs) closed FY25 with notable growth in its global training and professional development programs. The program continued to support sectors such as poultry, aquaculture, dairy and feed manufacturing through in-person, virtual and digital learning. A highlight of the year was the introduction of the STAR (Top Achiever Recognition) Awards, recognizing outstanding professionals who have applied SEC training to improve operations and lead change in their communities.



## INDONESIA TRADE MISSION:



Indonesia is the fastest-growing country in Southeast Asia, which is why ISA decided to conduct a trade mission there this past year. The delegation of board members and staff met with multiple government agencies to discuss expanding soy markets and the continued relationship between U.S. soy and the Indonesian government. Soy plays an important part in the Indonesian diet, which the delegation witnessed firsthand while visiting local Tempe and soy snack food producers. ISA continues to focus on expanding international markets, with Indonesia a priority in Southeast Asia.

## IT'S SUSTAINABLY SOY:

It's Sustainably Soy has proudly reached a milestone of more than 100 certified products. This achievement reflects the program's continued growth and success in promoting soy-based innovation. The expanding portfolio showcases a diverse range of products, from industrial goods to consumer items, that use sustainable soy ingredients. This progress highlights the strong partnerships and industry commitment driving the adoption of soy-based solutions.



# Soybean Production



Funded by the Illinois Soybean Checkoff

## ON-FARM TRIAL NETWORK:

The On-Farm Trial Network (OFTN), launched in 2024, is a program for Illinois farmers and organizations that functions as the bridge between farms and industry and university-generated-research. The first year of the OFTN sulfur plots was successfully planted this season and planning began for next year's trials. Five new trials were developed based on farmer feedback, research insights and regional challenges.



## FARMER-DRIVEN RESEARCH:

New research outreach continues including the launch of the Illinois Soybean Association Agronomy Farm featuring four demonstrations: double-crop soybeans following wheat, a pollinator plot, a cover crop species demonstration and a maximum return-to-nitrogen corn plot. The first Annual Insights Report was published in the June issue of *Illinois Field & Bean*, and more than 140 responses were received from the Growing Concerns Survey.



## FIELD ADVISOR:

Field Advisor continued to share valuable content, including crop reports, blogs, webinars, Soy Envoy insights and actionable checkoff-funded research. The team also successfully coordinated the inaugural Field Advisor Forum, which drew 156 in-person attendees and over 50 virtual participants. Visit [FieldAdvisor.org](https://FieldAdvisor.org) to check out the latest content!



## Reflection

"Work on the ISA Soybean Production strategic plan progressed throughout the year and continues to evolve as harvest data provides new agronomic insights and analysis. Collaboration with both new and existing partners has expanded our reach through Field Advisor and strengthened our committee's engagement by learning directly from researchers about the impact of their investments on Illinois soybean systems."

Each year, the number of proposed projects grows, bringing innovative ideas and meaningful questions to explore. We value the opportunity to work alongside researchers and farmers to build a strong, forward-looking portfolio of checkoff-funded agronomic research."



ABIGAIL PETERSON, CCA,  
DIRECTOR OF AGRONOMY

# Government Relations



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## ADVOCACY THAT DELIVERS:

In FY25, the Government Relations team strengthened legislative outreach by engaging directly with lawmakers at both the state and federal levels. Through on-farm visits, legislators gained valuable insights into the agricultural process, reinforcing our position as a trusted advocate for Illinois soybean farmers. Our team continued advocacy efforts in Washington, D.C., and Springfield, and hosted the annual Soy Latte Day at the Illinois State Capitol, where over 100 legislative staff and assembly members were educated on the importance of soy in their everyday lives.

## MOMENTUM YOU CAN MEASURE:

ISG continued to expand its outreach and impact throughout FY25, strengthening its role as the statewide grassroots voice for soybean farmers. This year, ISG increased engagement through a growing lineup of in-person and virtual events designed to keep members informed and connected. ISG staff traveled across Illinois hosting regional town halls that offered timely updates on issues such as biofuel legislation, estate taxes and regulatory issues. These meetings helped build awareness of ISG's policy priorities and ensured producers had direct opportunities to ask questions and share input.

## CLARITY IN A COMPLICATED YEAR:

Staying ahead of fast-moving federal rules has become essential for Illinois farmers, and ISA stepped up in FY25 to help make sure producers weren't caught off guard. One of the most important examples came this winter, when we hosted a series of regional workshops focused on major regulatory shifts coming from EPA. The workshops, held in January and February, were in-person meetings that gave farmers clear, practical updates on topics such as the new Mitigation Strategies and pesticide labels coming from the U.S. EPA, Endangered Species Act considerations, and emerging concerns around species such as the monarch butterfly. More importantly, they offered a chance for farmers to hear exactly what's changing, steps they can take to prepare and what ISA is doing to protect their freedom to farm.



## Reflection

"Illinois Soybean Growers' (ISG's) focus in FY25 has been on influencing legislation that affects trade, biofuel markets, environmental practices and farm support programs. During multiple D.C. fly-ins with national partners, ISG engaged with nearly all members of the Illinois delegation and contributed to meaningful improvements to 45Z and the Renewable Fuel Standard. In Springfield, advocacy centered on estate tax policy, biofuels, conservation and landowner protections. Toward the end of the state's legislative session, Governor Pritzker signed an ISA-backed bill that strengthens landowner rights related to carbon pipelines. To better support members, ISG expanded its virtual outreach through monthly webinars featuring policy experts and industry specialists. These sessions provided timely guidance on issues ranging from herbicide label changes to tax planning and trade dynamics, engaging hundreds of farmers statewide. ISG also continued investing in community-building through events such as two Farm Business Summits focused on farm succession. These efforts contributed to strong membership growth and increased fundraising, further strengthening ISG's capacity to deliver effective advocacy.

Together, these initiatives demonstrated ISG's commitment to showing up in local communities, answering tough questions, and ensuring producers have a voice in shaping policy priorities. At every step, the goal remained clear: to keep Illinois farmers informed, prepared, and protected. FY25's results highlight just how deeply committed ISA is to delivering on that promise."



KEVIN "KJ" JOHNSON,  
DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS & STRATEGY

# Marketing Communications

## ILLINOIS FIELD AND BEAN:

Throughout FY25, **Illinois Field & Bean** Magazine delivered 12 issues featuring timely, in-depth coverage on the topics that matter most to Illinois' 43,000 soybean farmers. From farmer advocacy and checkoff-funded research to field trials and market expansion, each issue highlighted the work being done to advance our industry. FY25 issues were also featured on the newly updated **Illinois Field & Bean** page on [ilsoy.org](http://ilsoy.org), expanding access to readers. Visit [ilsoy.org/illinois-field-bean](http://ilsoy.org/illinois-field-bean) to explore the latest content.

## PRODUCER SENTIMENT SURVEY:

The FY25 ISA Producer Sentiment Study provided a comprehensive analysis of Illinois soybean farmers' perspectives on industry trends, challenges and ISA's role in their operations. This study uncovered farmer sentiment regarding the checkoff programs, market conditions, technology adoption and policy priorities. By analyzing key trends and farmer priorities, this report offered actionable insights to guide ISA's communication, investment and program development.

## DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS:

The ISA Communications team strategically refined and expanded its social media presence in FY25 to more evenly showcase messaging across departments and key programs. By prioritizing high-quality photography and video, the team strengthened storytelling efforts and drove measurable growth in impressions, engagement and overall traffic to ISA digital resources.



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## Funded by the Illinois Soybean Checkoff Reflection

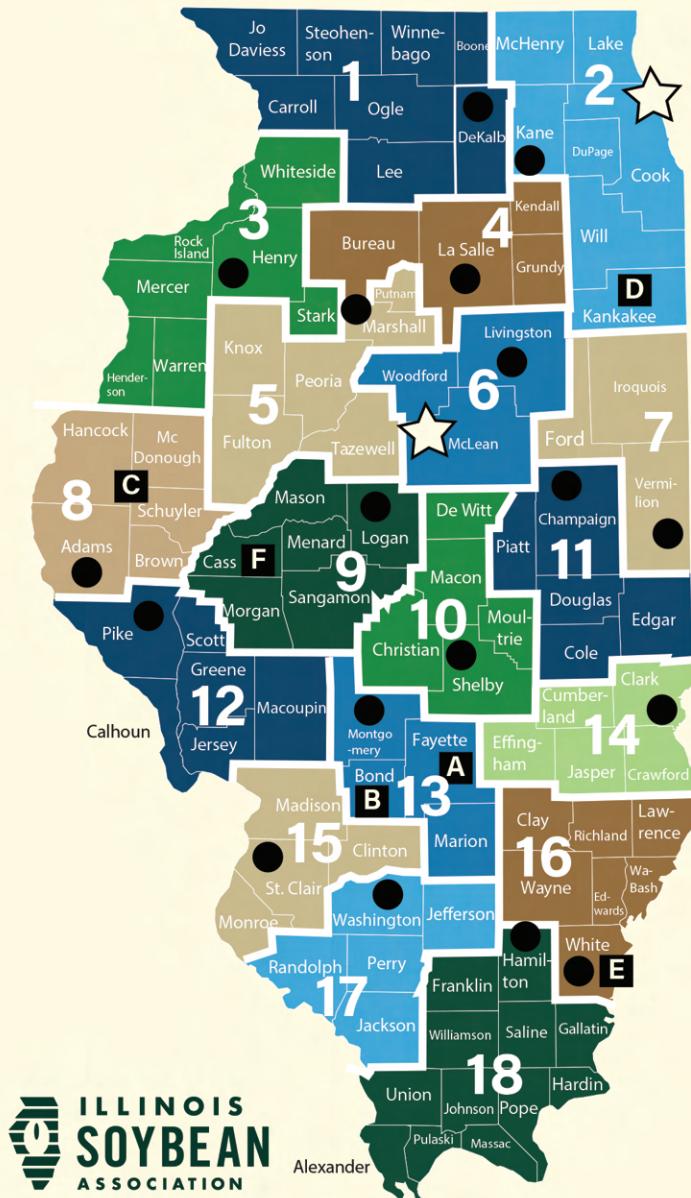
"Marketing Communications projects in FY25 were strategically focused on streamlining efforts across our channels to more consistently and effectively tell the story of Illinois soybean farmers and the programs and initiatives that support them. By aligning print, digital and research-driven communications, our team strengthened ISA's ability to inform, engage and add value for farmers across Illinois. Throughout the year, ISA Marketing Communications team members and Board Directors also engaged with several state and national media outlets to amplify farmers' concerns around global trade and policy.

We remain committed to delivering timely and relevant industry news and messages that keep Illinois farmers informed and engaged amid a rapidly evolving global marketplace. Through proactive storytelling and strategic communications, ISA will continue to elevate the voice of Illinois soybean farmers and reinforce their leadership role on the global stage."



BETSY OSMAN,  
DIRECTOR OF MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS/  
EDITOR IN CHIEF, ILLINOIS FIELD & BEAN MAGAZINE

# FY24 ISA Board Leadership



## DISTRICT DIRECTORS

1	Ryan Frieders
2	Steve Pitstick
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6	Rob Schaffer
7	Bryan Severs
8	Tim Clark
9	Ron Kindred
10	Elliott Uphoff
11	Matt Murray
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13	Heath Houck
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17	Emily Lovelady
18	Martin Duffy

## AT-LARGE DIRECTORS

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B	Scott Gaffner
C	Brady Holst
D	Jeff O'Connor
E	Tim Scates
F	David Wessel



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## CEO's Reflection

### POSITIONING ILLINOIS SOY FOR A STRONGER FUTURE

Despite a challenging year for commodity groups, the Illinois Soybean Association is working behind the scenes to ensure Illinois soy remains strong and competitive in a changing world. We are fully committed to strengthening our impact through new projects, research and outreach, and to aligning our actions to leverage new opportunities that build resiliency for Illinois farmers. And with 127 new projects lined up for FY25, our commitment to supporting Illinois soybean farmers is more selective but just as impactful.

Over the next fiscal year, ISA will continue investing in production research to advance on-farm profitability and sustainability. We know our growers' ability to operate freely and effectively depends on robust research and data that addresses the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Through our Soy Innovation Center, we'll continue collaborating with industry experts to discover new uses and innovations for Illinois soy. We will continue to grow markets far and wide, including for use by livestock and biodiesel producers here at home and by buyers and end users in Europe and Southeast Asia.

Transportation and infrastructure will remain a focus as we understand that efficient and reliable transportation is essential for maintaining the competitiveness of Illinois soybeans in the global market.

And we will continue to champion legislative work that safeguards and advances our industry. This includes advocating for higher blends of biodiesel, ensuring that our state remains at the forefront of renewable energy initiatives.

Thank you for your continued support and engagement. Our progress continues to be driven by Illinois' hardworking farmers, the ISA board and staff who press on with the ISA creed: "Yes we can. And we'll do it together."



JOHN LUMPE, ISA CEO



On behalf of Illinois Soybean Association (ISA), which includes both the Illinois Soybean Board (ISB) checkoff funded program, and the Illinois Soybean Growers (ISG) non-checkoff member program.



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# Supporting Illinois Crop Management Decisions

By Deanna Burkhart, Agronomic Services Manager, Illinois Soybean Association

The Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) Soybean Production Committee has several priorities to keep in mind when selecting project proposals for checkoff funding. These priorities include strengthening agronomic research and education programs by building partnerships, establishing research that addresses regional production opportunities and challenges, continuing the expansion of ISA's agronomic network with ongoing outreach, as well as demonstrating soybean system agronomics focused on soil and water quality,

resource resiliency and land stewardship. Projects range in scope but tend to focus in on one thing – supporting Illinois soybean farmers.

One project that aims to work directly with Illinois soybean farmers is the On-Farm Trial Network (OFTN). The OFTN is managed by the Soybean Production department at ISA and is a checkoff-funded program that coordinates field-scale trial opportunities with Illinois farmers. These on-farm trials provide farmers with an avenue to directly generate practical results while

participating in the research process. Farmers can evaluate new products, practices or management strategies in their own fields while contributing to regional and statewide results.

This program strives to provide valuable results from across the network to all Illinois farmers, aiming to inform future management decisions and recommendations. The OFTN team at ISA has been working with researchers, agronomists and farmers to develop protocols that address significant production concerns. Illinois farmers are invited to help

guide future research by sharing their concerns through the Growing Concerns Survey found on [FieldAdvisor.org](http://FieldAdvisor.org) by navigating to the Discover tab and selecting Research. By contributing to the survey, you have the chance to put Illinois at an advantage when it comes to production improvements. Responses will be reviewed and taken into consideration as we plan future checkoff-funded research. Survey responses also contribute beyond the checkoff by enabling university researchers to better understand emerging production



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*Trial* **NETWORK**

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challenges and prioritize research needs.

An example of how farmer responses can influence today's research can be found in the OFTN protocols. Many are curious to learn what rates, sources and timing of sulfur fertilization on soybeans might be beneficial to yield. This was interesting to discuss with farmers across the state and was implemented into one of the first OFTN Action Trial protocols. Data analysis for the 2025 OFTN trials is being finalized and will be shared soon. Look for reports summarizing yield responses and additional results from the 2025 Sulfur Fertilization in Soybeans, ROI of Soybean Insecticides and Legacy Soil Health trials. Results will be posted on [FieldAdvisor.org](https://fieldadvisor.org) and presented at ISA Agronomy events. We look forward to another year of the OFTN.

In 2026, OFTN trials are planned to be implemented on over 30 fields across Illinois, providing a diverse set of research sites that reflect the state's different soils, climates and management systems. These trials are designed to generate practical, locally relevant data that farmers can use with confidence when making management decisions on their own operations. Most protocols are available to farmers statewide. However, we are specifically targeting southern Illinois farmers for the 2026 double-crop soybean population study. Results will help guide future double-crop management research.

OFTN trial protocols address a range of timely and high-impact topics, including soil health improvement strategies, weed suppression practices, double-crop planting population optimization, and integrated pest and nutrient management. Each protocol is developed to be compatible with normal field operations, producing practical results.

We are seeking to enroll farmers in both OFTN Action and Legacy Trials, in which farmers will have the opportunity to con-

tribute valuable data, gain first-hand insights and help strengthen farmer-driven research that supports more productive, profitable and sustainable agriculture across Illinois.

Action Trials allow farmers to test specific practices or products in a single season and quickly evaluate outcomes. Last year, the OFTN coordinated two types of Action Trials, one looking at sulfur rates and the other insecticide application on soybeans. Similar protocols will be offered this growing season, plus more! 2026 Action Trials will consist of the following protocols:

- Cover-Crop Biomass & Weed Suppression
- Double-Crop Soybean Management – Planting Population
- Insecticide Seed Treatments in Conservation Systems
- ROI of Soybean Foliar Insecticides
- Sulfur 2.0

Legacy trials are longer-term strip trials designed to evaluate the soil health impacts of cover crops and tillage over multiple years. Find more information on trial opportunities at <https://fieldadvisor.org/on-farm-trial-network/>.

Illinois farmers considering hosting a trial in partnership with the OFTN can expect one-on-one engagement with ISA agronomists and administrators to support the implementation and execution of every trial. Plot maps tailored to each field are provided to the farmer through the program. Scouting visits, soil testing and other sampling needs will be coordinated by the OFTN team. All sampling results are shared with the farmer. The focus on data quality within OFTN trials requires the use of a calibrated yield monitor and field management collection throughout the season. All trial opportunities require a minimum field size of 40 acres, and

(See Supporting Illinois Crop Management Decisions, page 18)

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## Supporting Illinois Crop Management Decisions

(continued from page 7)

additional requirements vary by protocol.

Farmer enrollment for 2026 Action Trials will wrap up soon. If you would like to find out more information about hosting a trial on your farm, complete the OFTN Interest Form by clicking "Learn More" at <https://fieldadvisor.org/on-farm-trial-network/> or contact Deanna Burkhart, ISA Agronomic Services Manager, at [deanna.burkhart@ilsoy.org](mailto:deanna.burkhart@ilsoy.org) or 309-307-9366.

Additionally, ISA manages two demonstration field sites as part of the OFTN. One is the ISA Agronomy Farm, located south of Heyworth, and the second is located at the Farm Progress Show site in Decatur. These locations are home to in-field demonstrations of various trials

across soybean, corn, wheat and cover-crop plots. Part of this year's plot rotation at the ISA Agronomy Farm includes mini-demonstrations of some OFTN Action Trials. Winter Barley and cereal rye were planted Nov. 7, 2025, as a demonstration of the Cover-Crop Biomass and Weed Suppression protocol. The establishment and growth of the cover crops will be documented and biomass sampled before soybeans are planted this spring. Wheat was planted on Oct. 22, 2025, and double-crop soybeans will follow. This plot will be a smaller version of the Double-Crop Soybean Management – Planting Population study. The ISA Agronomy Farm will continue to be rotated to new trials, providing visual demonstrations of how management practices can affect crop production, both positively and negatively. ISA will host spring and summer events at our demonstration sites. Stay informed about upcoming events on [FieldAdvisor.org](https://FieldAdvisor.org).

**org.** If you are interested in a tour of the farm or have questions, contact the ISA office for more information.

We hope you decide to join us in the effort to support Illinois crop management

decisions by sharing your production concerns, attending an ISA Agronomy event, visiting the ISA Agronomy Farm, finding information on [FieldAdvisor.org](https://FieldAdvisor.org) or hosting an on-farm trial with ISA's OFTN.

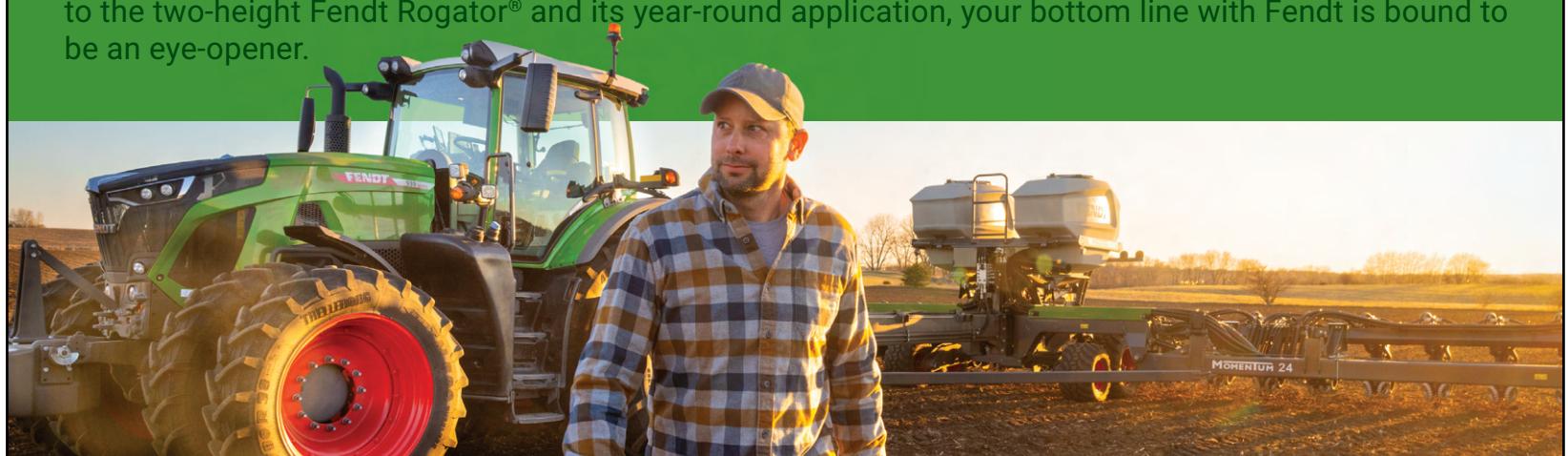


Illinois farmers considering partnership with the OFTN to host a trial can expect one-on-one engagement with ISA, which helps producers with the implementation and execution of every trial.

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# Let's (Transportation) Go!

## ISA to co-sponsor annual conference that gets agriculture moving

**T**ransportation challenges are a perennial issue for farmers: You can't go over them, go under them or avoid them.

The agriculture industry must put its collective heads together and confront these complex issues. The Specialty Soya and Grains Alliance (SSGA) is ready for a robust conversation to address big ideas that move transportation forward on the pathway toward diversifying demand for U.S. agriculture.

Save the date for Transportation Go! scheduled April 8-9, 2026 in Chicago at the Inter-

Continental Hotel Magnificent Mile, where supply chain stakeholders will gather to discuss immediate and long-range issues and seek solutions and opportunities to industry obstacles.

"We need to find new markets beyond our No. 1 buyer of soybeans, China, and find other options and keep up with our competition," said Bryan Severs, Chair of the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA). "The Specialty Soya and Grains Alliance can help us do that with their identity-preserved soybeans and programs like Transportation Go!"

Hosted by SSGA, the business alliance of U.S. identity-preserved agriculture, Transportation Go! is the premier conference representing identity-preserved, value-added agriculture supply chain stakeholders.

"We are so excited to host this year's Transportation Go! conference in Chicago, an integral transportation hub in our industry," said Severs, who also serves as SSGA Chair. "Every year, this conference sparks valuable conversations that make an impact. If you have a stake in the agriculture supply chain, make sure you mark your calendars for this event."

In 2026, Transportation Go! is being held in Illinois for the first time and is sponsored by ISA and the Illinois Department of Agriculture. Severs, who grows non-GMO soybeans in Vermilion County, said his home state is the ideal location to host an agricultural transportation summit, given its proximity to railways, rivers and the Great Lakes.

"We need to concentrate more on the Great Lakes because that's a competitive advantage for Illinois," Severs said. "Everyone knows about our rivers and getting it down to the Gulf, but moving it north and going through the Great Lakes is



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another avenue we need to keep working on."

Illinois exports about 60% of its soybeans – typically to markets in Southeast Asia, Mexico and the European Union – often ranking as the nation's top soybean-exporting state.

"We have a big advantage in transportation here in Illinois and a great opportunity to move things," Severs said. "We can move our products from our farmers to get them to our ports and send them to international markets."

During the conference, organizers will steer the conversation through highly interactive panels and keynote speakers. The list of confirmed speakers includes:

- Dwight Robinson, CEO of L.A. Grain
- Andy Banfield, Iowa Interstate rail
- Sten Konst, Spliethoff Group
- Brian Oszakiewski, Executive Director of American Great Lakes Port Association

Additional invitations have been extended to representatives from the Port of Los Angeles; Great Lakes St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation; Federal Maritime Commission; and more.

"We're working hard behind the scenes to ensure that the conference agenda continues to be robust, bringing in the minds that attendees want to hear from most," said Gary Williams, SSGA Director of Transportation and Regulatory Affairs. "The value-added agriculture supply chain has distinctive needs and unique problems that Transportation Go! is designed to work through by bringing together key players in the industry."

Severs said he's excited for conversations that tackle not just immediate transportation issues but long-term goals.

"We want to be thinking 20 years down the road," Severs said. "We're going to keep growing and raising more soybeans. We've got to find a way to not just get them down the road but down through



the waterways. That's a vision we have – we're planning for 2040, 2050, so (ISA) thinks there's a lot of value in supporting that."

Transportation Go! registration and additional information are now available at [transportation-go.com/](http://transportation-go.com/). SSGA's annual meeting will be held at the same location on April 7, during which board of director elections will take place

and the annual SSGA Alliance Honors will be presented.

"I look forward to this conference every year, and this year is no different," Severs said. "Before you know it, April will be here, so pencil in Transportation Go! and get ready for two days of putting our heads together, brainstorming solutions and opportunities for the industry."

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# Why Wheat?

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

Planting winter wheat on ground in Bureau County represented a notable departure from the long-standing corn-soybean rotation that has traditionally defined much of north-central Illinois agriculture. Incorporating wheat into this system was not something I initially expected to see widely considered by local producers, yet this field—quite literally in my own backyard—served as a real-world example of how rotations can evolve to meet agronomic and economic goals.

The wheat was planted on Sept. 30, 2024, and as spring arrived, the crop greened up quickly, becoming a visible and consistent presence in the landscape. From early spring growth through harvest on July 4, 2025, the wheat stood out, not only as a break from the typical rotation but

also as a reminder of the potential value that small grains can bring to Illinois cropping systems.

From planting to harvest, there were many compelling reasons why wheat appeared to be a sound agronomic choice. The crop offered opportunities for improved soil cover, enhanced system diversity and the potential for subsequent double-crop soybean production. At the same time, integrating wheat introduced new logistical considerations. Timing of planting and harvest, equipment availability, input management and marketing strategies all required thoughtful planning and adjustment compared to the more familiar corn-and-soybean cycle.

As the season progressed, several key questions naturally emerged: Was the decision to plant wheat worth the investment? Did the crop provide a positive return on investment when yields and costs were evaluated? And perhaps most importantly, does wheat deserve a place in

future cropping plans? These are critical questions for any producer considering diversification.

The experience provided valuable insight into both the opportunities and challenges associated with integrating wheat into a traditional two-crop system. As yields came in and the year drew to a close, the field offered more than just grain—it provided perspective on the role wheat can play in building resilient, profitable and diversified farming operations in north-central Illinois.

The Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) has a longstanding commitment to funding impactful research that advances wheat production and double-cropping systems across the state. Over the years, ISA-supported studies have delivered valuable insights for farmers seeking to improve productivity, manage pests and diversify crop rotations.

One particularly compelling area of research has examined the role of double-cropping soybeans

following winter wheat as a strategy for suppressing soybean cyst nematode (SCN) populations. Research conducted by Southern Illinois University demonstrated that soybeans double-cropped after wheat resulted in a 30% reduction in SCN counts compared to fallow systems. These findings highlight the potential of wheat-based rotations to mitigate one of the most persistent yield-limiting pests in soybean production. Additional details on this research can be found in the Crop Protection Network article authored by Leo Rocha referenced below.

Given the limited number of effective tools available to manage SCN, incorporating wheat into crop rotations offers a practical and biologically sound approach to introducing diversity into the production system. Beyond pest suppression, ISA-funded research continues to gain momentum in identifying wheat varieties that enable earlier planting of double-crop soybeans, thereby



maximizing the growing season and yield potential.

Dr. Jessica Rutkoski's research is focused on helping farmers select wheat varieties that deliver strong yield performance without increasing risk from early jointing and subsequent frost events. Her work provides critical guidance for balancing early maturity with resilience to spring weather variability. Comprehensive data on commercial wheat varieties evaluated through this research were published in the University of Illinois Official Variety Trial, available at [vt.cropsci.illinois.edu](http://vt.cropsci.illinois.edu). This work is continuing for a second year in 2025, further strengthening the dataset available to growers.

By applying Dr. Rutkoski's findings, farmers might be able to select wheat varieties that allow field access up to one week earlier for planting double-crop soybeans—an advantage that can significantly impact overall system productivity. Complementary research from the Illinois Nutrient Research and Education Council has also demonstrated that winter wheat and double-crop soybean systems provide multiple environmental benefits, including reduced soil erosion, improved soil organic carbon levels, and decreased nitrogen loss from mineralization.

Collectively, this body of research underscores the value of wheat as more than a rotational crop. Through its ability to suppress pest populations, enhance soil health and diversify cropping systems, wheat represents a viable and economically sound cash crop that addresses many of the challenges associated with traditional corn-soybean rotations.

Although research provides valuable guidance and data to support decision-making, actual on-farm field experience is ultimately the most effective way to determine whether a system will perform as intended under real-world conditions. Translating research findings into practice requires careful observation of how

management decisions, environmental conditions and logistical considerations intersect throughout the growing season.

Detailed information on crop inputs, management practices and in-season observations for this field can be found on [FieldAdvisor.org](http://FieldAdvisor.org). However, for the purposes of this article—and to remain mindful of time and space constraints—I will focus on several high-level takeaways that might encourage further exploration and consideration of the risks and rewards associated with this production system.

Final yield results were confirmed only after scale tickets were returned and verified to ensure the most accurate weights. The winter-wheat crop achieved a yield of 120 bushels per acre, while the subsequent double-crop soybeans produced 35 bushels per acre. Soybean harvest conditions were dry, allowing for timely field operations, and harvest across the double-cropped fields was completed on Oct. 26.

These results provide a tangible benchmark for evaluating the performance of a wheat-double-crop soybean system within this region. Beyond the yield numbers, the experience reinforced the importance of precise management, adaptability and a willingness to evaluate both agronomic and economic outcomes. Together, the data and field observations contribute to a clearer understanding of how this approach might fit into broader cropping strategies and inform future decision-making.

Through our work with farmers across Illinois, it is clear that there is strong interest in pursuing additional research that supports greater diversity across agricultural acres. In response, ISA is continuing to invest in on-farm research initiatives designed to evaluate practical, field-scale solutions that fit within existing production systems while expanding agronomic and economic opportunities.

One area of focus moving forward is plant population management within double-crop systems. As part of the ISA 2026 On-Farm Trial Network, farmers will have the opportunity to enroll in a population study specifically tailored to double-crop soybean production. This research aims to generate locally relevant data that can help refine management recommendations and improve decision-making under a range of field conditions. Protocols, eligibility requirements and enrollment details are available at [fieldadvisor.org/on-farm-trial-network/](http://fieldadvisor.org/on-farm-trial-network/).

In addition to conducting plant-population studies, collecting ongoing feedback from farmers has highlighted interest in exploring relay-cropping systems and alternative oilseed grain rotations. These approaches have the potential to further diversify cropping systems, enhance resource-use efficiency and introduce new agronomic and economic possibilities beyond traditional rotations.

Continued collaboration with producers is essential to ensuring this research remains grounded in real-world challenges and opportunities.

We encourage farmers to share their priorities and research interests by completing the Growing Concerns Survey found on [FieldAdvisor.org](http://FieldAdvisor.org). Your input helps shape future research efforts and ensures that ISA-funded projects address the questions that matter most on the farm. With your participation, there is a strong possibility that this season's research could include scouting one of your fields as part of our ongoing commitment to farmer-driven innovation.

### References

Crop Protection Network article: Rocha, L. F., Pimentel, M. F., Bailey, J., Wyciskalla, T., Davidson, D., Fakhoury, A. M., and Bond, J. P. 2023. The effect of wheat on soybean cyst nematode populations in double-cropping soybean production. *CPN 5010. doi.org/10.31274/cpn-20230127-0*

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BACK TO THE U.S. SOYBEAN FARMER.**





# Q&A with Rabobank's Chris Olson

Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) partner Rabo AgriFinance has agriculture experts located across the nation to connect farmers to the resources and knowledge of one of the world's largest and most innovative banks: Rabobank. In this Q&A, Rabo AgriFinance Managing Director Chris Olson shares how the organization's focus on ambition, innovation and tailored financial solutions helps Illinois producers manage risk, plan for growth and position their operations for the future.

**Question:** Rabo AgriFinance emphasizes supporting ambitious, innovative producers. How does that mission guide the way you work with farmers here in Illinois?

**Answer:** "From that standpoint, we're looking for innovative operations. Ambition can be defined by your farming style and your innovativeness: how you're doing things and how you're raising your production methods. Specifically in the Midwest, with heavy corn and soybean production, the emphasis is on making sure we have the right products and services to help clients through challenging times. The most consistent thing in agriculture right now is volatility, and as a lender, we can help manage that. Ambition sometimes means growth, and with growth comes managing market volatility. We try to put banking solutions in place that fit the operation, the balance sheet and the cash-flow forecast, rather than doing things just one traditional way."

**Q:** How is Rabo AgriFinance helping producers navigate tighter margins, volatile markets and rising operational costs?

**A:** "Starting last year, we worked with our Rabo Research team and looked specifically at corn and soybean production across the Midwest. One thing we did was put new products in place. We went to a higher advance rate, up to 75% of appraised value on land financing, and stretched amortizations out to 35 years. There's going to be more cash-flow stress in the farm economy, and we felt it was a safe investment for us to lean into land financing and help producers through a challenging time. These products help manage volatility and provide more robust cash-flow options than traditional financing."

**Q:** What kinds of investments or strategies are you seeing from forward-thinking producers who are planning for future generations?

**A:** "Margin management and using marketing tools. Whether you're dealing with \$3.50 corn or \$7.50 corn, it all comes back to margin management. There's a set of input costs every year for every unit of production, and it's about how you market that crop to lock in a profit. The more innovative and ambitious growers tend to have strong, consistent marketing plans that help manage risk."

**Q:** What advice would you give young farmers looking to build a strong financial foundation?

**A:** "It goes back to your marketing plan and budget management. Opportunity cost is always there, and you'll second-guess decisions, but the key is consistency and understanding this is a long play. You're doing this for 50 years, not five months. The goal is making money or, sometimes, minimizing losses. Having a clear sense of direction, a business plan and the ability to look not just one year ahead but three years ahead is critical. That preparation helps when opportunities come up for land or equipment purchases and requires discipline in managing margins, marketing and the business."

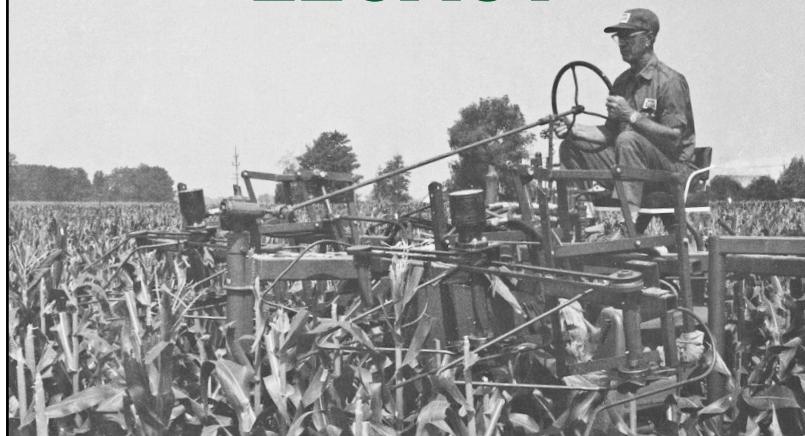
**A:** "High variability in commodity prices has become the new normal. Markets used to move two or three cents a day, now they move 20 or 30 cents. Being prepared to make profitable sales when the timing is right is key. Another area to watch is farm efficiency and sustainability programs that may offer premiums. Producers need to be educated on what's available and ready to act, whether that's adding 25 or 50 cents a bushel or other value opportunities."

**Q:** What trends or emerging risks should farmers be watching closely as they plan for 2026 and beyond?

To learn more, visit [www.rabobankna.com](http://www.rabobankna.com).



## A HOME-GROWN LEGACY



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# Winter Barley

## A Natural Way to Suppress Weeds

By Eduardo Lago & Karla Gage, Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Weeds resistant to herbicides have become a year-round management challenge. Although cereal rye has been the gold standard cover crop in the Midwest, many farmers view its massive winter biomass as an obstacle to sowing the summer crop. Research from Southern Illinois University (SIU) indicates that switching to winter barley could suppress weeds with less biomass than cereal rye.

A field study conducted in Carbondale showed winter barley can play a meaningful role in early-season weed suppression ahead of soybeans. The research suggests the presence of winter barley as a cover crop resulted in a 54% decrease in waterhemp plants and a 21% reduction in giant ragweed emergence by the time of soybean post application.

The duration of this protection was even more impressive. The winter barley effect persisted for 42 days after soybean planting, when establishment of both waterhemp and giant ragweed remained significantly lower in treatments with barley, compared to those without barley.

### The Mechanism of Winter Barley: Allelopathy and Biomass

Why is winter barley performing so well? It comes down to its function as a physical barrier and chemical defense.

**1. The "Living Mulch":** Winter barley grows shorter and yields less biomass than cereal rye, making it easier to manage at termination and planting while still providing enough ground coverage to shade and prevent germination of weed seeds.

**2. Natural Weed Killers:** Winter barley not only acts as a physical barrier but is also allelopathic. This means the plant excretes

natural chemical compounds into the soil that are responsible for the inhibition of nearby weed seed germination.

### Integrated Weed Management: Better Together

Although winter barley is one of the potential tools in integrated weed management, this research demonstrates that winter barley performs best when used with other tools. The most notable control was achieved when winter barley was applied in conjunction with a preemergent herbicide.

For waterhemp, preemergent herbicide use minimized emerging weeds across all plots, whether winter barley was early terminated (seven days before planting), terminated on the day of planting soybeans or terminated a week after planting. In contrast, earlier terminations without the use of preemergent herbicide resulted in higher weed emergence by the time of postemergence application. The use of a preemergent herbicide provides flexibility and improves weed control when used with cover crops.

### The Bottom Line for Your Farm

For growers looking to diversify their cover-crop program, winter barley offers the weed suppression needed while remaining easier to manage than traditional options such as cereal rye. As with other cover crops, winter barley won't replace herbicides, but it can help them work better. And that's a tool worth having in the toolbox.

To keep up to date on our integrated weed-management research funded by the Illinois Soybean Checkoff, visit the Research Hub on [FieldAdvisor.org](https://FieldAdvisor.org).

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