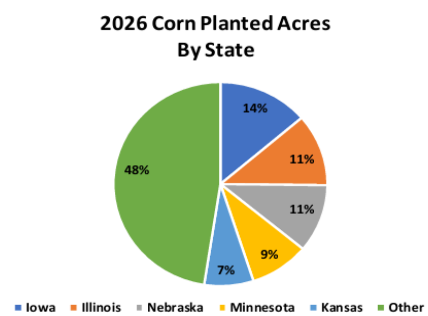
A weekly Cornbelt digest of marketing, economic, agronomic, and management information.

Commodity Market Drivers—

- **The latest USDA Prospective Plantings Report** shows farmers are planting 3% less corn compared to last year. Producers in SD, NE, IA, and MN will lead the rest of the country in fewer corn acres. SD acres will fall by 550,000 to 6.3 mil., the biggest decline in any of the top corn-producing states. The USDA said corn acres in NE, IA, and WI will each fall by about 450,000 acres. Soybeans in the U.S. will replace at least some of the corn acres, increasing by 4% compared to 2025. IA will see the biggest rise in soybean acres, up by 450,000 over last year. WI will jump by 370,000 acres, and NE will plant an additional 350,000.

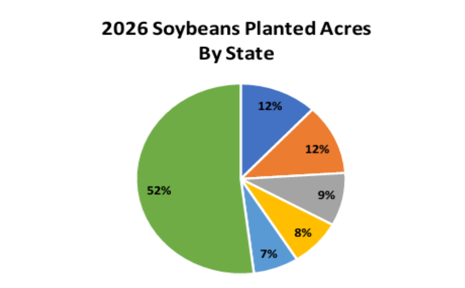
	Planted (1,000 Acres)
United States	**95,338**
% Change from Previous Estimate	N/A
% Change from Previous Season	↓ 3.5

Top 5 States	Planted (1,000 Acres)		% Δ PY
Iowa	13,100	↓	3.3
Illinois	10,900	↓	2.7
Nebraska	10,300	↓	4.2
Minnesota	8,600	↓	3.4
Kansas	7,100	↑	3.6



	Planted (1,000 Acres)
United States	**84,700**
% Change from Previous Estimate	N/A
% Change from Previous Season	↑ 4.3

Top 5 States	Planted (1,000 Acres)		% Δ PY
Illinois	10,500	↑	1.9
Iowa	9,900	↑	4.8
Minnesota	7,300	↑	2.1
North Dakota	6,700	↑	2.3
South Dakota	5,600	↑	9.8

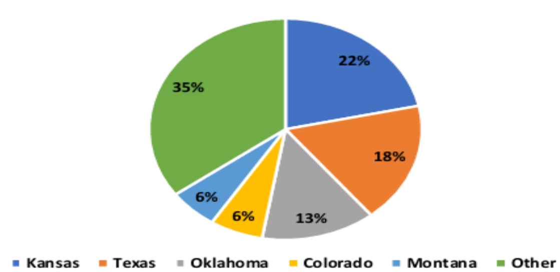


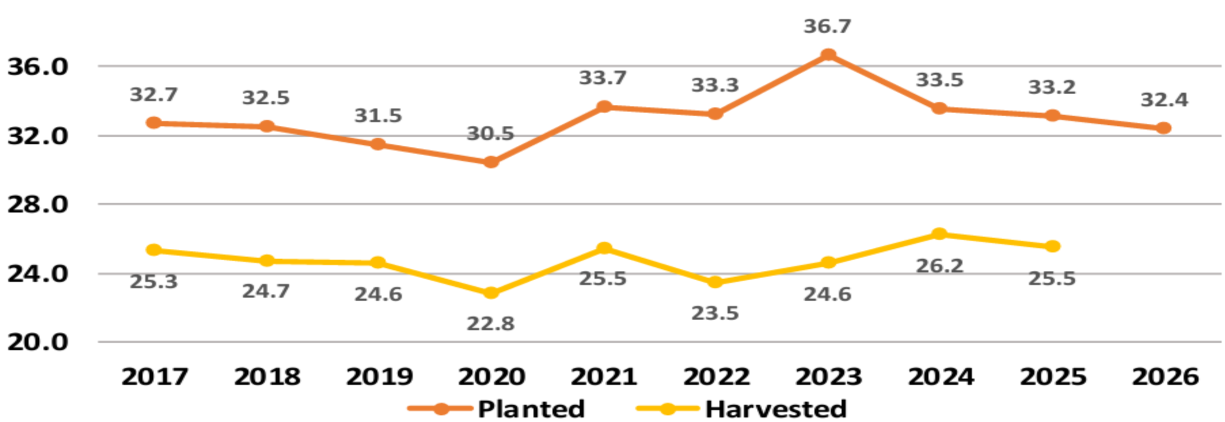
- **While the USDA's Prospective Plantings report showed more soybeans** and a drop in corn acres, Rich Nelson, a commodity broker with Allendale, said there are still questions, even after the report, "Keep in mind, what makes this year's survey a little different and unique is that this is a survey of producers in the first 2 weeks of March, and it's very likely the vast majority of those surveys came in the first week, which would be likely before producers really started talking about that fertilizer issue, which was in that second week. So, we have some questions regarding whether the survey itself is accurate or not, but for now, it is a number suggesting it may be a more muted corn-soybean acreage switch." Nelson talked about the shift from corn to soybean acres, "Corn acres down 3.5 mil. Soybean acres, in this case, are rising up by about 3.5 as well. So, the trade had expected a number of probably 4.4 mil. or more for a general switch. So, in the trade's mindset, these numbers are probably not completely finalized, but for the overall acreage story, I think they're probably right." Nelson also pointed to wheat numbers, "1.6 mil. acres for total decline versus last year, at 43.8 mil. This would be, in this case, a bit lower than the trade estimate. And when you look at the breakdown, it's really interesting. USDA, in this case, lowered its prior view. So, remember, we've already had a winter wheat number. USDA lowered its prior view of winter wheat just a little bit here compared with that January estimate. They also gave us, in this case, a 575,000-acre decline for the other spring. On top of that, another 200,000 acres are out of this discussion with durum. So really, for wheat, we very lightly reigned in the winter wheat acre story." (Radio Oklahoma Network)

	Planted (1,000 Acres)
United States	**32,410**
% Change from Previous Estimate	↓ 1.8
% Change from Previous Season	↓ 2.2

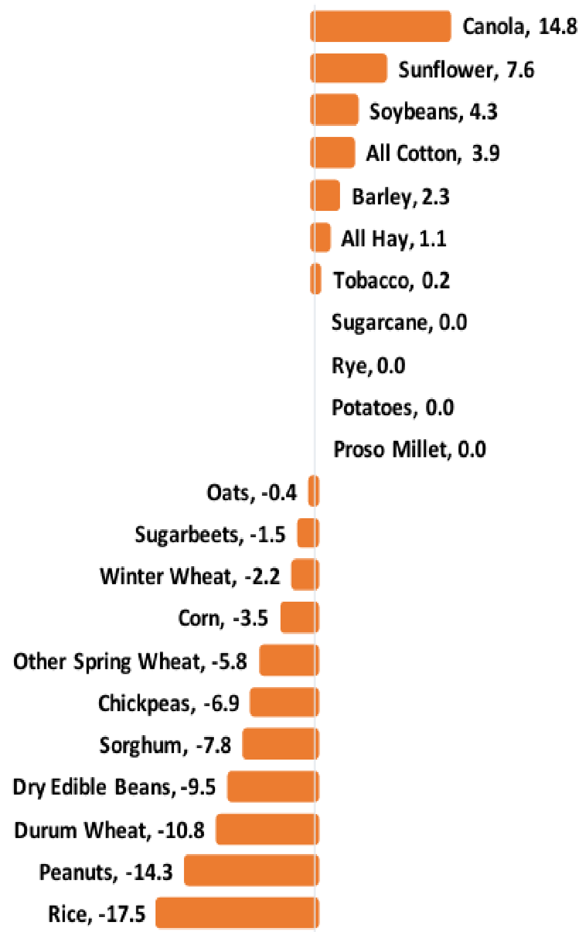
	Top 5 States Planted (1,000 Acres)	% Δ PY
Kansas	7,000	↓ 4.1
Texas	5,700	↑ 3.6
Oklahoma	4,400	↑ 6.0
Colorado	2,050	↓ 2.4
Montana	1,900	↓ 15.6

2026 Winter Wheat Planted Acres By State





- **U.S. farmers are expected to plant fewer corn acres** this spring and shift more land to soybeans as rising input costs continue to pressure farm budgets, analysts say. Higher fertilizer and diesel prices, driven in part by global geopolitical tensions, have made corn more expensive to produce than soybeans, which require less nitrogen. As a result, producers are adjusting planting decisions to manage financial risk, according to Reuters. The shift comes as farm income is projected to decline for a 4th consecutive year, according to economists. Lower commodity prices and elevated input costs have squeezed margins across much of the farm sector. Market analysts say the acreage changes could influence grain supplies later this year, potentially supporting corn prices if production falls. Planting decisions remain fluid, however, as farmers weigh weather conditions, input availability and market volatility ahead of the spring planting season.



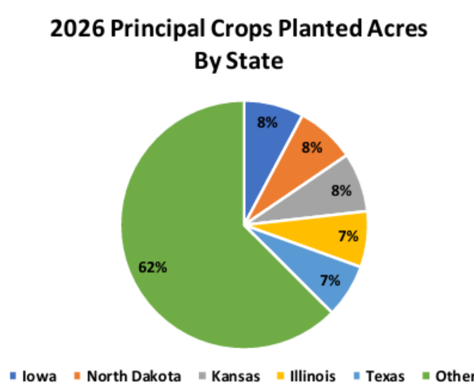
USDA

2026 Principal Crops

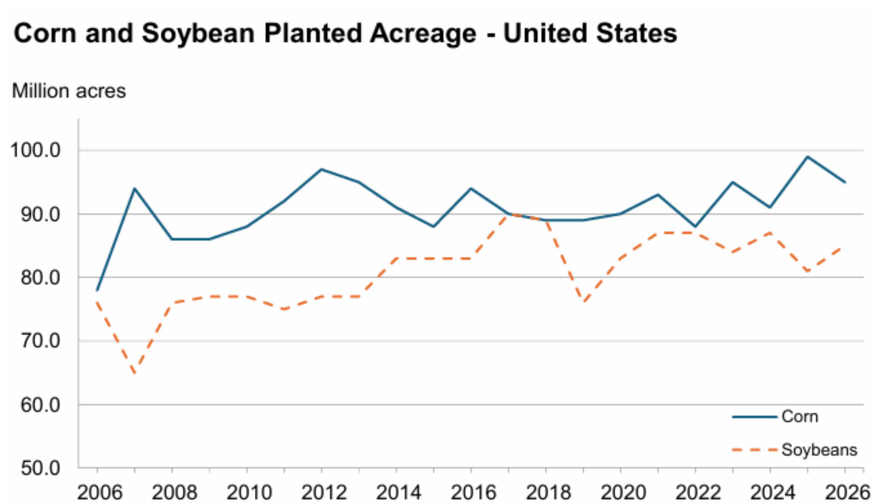
Planted Acreage

	Planted (1,000 Acres)
United States	309,951
% Change from Previous Estimate	N/A
% Change from Previous Season	↓ 0.5

Top 5 States	Planted (1,000 Acres)	% Δ PY
Iowa	24,190	↑ 0.2
North Dakota	23,921	↓ 1.3
Kansas	23,858	↓ 0.4
Illinois	22,575	↓ 0.9
Texas	21,556	↓ 0.1



- **The USDA Prospective Plantings Report** showed farmers intend to plant fewer corn acres and more soybeans this spring than compared to last year. Mike Zuzolo, president of Global Commodity Analytics, said the USDA numbers may still be fluid yet heading into spring planting, I think the biggest thing that I keep thinking about, and maybe a lot of other analysts, because of the energy crisis that we're starting to feel pretty directly now in the chemicals and in the fertilizer and diesel prices, is that we figured that maybe this acreage report especially would have a 'Best By' date or a stale date on it, given the fact that producer decisions are probably still pretty fluid right now. So, I think that's at the top of my mind right now, and even if USDA continues down the path of a bigger corn acreage number than what the trade was expecting, a much smaller bean acreage number than the trade was expecting, at 84.7 mil., that was the big call-out or the big shout-out in the report." He said even if the acreage numbers are accurate, corn yield is a big concern because of potential input cutbacks, "If those numbers hold, then I think you really have to start wondering about the national yield in the corn, because I think we will see some cutbacks on inputs. And so, my numbers are going to stay below 180 national yield for corn until I see the all clear with the energy markets and the Strait of Hormuz. So, my initial takeaway was that I wasn't expecting the trade or the USDA to go the route I went. I was all the way up at 87 mil. bean acres. And I'm going to hold that number because we, in 2022, did 87.5, in 2024 we did 87.3, and my simple math was at almost 99 mil. corn acres this past year, we could easily rotate back into 87 in terms of beans, especially, I think, given USDA's wheat number." The wheat prediction was much lower than the trade expected, and Zuzolo wondered what other commodities could be planted into those missing wheat acres, "Where are those acres going? Are they going to go into corn? They're going to go into beans. Does it make sense at this point for it to go into corn? So, I think there are a lot of unanswered questions. Last thing I'll say is on that bean acreage number, one of the reasons I also stayed relatively low on the corn acreage number at 93.5, USDA came in at 95.3, was because after the 2012 drought, we have not seen a planted acreage number for corn above 94 mil., except once, other than last year, and that was in 23-24, so to get above 94 mil. in the last 12 or 15 years is really saying something, and for USD to do that, given those big acreage numbers last year, really makes me question and scratch my head." (American Ag Network)



- **Quarterly Grain Stocks were also reported by USDA on Mar. 31.**
  - ✓ **Corn stocks** on March 1, 2026, totaled 9.02 bil. bu., up 11% from March 1, 2025. 5.43 bil. were stored on farms, up 21% from a year earlier. Off-farm stocks, at 3.59 bil., are down 2% from a year ago. The December 2025 - February 2026 disappearance is 4.28 bil. bu., compared with 3.93 bil. bu. during the same period last year.

Top 5 States - By Total Stocks	March 1 Total (1,000 Bu)	% Δ PY	March 1 On-Farm (1,000 Bu)	% Δ PY	March 1 Off-Farm (1,000 Bu)	% Δ PY
Iowa	1,578,826	↑ 7.3	980,000	↑ 24.1	598,826	↓ 12.2
Illinois	1,453,257	↑ 5.2	720,000	↑ 20.0	733,257	↓ 6.2
Minnesota	1,085,720	↑ 15.9	810,000	↑ 22.7	275,720	↓ 0.3
Nebraska	1,029,658	↑ 9.3	620,000	↑ 24.0	409,658	↓ 7.3
South Dakota	613,251	↑ 18.6	405,000	↑ 22.7	208,251	↑ 11.2

  - ✓ **Soybean stocks** on March 1, 2026, totaled 2.10 bil. bu., up 10% from March 1, 2025. Stocks on farms are estimated at 900 mil. bu., up 3% from a year ago. Off-farm stocks, at 1.20 bil., are up 16% from last March. Disappearance for the December 2025 - February 2026 quarter totaled 1.18 bil., down 1% from the same period a year earlier.

Top 5 States - By Total Stocks	March 1 Total (1,000 Bu)	% Δ PY	March 1 On-Farm (1,000 Bu)	% Δ PY	March 1 Off-Farm (1,000 Bu)	% Δ PY
Illinois	374,952	↑ 11.0	125,000	↓ 10.7	249,952	↑ 26.4
Iowa	358,351	↓ 0.4	155,000	↓ 3.1	203,351	↑ 1.7
Minnesota	209,713	↑ 21.3	120,000	↑ 21.2	89,713	↑ 21.5
Nebraska	174,632	↑ 20.1	48,000	↑ 21.5	126,632	↑ 19.6
Indiana	151,566	↑ 1.2	72,000	↓ 15.3	79,566	↑ 22.7

  - ✓ **All wheat stocks** on March 1, 2026, totaled 1.30 bil. bu., up 5% from a year ago. On-farm stocks are estimated at 298 mil., down 3% from last March. Off-farm stocks, at 1.00 bil., are up 8% from a year ago. The December 2025 - February 2026 disappearance is 377 mil., 12% above the same period a year earlier.

Top 5 States - By Total Stocks	March 1 Total (1,000 Bu)	% Δ PY	March 1 On-Farm (1,000 Bu)	% Δ PY	March 1 Off-Farm (1,000 Bu)	% Δ PY
Kansas	285,971	↑ 14.1	11,000	↓ 6.8	274,971	↑ 15.1
North Dakota	189,115	↑ 0.8	116,000	↓ 0.9	73,115	↑ 3.5
Oklahoma	111,293	↑ 10.8	3,800	↑ 76.7	107,493	↑ 9.3
Washington	99,396	↑ 34.8	7,100	↑ 2.9	92,296	↑ 38.1
Montana	88,619	↓ 7.8	58,000	↓ 9.4	30,619	↓ 4.7

- **Pre-report trade estimates called for an uptick in soybean acreage.** If realized, it will be the 6th largest planted soybean acreage in U.S. history. Those acres will largely be pulled from last year's mammoth corn acreage. A 3.5-mil. -acre annual increase in soybean acreage, would bring the 2026 soybean planting expectation to 84.7 mil. acres. Soybean futures prices in Chicago welcomed the acreage estimate, which points to slightly lower production estimates than previously forecast by the World Ag Outlook Board at USDA's 2026 Agricultural Outlook Forum (AOF) in February. Using trendline yield estimates of 53.0 bpa, 2026 soybean production could reach 4.436 bil. bu., about 14 mil. fewer bushels than USDA's previous forecasts. USDA's soybean acreage estimate was slightly on the lower end of pre-report trade expectations, which ranged between 84.25 mil. – 86.5 mil. acres and featured an average guess of 85.549 million acres. Most of the pre-report analyst forecasts were tightly distributed around USDA's AOF estimate of 85.0 million acres, so the slightly lower NASS forecast of 84.7 mil. acres was enough of a deviation to spur bullish price activity. AR, SD, MS, IA, WI, NE, and KS are expected to account for nearly 3.0 mil. acres of new soybean plantings in 2026, compared to the previous year. Increased soybean acreage in the Delta was largely a function of reduced rice acreage while acreage gains in the Upper Midwest were made following the shift away from corn acres, particularly in SD.

- **U.S. farmers are expected to plant the smallest wheat crop on record this year**, continuing a long-term decline as producers shift to more profitable alternatives. Data from the USDA shows wheat acreage dropping as low prices and rising input costs squeeze margins. Producers across the Plains are opting for crops such as soybeans and corn, which offer stronger returns despite their own cost pressures. The Wall Street Journal reports persistent drought in key growing regions has also discouraged wheat planting, particularly for winter wheat. Analysts say global competition and ample supplies have kept wheat prices subdued, reducing incentives for U.S. growers. At the same time, higher fertilizer and fuel costs have made wheat less attractive compared to crops with better profit potential. The shift could have long-term implications for domestic supply and export competitiveness, though global markets remain well supplied for now.

- **Corn and soybean Friday market details from** General Manager Kevin Walker and staff at Legacy Grain.

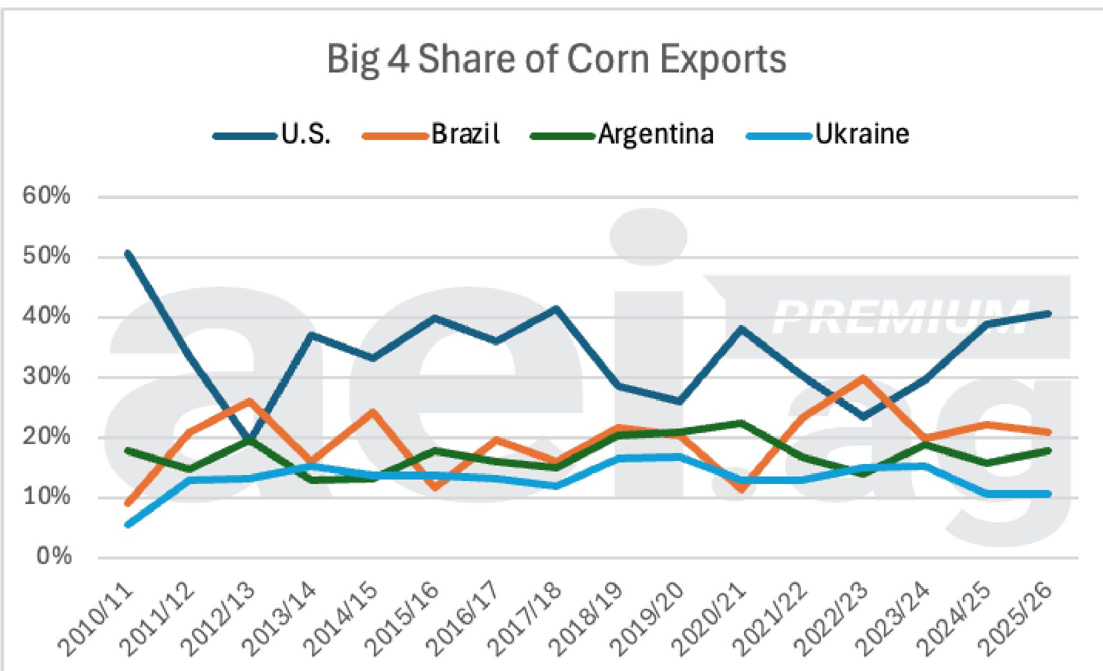
  ✓ **Soybean market drivers**: Soybeans saw losses of 1 to 5¼¢ in most contracts on Thursday, as May saw a 4¼¢ gain this week. The CmdtyView national average Cash Bean price was down 5½¢ at $10.94. Soymeal futures were down $3.00 to $4.20, as May was down 10¢ on the short week. Soy Oil futures were 100 to 183 points higher, and May was 153 points in the green. The Monday session will have a normal Sunday night open. USDA Export Sales data showed bean sales at 13 mil. bu. in the week of 3/26. That was down from last week but 35.51% above the same week last year. China was the top buyer of 5 mil., as 5 mil. bu. was switched from unknown, with 3.3 mil. sold to Bangladesh. New crop business came in at 0 bu. Census trade date was released for February this morning, with a total of 154.2 mil. bu. of soybeans shipped. That was up 34.6% from a year ago but down 27.93% from January. Meal exports were shy of the 2024 Feb record at 1.37 MMT, with bean oil at 71,814 MT. May 26 Soybeans closed at $11.63½, down 5¢, Nearby Cash_ was $10.94, down 5½¢.

✓ **Corn market drivers**: Corn futures headed into the long weekend, with some front month weakness as money was being taken off the table. Old crop contracts were fractionally to 2¢ lower, as new crop was steady to fractionally higher. May was down 9¾¢ last week, with December dropping 9¢. The CmdtyView national average Cash Corn price was down 2¼¢ at $4.12½¢. Export Sales data from Thursday morning showed 45 mil. bu. for old crop business in the week ending on 3/26. That was down 5.6% from last week and 2% below the same period last year. Mexico was the top buyer of 6.7 mil. bu., with Japan purchasing 6.6 mil. and 6 mil. in sales to Taiwan. New crop business was tallied at 4 mil. bu., all to Mexico. Monthly export data from Census showed a total of 266 mil. bu. of corn exported in February, a record for the month and 2.44% above the January. Distillers' exports were up 8.26% vs. a year ago at 919,855 MT. Ethanol shipments were a February record 794.45 mil. gals. May 26 Corn closed at $4.52¼, down 2¢, Nearby Cash was $4.12½¢ , down 2¼¢.

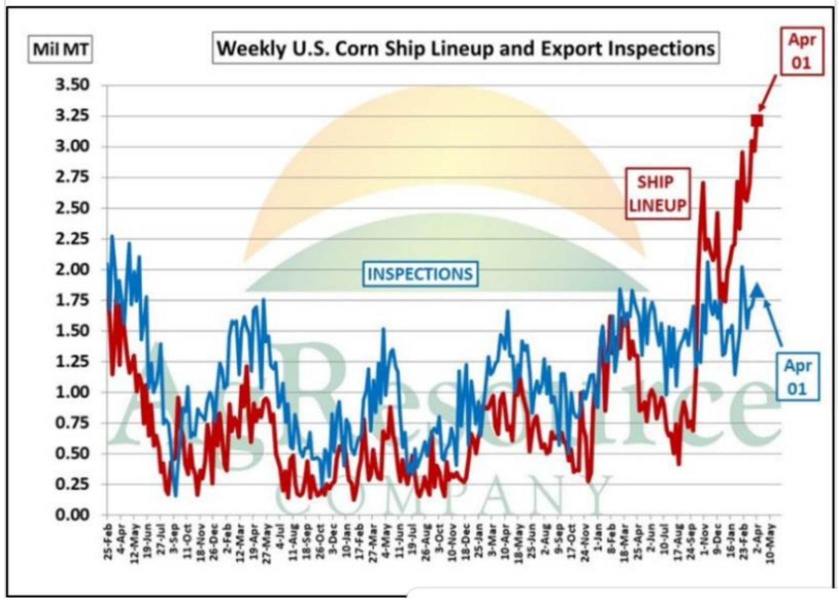
- **Brazilian soybean output is growing.** Brazil is expected to set new records in soybean production, reaching a new high for the third consecutive year, and in exports for 2026-27. Production is estimated at 6.76 bil. bu., representing a 3.3% increase from the 2025-26 estimate of 6.54 bil., according to a report from the [Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) of the USDA.](#) "While the increase is partly driven by projected area expansion, it can also be attributed to improved cultivation practices, such as greater adoption of no-till farming and better resource management, as well as investments in technology and machinery made in prior seasons," the FAS said. Exports are estimated at 4.32 bil. bu., an increase of 3.9% compared to 2025-26. The increase is driven by available supply and steady demand from China, the FAS said. The recent strengthening of the Brazilian real against the US dollar may moderate export growth, it said. Soybeans represent more than 95% of all oilseeds produced in the country. Soybean planted area is expected to reach 121 mil. acres in 2026-27, a 2.8% increase from last year. Although still a significant expansion, this growth rate is lower than the average annual expansion over the past 5 years, estimated at 4.2%, potentially indicating a slowdown in soybean area expansion, the FAS said. "This trend reflects the agricultural economic outlook for the 2025-26 season, as high interest rates, elevated production costs, and flattening prices have resulted in lower producer margins," the FAS said. Brazil's national average soybean yield is estimated at 55.7 bu. per acre. This represents an increase of less than 1% compared to the 2025-26 estimate, but nearly 6% above the average yield recorded over the past 5 years. Soybean oil production is forecasted at 12.8 mil. tonnes with domestic consumption expected to increase to 11.1 mil. tonnes, up 2.7%. "The expected rise in oil production and consumption is primarily driven by biodiesel blending mandates," the FAS said. According to the official Brazilian biodiesel blending calendar, Brazil plans to increase the biodiesel blend to B16 by the end of March. However, this increase may face delays due to new technical validation and engine compatibility testing requirements before implementation, it said.

- **Brazil is heading for another record-breaking soybean harvest**, but Purdue Univ. agricultural economist Joana Colussi explains shrinking profit margins are pushing farmers there near the break-even point and could finally slow the country's rapid acreage expansion sooner than expected, "This year, the expansion in the crop area in Brazil was around 4% or 3%. But in the past, we have seen 2 digits, sometimes 10%. So, I would say that we could expect a slowdown for sure, starting in the next crop season, 2025-2026, and also in the coming years." Colussi cautions that while Brazilian farmers are under financial stress, it does not mean producers in the US will again have the upper hand in the world soybean market. But the competition from Brazil won't be as aggressive. (WILL radio)

- **The U.S. is on pace for record corn exports** during the 2025/26 marketing year, and it would have been hard to believe just a few years ago that this record would have happened without China making large purchases, observes ag economist David Widmar of AgEconomicInsights.ag. "For 2025/26, global corn exports are up to 8.13 bil. bu. While the current estimate is slightly ahead of the 2021/22 peak, it's likely too soon to declare a new record for global corn traded. Since 2010/11, the U.S, Brazil, Argentina, and Ukraine have frequently accounted for more than 80% of global corn exports. More recently, the Big 4 have seen their share of activity increase from a low of 82% in 2022/23 to a record high of 90% for the 2025/26 marketing year. So, in addition to corn exports being heavily concentrated among these four, the group's share has increased in recent years. Not surprisingly, the U.S. is often the largest corn exporter and accounts for 30% to 40% of global corn exports. Notably, the U.S. market share hit a low of 23% in 2022/23 but has since increased to 41% for 2025/26. In addition to 2025/26 having the highest market share in eight years, the U.S. is also above the 40% market-share threshold, a level reached only four times in the last 16 years. In short, the second factor behind the surge in U.S. corn exports has been growth in market share. Outside of the U.S., Brazil has experienced a whiplash in its share of export activity. After dramatically displacing U.S. activity in 2022/23, Brazil's market share has since moderated at around 20%. While Argentina is expecting to post a year-over-year increase, activity will remain below its 2018-2020 highs. Lastly, Ukraine has posted considerable declines in market share, undoing many years of growth. From 2010/11 to 2019/20, Ukraine's share increased from 5% to 17% but has since retreated to 11%. Certainly, the country's conflict and the loss of 10 mil. acres are also affecting global trade patterns. While there is no clear normal level for U.S. market share, the upside seems limited. However, total corn exports remain below the long-run trendline. As such, the biggest factor in whether the U.S. can maintain 3 bil. bu. worth of annual corn exports is likely the extent to which the global corn trade increases in the coming years."



- **As of Apr. 1,** there was 126 mil. bu. identified in the U.S. vessel lineup that were scheduled to load corn for export. "That is a new RECORD," says Chief economist Bill Tierney at Ag Resource. Next week's corn export inspections could be 72 mil. bu. That is up 2.5% from the previous week. There were 13 vessels in the lineup. That's up 7 from the previous week. Based on the recent pace of inspections, March Census exports could be 320 mil. bu. In the March WASDE, the USDA left its projection of U.S. corn exports unchanged at a record 3.300 bil. bu. Last year's exports were a record 2.858 bil. bu. Tierney expects exports will be 3.250 bil. bu. There have been no corn exports to China, However, so far this year, China has booked 106 mil. bu. of sorghum. It is likely that additional sorghum purchases have been made, but they may currently be registered to "unknown" destinations."



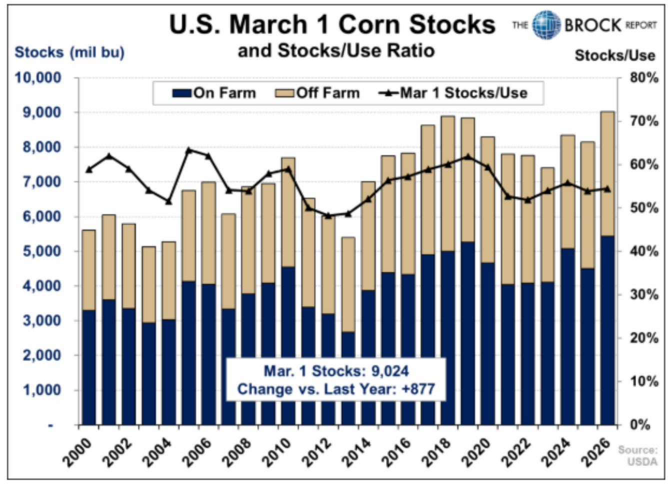
- **With less grain sold, grain stocks are higher.** That was the bottom-line Mar. 31 when USDA released its latest [Grain Stocks data]. USDA estimated March 1 soybean stocks up 10% from a year earlier, corn stocks up 11% and wheat stocks up 5% with the soybean estimate above average trade expectations and corn and wheat below analysts' expectations. Soybean stocks in all positions on March 1 were estimated at 2.10 bil. bu., up 10% from 1.91 bil. bu. on March 1, 2025, the USDA said. On-farm stocks were 900 mil. bu., up 3% from last year, and off-farm stocks totaled 1.20 bil. bu., up 16%. Indicated disappearance during the December 2025-February 2026 quarter was 1.18 bil. bu., down 1% from the same period a year earlier, the USDA said. "Stocks were on the high side of trade expectations, but probably not enough to believe that the USDA has to revise the final soybean crop estimate out Sept. 30 any higher, so a little bit on the heavy side on the stocks, which means a lower residual usage," said Bill Lapp, chief economist with Advanced Economic Solutions, Omaha, NE. "What the USDA will do for soybeans in particular is make adjustments to the crop next September after the marketing year, after we've exported all those soybeans we're going to export, and after we've crushed all the soybeans, they come back and say 'well, that crop, based on residual usage, must have been either smaller or larger.' This report does not tell me that, it's probably kind of a neutral on that." "Corn stocks affirms the outlook for feed and residual use during 2025-26 to be somewhere near 6.2 bil. bu., much to the chagrin of all the people who said that's way too high," Lapp said. "This, to me, confirms that estimate is in line with reality."

- **Speaking of grain stocks,** a great observation comes from [Agatha Kingsbury, an ag economist] who spent too little time at the USDA's Foreign Agriculture Service before losing her non-political job when the administration changed in early 2025. She points to the trade upheaval as the basis for the higher than usual amount of US grain stocks reported March 31. She says, "Soybean stocks came in larger than last year, and larger than some expected. That's notable, especially considering domestic crush is running near record levels and close to capacity, yet the 2025/26 export program has been underwhelming. Why? We can't ignore the bigger picture:
  - ✓ Ongoing trade disputes with major buyers
  - ✓ A constant cycle of tariff threats and uncertainty
  - ✓ A noisy, often inflammatory trade narrative

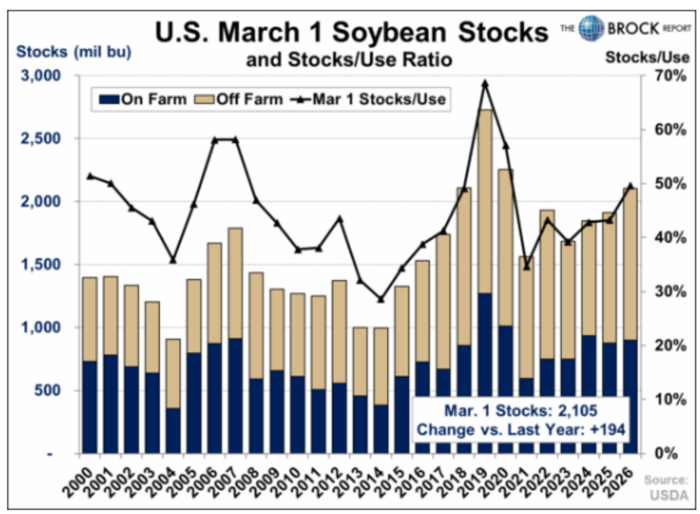
  All of this has taken a real toll on the U.S. soybean balance sheet. Even with strong domestic demand, exports haven't carried their weight. So now we zoom out. Larger old crop stocks; likely larger carryout; and now… more soybean acres in 2026. Which points to potentially bigger production on top of an already comfortable supply situation."
  Kingsbury looks ahead to the 2026-27 marketing year that begins Sept. 1. "The saving grace is likely to be domestic crushing and the biofuels story. Because if we're being honest, export prospects don't look particularly bright right now, and part of that is structural. During my tenure at USDA Foreign Agricultural Service, I constantly heard the same line: "The U.S. can't make it without China, and China can't make it without U.S. soybeans." At the time, which may have been true. But is it still? Today, China has significantly diversified supply, with Brazil rapidly expanding production and export capacity. The idea that China needs U.S. soy the way it once did is increasingly outdated. On the flip side, the U.S. can operate without China as a dominant buyer, but only if we adapt:
  - ✓ Lean further into domestic demand (crush, biofuels)
  - ✓ Redirect export promotion efforts toward diversifying markets.
  - ✓ Reevaluate how we allocate resources across commodities and value-added exports.

  For years, a significant share of export promotion funding has been concentrated on maintaining the China relationship. That strategy made sense in a different era." Kingsbury says the bottom line is the fac that the story isn't just about acres, it's about demand. And right now, the real shift isn't in the field… it's in how (and where) demand is built. It may be time to rethink the narrative. It may be time for USDA to talk more with domestic industry and soy crushers, and less with export promotion folks. We always say, "Time will tell," but do we really have time to waste?"

- **"The USDA's quarterly Grain Stocks report**," says the Brock Report. "…offered updated estimates for corn, soybean, and wheat inventories as of March 1. The data largely aligned with expectations, with no major surprises across the board. Corn stocks showed the largest deviation from our estimate, though the difference was relatively minor at just 59 mil. bu. lower. Despite these record-large inventories, the stocks-to-use ratio for the December–February quarter came in at just 54.4%, a relatively tight figure given the supply backdrop. For comparison, the last time March 1 stocks approached similar levels (2017–2019), stocks-to-use ratios pushed as high as 62%. This highlights the strength of demand, particularly from exports and feed usage. Looking at the All-Quarters Stocks chart, elevated stock levels are largely a function of record supply, with 2025/26 total supply coming in at 18.6 bil. bu. March 1 corn stocks as a percent of that supply sit at 48.53%, the third lowest among the years shown. This reinforces the narrative of strong usage, as a historically large supply is being worked through. March 1 corn stocks increased across most major states year-over-year, with gains in both on-farm and off-farm storage. Larger inventories in states like IA, IL, and MN highlight the large supply, while increased on-farm storage suggests producers continue to hold large amounts of corn.



  The soybean inventory numbers show totally different story than corn. Despite lower overall U.S. supplies compared to a year ago, stocks remain elevated, with March 1 inventories at 2.105 bil. bu. Of that total, 900 mil. are held on farm, with 1.205 bil. off farm. The stocks-to-use ratio came in at 49.7%, up more than 6 percentage points from a year ago. March 1 soybean stocks as a percentage of total supply came in at 45.7%, the highest since 2020. For comparison, last year's March 1 stocks were closer to 40% of supply. This higher percentage reflects softer demand, particularly in the export market from China. Despite the large increase in overall March 1 stocks, on farm storage was up just 23 mil. bu. Supported largely by decreases in soybeans on farm in the 2 key states of IA and IL." For the complete commentary and charts go to The Brock Report.

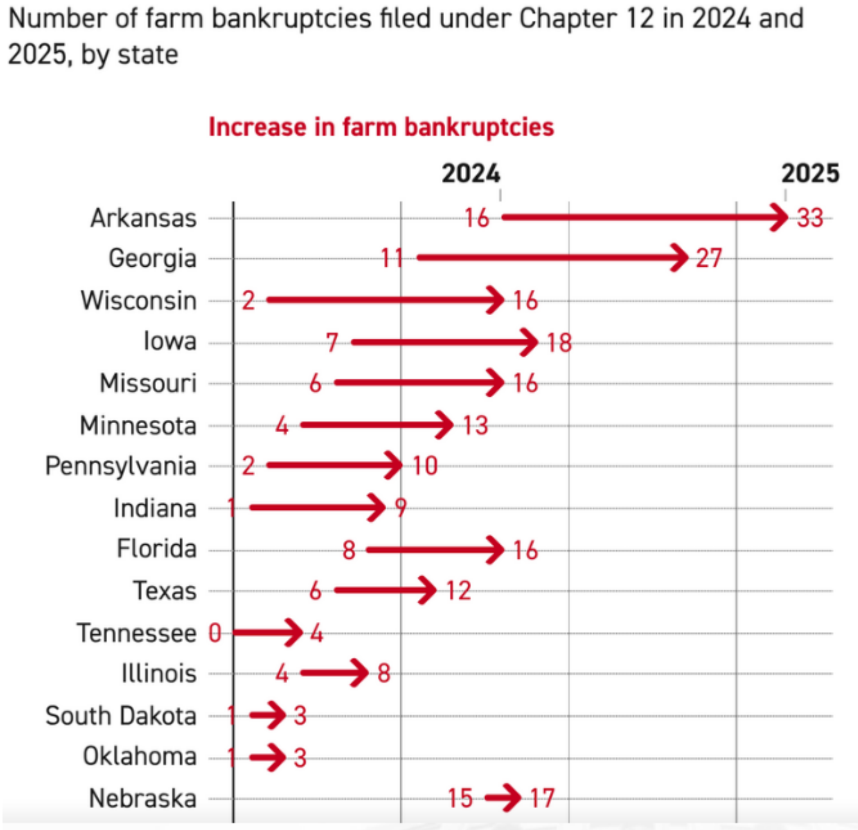


- **Marketing.** "The corn market lost ground on the week while beans had small gains." -- Matt Bennett.
  - ✓ **Corn—futures**. May '26 corn posted the second straight week of losses. May settled at \$4.52¾**,** down 2¢. This was 8¼¢ off the high and 1¢ off the low. May lost 9¾¢ for the week. Technically, we look like the high could be in for the time being. Looking at the chart, we're back to testing support under the market.
  - ✓ **Corn—cash and basis**. Basis was steady. While basis levels improved, the board moving lower wasn't offset by any means. With big farmer holdings yet, basis is unlikely to improve much on market moves lower, while we've seen widening on rallies. St. Louis river terminal basis is 28¢ over May (2¢ improved).
  - ✓ **Corn—marketing strategy**. The cash market in the west has tons of corn to wade through, while the east is a different story. This stocks report showed on-farm farm stocks went up 20% from a year ago, which affirms why basis has acted as it has. The bottom line here is that the best chance for old corn to have value is to see crude oil stay strong and the corn market eventually work higher.
  - ✓ **Corn—2026 crop.** December 2026 corn ended the week at \$4.81¼, down 9½¢ on the week. This fall corn market was all over the place this past week. While we saw some \$4.90s, we also saw corn dip into the \$4.70s. I keep reminding people remember what \$4.50 and below felt like. While that doesn't mean we go out and hedge the whole crop.
  - ✓ **Beans—futures.** Beans had solid gains on the week early in Thursday's session but backed off and gave up some of those gains. May beans settled at \$11.63½, down 5¢. This was 10¾¢ off the high and 1½¢ off the low. Beans gained 4¼¢ on the week. May meal settled 10¢ lower on the week at \$315.2, while soy oil closed at 68.94¢, up 1.53¢.
  - ✓ **Beans—cash and basis**. Basis was steady. St. Louis terminals were 12¢ over May, 1¢ improved. Cash beans were a bit higher on the week due to the board rallying. When it comes to cash beans, the grower doesn't have near as many bushels to sell relative to corn.
  - ✓ **Beans—marketing strategy.** We could see some strong basis levels moving forward. Crush has remained strong and will continue to, but at the same time, exports are poor and will likely stay that way. I continue to think keeping gambling bushels around is a good idea but wouldn't sit on a huge percentage at some of the best prices we've seen in the last couple of years**.**
  - ✓ **Beans--2026 crop**. Nov 2026 beans settled at \$11.54**,** up 10¢ on the week. New beans had a decent week, likely supported by the lower-than-expected acreage number. It's expensive to put corn in the ground, so those with swing acres definitely have a tough choice to make.
  - ✓ **Price ratio**—**2026 crop**. 2.39/1, beans to corn, based on fall futures, +6¢/week.

- **Market advisor's thoughts/suggestions**: Matt Bennett. "While the highly anticipated  USDA acreage intentions report dropped on Tuesday, the war situation has been front and center when it comes to news. Most likely, hedge pressure continues to hit this market as growers continue to sell bounces. With the funds selling 22,000 of their longs, they still sit at a 258,000-contract long position. So, what we've seen recently is some farmer selling while the funds pull back a bit-this is likely due to thoughts of some war premium exiting the market in the event we see a ceasefire of some sort. Plain and simple, this market is likely to be volatile until we straighten out the Iran situation. It's entirely possible if oil remains strong, that corn could rally even with solid acres and a good yield this summer. However, I believe risk-management on rallies should be a consideration-with flexibility a key. Typically, oil to corn likes to stay around 15.5/1 on a ratio, and right now, we're far from that. However, the longer oil stays high, the better the chance we see corn work closer to that ratio. I wouldn't bet the farm we head there, especially with how volatile the oil market has been. However, selling into rallies with offers in place seems like a good plan. If a person wants to stay long, I'd rather do it on paper. If you have your inputs quantified on new corn, run the math at normal yields. If you can make this work, locking in some break-even levels in the black would sure feel nice compared to the last few years. Keeping flexibility in the event you want to get more aggressive is also a great idea as there's no doubt, we could see much higher prices……The soybean Consensus of Trades report showed funds buying more beans, adding 13,000 contracts to their long position-putting it at 204,000. The acreage report gave some support as most of the guesses were above the USDAs 84.7 mil. acres. The buzz around the renewable fuel numbers remains supportive as well. On the flip side, we know Brazil had a big crop and world stocks are more than adequate. So, the bean market is trying to find its way. While we could make the case, we should stay strong due to strong domestic demand in the US, it's tough to get too bulled up with the stocks situation. As with corn, much of the direction could have more to do with the war situation than anything. I still see these prices as something to consider, especially if you keep your flex. For those with a solid APH, these prices work, but I'm well aware they may be more of a challenge for others. What it again comes down to is marketing based on your break-evens.".....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 past week on the podcast, we talked about the acreage/stocks report and how that may impact us moving forward. Here's the link. Protecting Your Profits: Grain Market Update with Matt Bennett

Farm Economy---

- **GRIM FINDINGS.** Farmers have been struggling with consistently high input costs thin



their margins. Small producers are especially embattled, and they continue to exit the market as profitability becomes harder to achieve, according to USDA data analyzed by POLITICO. The number of farms in the United States fell by almost 150,000 in the last 5 years, and total farmland area was reduced by more than 21 mil. acres nationally. Farm numbers dropped 3 times as fast as farmland area did, according to the data, showing there was significantly less farmland loss compared with the number of farms that closed. The development suggests smaller farms are consolidating or being absorbed into bigger ones. This trend was noticeable in 42 states, including TX, MT and KS, which had among the most farmland acres in 2025. MT, for instance, had 14% fewer farms in 2025 compared with 2021, but the state only lost around 1% of its farmland. "We've seen rising input costs, we've seen trade disruptions, demand disruptions, we've seen decreased prices for commodities," said Bailey Conrady, manager of the Champaign Co. Farm Bureau, in an interview. "As you see farmers retiring, filing for bankruptcy, going out of business, stepping away for any reason, that just drives that further consolidation," Conrady added. Chapter 12 bankruptcy filings — the debt restructuring pathway designed for family farmers and fishers — increased by 46 percent in 2025 from a year earlier, with the Southeast and Midwest hit hardest. Also at the White House: Trump plans to send Congress a budget request April 3 detailing his policy and funding wish list for fiscal 2027, according to a spokesperson for the White House budget office, our Jennifer Scholtes reported. The president's budget is scheduled to arrive on Capitol Hill almost nine weeks after it was due, on Feb. 2. Though the fiscal blueprint is nonbinding, top appropriators in both parties have expressed frustration with the delay since they rely on the framework to begin writing the dozen annual funding bills Congress must pass by Sept. 30.

- **The farm economy is struggling**, thanks to the Mid-East conflict. That is the opinion of Mike Seyfert, (left)president and CEO of the National Grain and Feed Assn., who says the grain and feed industry's transportation costs have risen significantly, "Yeah, it's absolutely something that we're watching and following. And you know, since the war in Iran started, what we've seen, and our members have reported to us, is on vessels out of the center gulf, let's take the center gulf, they've been saying premiums of $1 mil. to $1.5 mil. That equates to about 50–55¢ extra per bu. And when you think of where we've been dealing with competitive issues in the global market, and some of the margins that we producers, our members, are operating on, that's tough. And you know, we're seeing it in trucking. A $1 increase in diesel fuel is about a $20 increase in a 100-mile round trip, or about 2¢ a bu." Rail shipping costs are about to head significantly higher too, "The rail side, a lot of those contracts, fuel surcharges, if there are any in that, probably won't go into effect until maybe more in the May timeframe, the way those contracts were written. But what we've been told back of the envelope, kind of taking a look at it, assume that that surcharge could equate to about $375 a railcar, which is 11¢ a bu., which may not sound like a lot until you take 110-car shuttle train, and that's $41,000, and so, a real impact there. And you know, we also have heard, even on the vessels that can get booked, do go out, challenges with what they call bunkers, which is where they get their fuel as they're in transit in that, and so transportation is a big issue, I think, the longer this goes on." Regarding transportation, Seyfert said there seems to be good progress on Capitol Hill for a forthcoming highway bill, "Seems to be good progress being made on the highway bill, particularly on the House side. I think what we're really hoping for, they're working on, is some increased truck weights that would be more efficient for our members, for producers, and a lot of the trucks we have now operate safer than we've had in the past. And also looking at some more reasonable hours of service exemptions that are more reflective of how we haul grain and feed here in the country. And really, everybody thinks of at harvest, but we're moving grain throughout the year. It's really not seasonal, so looking at that." And there is the Water Resources Development Act, "Obviously, the waterways are the competitive advantage we have against South America and other areas right now. So, continuing to get the funding, the resources, we need to update that lock and dam system, many of which are past their 50-year lifespan on the Mississippi, but also looking out into the PNW and the Snake River dams, and making sure there that we maintain those dams, and that we don't get language in the bills that would allow those to be breached at some point in time." (Agriculture of America)

- **Inflation has become a common element** in the economy, but it's rate changes from time to time and various agricultural inputs also change in price inflation over time. Univ. of IL Farmdoc ag economists looked at a dozen inputs and other measure of inflation and provided a basis for what you probably already knew or expected. "For the annual change from 2024 to 2025 (labeled 2025 in Table 1), the input price changes for anhydrous ammonia and phosphorus were higher than the annual change in the implicit price deflator or general inflation. For the 2021 to 2025 period, all agricultural inputs illustrated in Table 1 except for feed and seed had higher rates of change than general inflation. Turning to the 10-year averages, feed, seed, and agricultural chemicals had rates of change lower than general inflation. The 10-year input price increases for anhydrous ammonia, phosphorus, and diesel exceeded 5%, which was more than double the annual rate of change in general inflation."

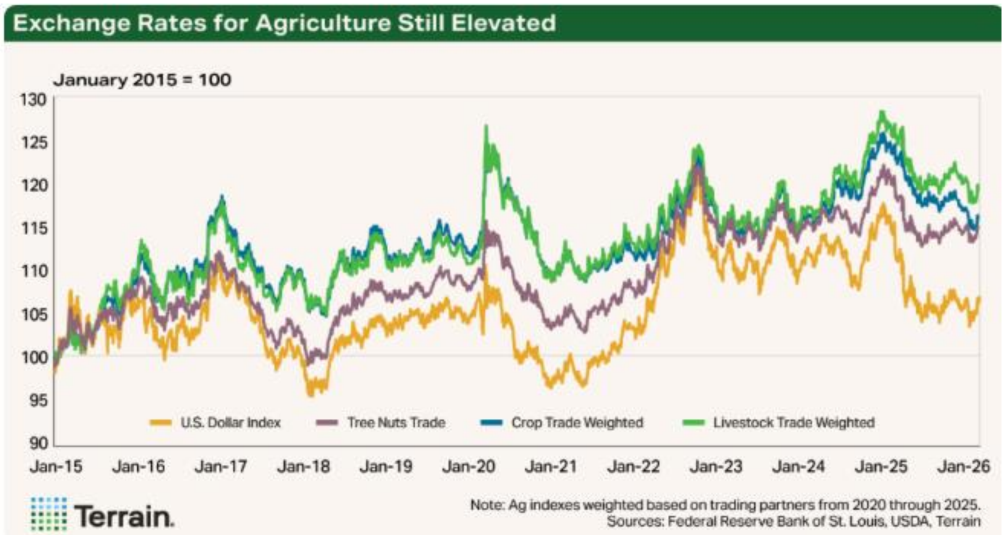
Table 1. Historical Annual Rates of Change for General Inflation and Farm Input Prices

	Annual Percentage Changes		
	25	21 to 25	16 to 25
Implicit Price Deflator for Personal Consumption Expenditures	2.6%	3.6%	2.5%
Agricultural Production Items	9.6%	7.3%	3.1%
Feed	-2.1%	2.1%	1.1%
Seed	0.0%	3.6%	0.8%
Anhydrous Ammonia	6.5%	19.6%	6.6%
Diammonium Phosphate (18-46-0)	9.4%	17.7%	6.5%
Potash	-3.6%	12.1%	4.0%
Agricultural Chemicals	-0.5%	6.5%	2.1%
Diesel	-4.6%	14.9%	6.3%
Supplies and Repairs	2.2%	5.1%	3.5%
Machinery	0.8%	6.7%	4.2%
Building Materials	2.2%	7.4%	4.9%
Wages	2.3%	4.9%	4.6%

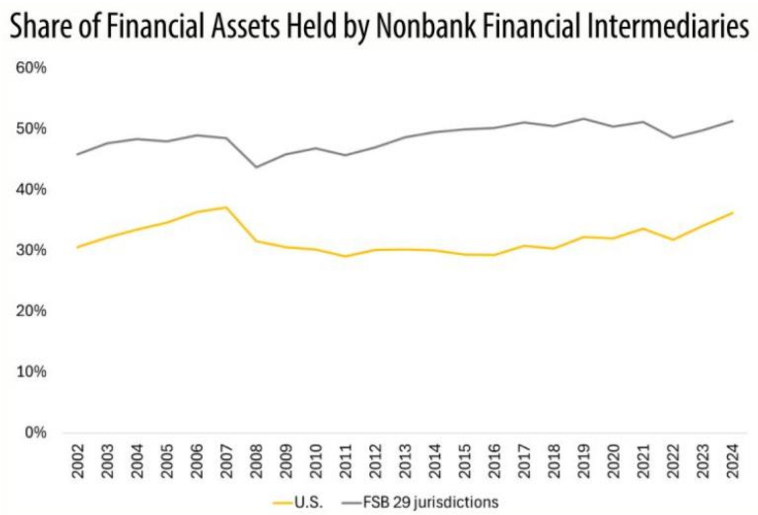
farmdocDAILY "

"Over long periods of time, farm input prices are significantly correlated with general inflation. However, farm input prices are by no means perfectly correlated with general inflation. Each input has its own supply and demand fundamentals. Farm input price indices for machinery and labor were more correlated with general inflation than feed, seed, fertilizer, and fuels. For the input price categories examined, the rates of change from February 2025 to February 2026 were substantially above general inflation for nitrogen, phosphorus, and potash. The anhydrous ammonia price was 11% higher in February 2026 than it was a year earlier. The price of anhydrous ammonia increased another 13% in March. Compared to March 2025, the price of anhydrous ammonia was 23% higher in March 2026. Higher input prices will impact 2026 breakeven prices and acreage decisions."

- **If we have a weak dollar, should that not benefit farm-related exports?** No, says [Matt Clark, Executive Director of Terrain Ag.](#) "Typically, a weaker U.S. dollar makes U.S. products more competitive in the global market. Change in the U.S. Dollar Index is often reported as a proxy for the performance of the U.S. dollar. This index is heavily weighted toward the euro, Japanese yen and British pound—accounting for more than 80% of the index, mostly the euro. From 2020 to 2025, the EU, Japan and the U.K. accounted for about 15% of U.S. crop exports. The currencies of other important trade parters, including China and Mexico, are not included in the index. Therefore, moves in the U.S. Dollar Index are not always reflective of changes to our agricultural export partners' purchasing power. As a result, I don't believe the recent softness in the U.S. dollar on its own, though helpful, will be enough to significantly tip the scale for an export boon. Moreover, competitor exporting countries may also experience currency weakness alongside the U.S., which blunts the impact of a weaker U.S. dollar. The Brazilian real, for instance, has been weakening to the Chinese yuan long term, limiting some of the recent benefit of a weakening U.S. dollar to the yuan. Many agricultural products have a certain amount of price inelasticity, a fancy way of saying that consumption remains relatively stable no matter what the price. So, even when an exchange rate may make an agricultural good slightly more or less affordable in another country, it does not necessarily imply a change in consumption. For example, corn, soybeans (including meal and oil), cotton and dairy products each observed one of their top export years on a volume basis in either 2020 or 2025, when exchange rates peaked. Recent global events have led to a sharp appreciation in the U.S. dollar. In times of uncertainty, the dollar has been viewed as a safe asset. Should global uncertainty continue, the dollar may regain some ground against other currencies and cease to be a tailwind to exports. The dollar has only slightly weakened compared with the currencies of our top trade partners. This weakening can act as a light tailwind to exports, but it is unlikely to dramatically push additional, or previously unlooked-for, exports. Supply-and-demand fundamentals will continue to be the driving factor for exports. The U.S. has ample supplies of many commodities and needs additional global consumption, supply shocks, or (more recently) uncertainty around future trade flows to drive additional exports.



- **The following have a lot in common:** vendors, private banks, credit unions, family, friends and other groups**.** They are all financing agriculture and are known as non-bank or non-traditional lenders. And KS St. Univ. ag economists report, "we've found that debt extended by such lenders totals a value likely larger than published estimates suggest." They are considered "nonbank financial intermediaries (NBFIs) — a category of entities and individuals other than central banks, banks and public financial institutions. In 2024, of the reported U.S. $145 tril. in financial assets, nearly 2/3 traced to NBFI sources. Of the $94.5 tril. in U.S. NBFI assets, "other financial intermediaries" such as hedge funds, trust companies and captive financial institutions captured a 56% share. Little evidence indicates NBFI activity changed abruptly in 2024. However, activities captured in the "narrow measure" may pose vulnerabilities to the financial system during periods of stress. Agricultural credit markets, shaped by specialized lenders and relationships, may not fully reflect these broader trends. That said, similar concerns about measurement and reliance on short-term financing could become more important if conditions deteriorate. The chart (above) reflects global data and for the 29 countries* making up 90% of the world's GDP tracked by the FSB, the chart above shows NBFIs held more than half of all financial assets in 2024 — nearly $257 tril."



The Business of Farming—

- **The Small Business Administration** is trying to compete with commercial banks, and even the Farm Service Agency in attracting farmers to apply for SBA's "Grocery Guarantee Loan" which SBA says has better terms than FSA loans. At least the loan limit is $5 mil. for the SBA, compared to $2.34 mil. for an FSA-guaranteed loan. The Grocery Guarantee loans will provide SBA backing for lenders up to 90% of the loan value, SBA stated. That's higher than the standard SBA guarantee of 75% for the agency's 7 (a) loan program. The purpose of the loans, according to SBA, is to boost "investments in production capacity, processing, and distribution to increase the supply of domestic food products and lower grocery prices." Nearly everyone in the food stream theoretically would be eligible for an SBA grocery loan. SBA offers higher lending caps than FSA, but also allows lenders to charge higher interest rates, and SBA guaranteed loans also come with higher fees than FSA guaranteed loans. As you do "comparison shopping" include your local lenders and check their offers.

SBA
U.S. Small Business Administration

- **Did Claude, or Grok, or Chad GPT review your loan application?** Recent developments in digital technology and AI are streamlining loan underwriting and reducing costs for farmers. Blaine Nelson, Chief Economist with Farmer Mac, says this is just the beginning, "I think a lot about through the lender's lens, just this need for a more efficient, a faster, smoother process and working with farmers, we're probably in the early stages of it. We've seen a lot of advancements made in the past several years. But when you think about the increased adoption of AI, I know that's a buzz word right now, but it's certainly going to accelerate some of these processes. Again, speaking purely to the lender side, just in how they actually underwrite a loan and work with a borrower on a loan." Nelson says the advancing technology has also made getting a farm loan faster, "We're talking about shorter times from actual loan application to submission for a farmer. You're talking about more transparency in terms of what actually matters on a loan application. You're also talking about reduced costs in the number of instances, whether it be for the appraisal process or just the actual man hours required to underwrite a loan. If that helps bring costs down for the farmers and it makes it a more efficient, smooth process, I think it's a win-win for both." Putting it in historical perspective, Nelson says Farmer Mac works behind the scenes to give farmers more and better choices, "Farmer Mac was spun up in the 1980s really post-Farm Crisis to kind of help solve some of that liquidity issue that comes along with certain types of loans. So, we like to think that we give options to lenders to offer farmers better rates. It's not always true, but you know, it certainly at times is and really, I think, just anytime that a farmer has a greater selection in terms of loan products, which we help banks offer or other lenders offer, again, it's the farmer that wins in that process." (NAFB News Service)

Farm Programs and Mailbox Money—

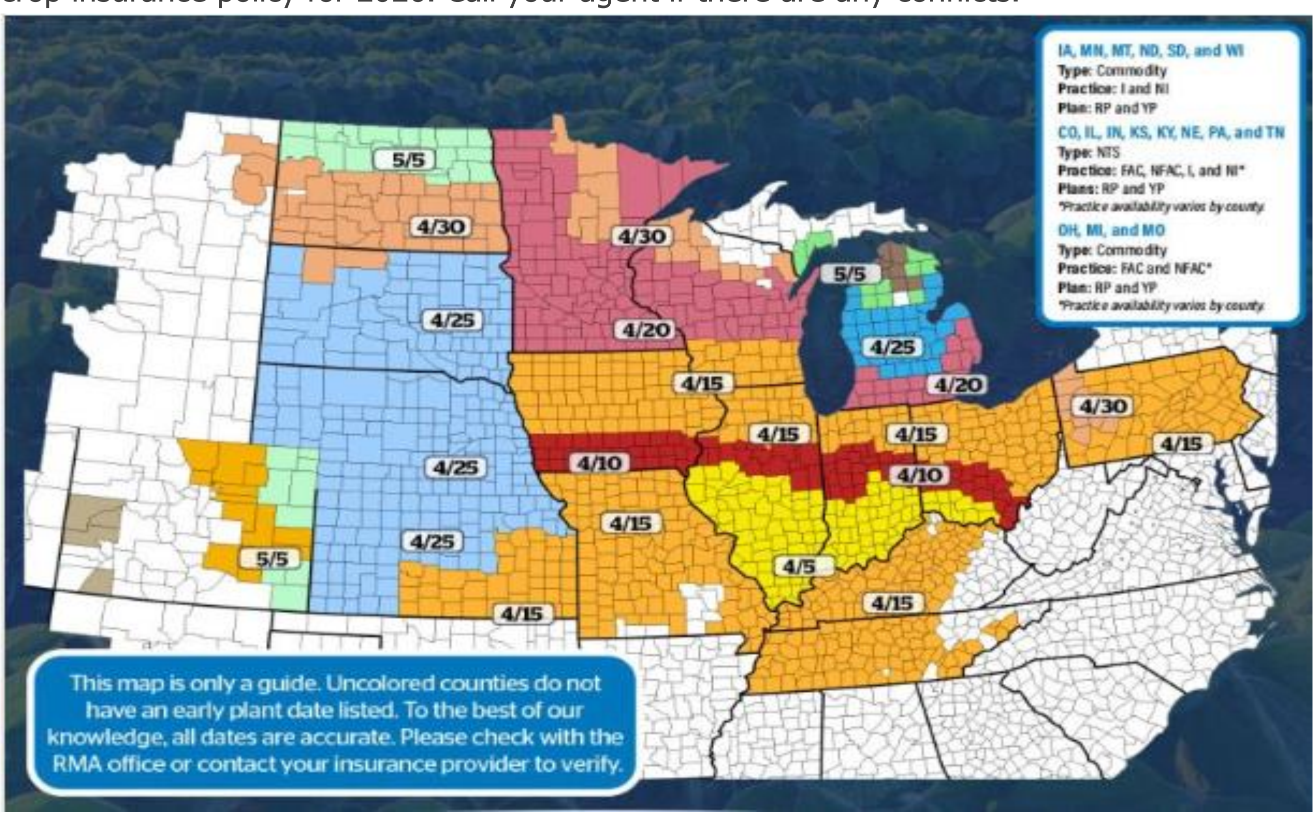
- **The Iran war, and Congress's fight over Homeland Security** funding and the voter ID SAVE Act are complicating the farm plight. A 43-day shutdown last year, that's nearing 50 days this year for DHS, compounded by debate on the SAVE Act, means the time for a Farm Bill and year-round E15 legislation is dwindling fast. Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-IA, says it all makes the job of saving farmers, "Very, very difficult, and it just shortens the time period that you have." Add to that the time it will take once the Iran war ends to repair refineries and ports and reopen the Strait of Hormuz, and Grassley says, "Even if the Strait of Hormuz was open and there was no Iran war, farmers are losing money, and they're just going to lose more money. I'm sorry to say that, but that's the fact." As farm bankruptcies rise, Grassley says there's talk of $15 bil. more in bridge aid or year-round E15 worth $14 bil. in a war supplemental or a special budget bill that can't be filibustered. He says the choice is simple, "Wouldn't it make more sense for the E15 at $14 bil., instead of $15 bil. out of the federal treasury?" Given that farmers want income from markets, not the government. But none of that matters until Congress breaks free of repeated stalemates. Grassley says Sen. James Lankford, R-OK, has proposed automatic stopgap funding to head off shutdowns, "There's no better example of the need for the Lankford legislation of an automatic continuing resolution." But Lankford has had little success so far as shutdowns remain a potent political weapon. (Berns Bureau, Washington)

***Risk Management and Crop Insurance*—**

- **Your driving record dictates your premiums for car insurance.** Now the Univ. of NE has determined your farming practices determine your crop insurance costs. Understanding producer behaviors around crop insurance and aligning federal policy with those behaviors is important to maximize the effectiveness of crop insurance and encourage participation to match actual risk exposure. A new study from University of Nebraska–Lincoln agricultural economists suggests crop insurance could be strengthened by better accounting for producer risk attitudes and regional risk exposure. Researchers used data from a 21-year period to model crop insurance choices and outcomes. They found that producers' insurance choices and the economic impact of crop insurance hinge largely on risk tolerance, risk exposure and premium costs. The analysis finds that keeping current policies in place would widen regional disparities in crop insurance benefits. The authors suggest the model could help policymakers, interest groups and researchers refine crop insurance, making it more efficient and effective by encompassing diverse risk profiles. Producer premiums, along with risk attitudes, are the key drivers of coverage decisions. Varying subsidy rates by crop and region could give policymakers greater flexibility to boost crop insurance participation. "To encourage participation in crop insurance, the U.S. government subsidizes producer premiums with premium subsidies exceeded $12 bil. in 2023. Premium subsidy policy design involves implementing varying subsidy rates that depend on the level of coverage, with higher coverage levels receiving reduced subsidy rates compared to lower coverage levels. Policy design also mandates subsidy rates to be uniformly applied across staple cash crops such as corn, soybeans, and wheat, as well as across different geographical regions. Despite the prevalence of heterogeneity in producer attitudes towards risk and its profound influence on the design of crop insurance, producer heterogeneity has received minimal attention in the economic analysis of crop insurance. Indeed, most economic analyses of crop insurance focus (implicitly or explicitly) on the decisions of the "representative producer." By incorporating producer heterogeneity, this framework facilitates the identification of factors influencing insurance decisions and enables a more nuanced assessment of crop insurance's welfare effects across different segments of agricultural producers. Understanding the factors affecting the producer insurance decisions and the disaggregated welfare impacts of crop insurance is essential for designing effective and efficient policy mechanisms aimed at increasing producer participation in certain crop insurance coverage levels/programs or/and the welfare of certain producer groups. The effectiveness of crop insurance depends on aligning federal policy with producer behavior, ensuring that crop insurance options match actual risk exposure while maintaining economic efficiency. Our approach to modeling crop insurance decisions by accounting for producer heterogeneity can be especially useful for interest groups, policy makers and researchers seeking to refine risk-based policies and/or strengthen crop insurance as the cornerstone of the U.S. farm policy."

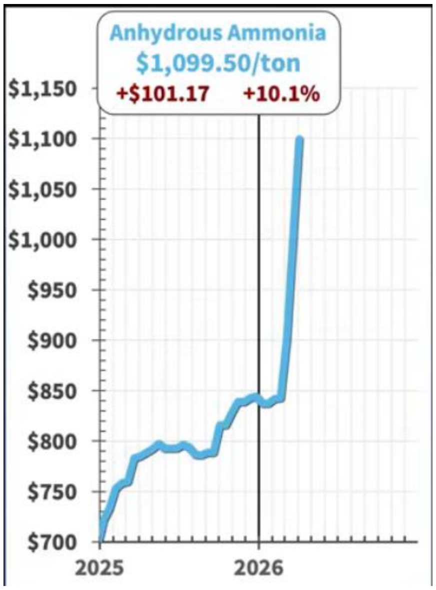
- **Early Planting Dates for corn** are here! Before you hit the fields, be sure to check your policy guidelines to stay compliant with your crop insurance coverage.

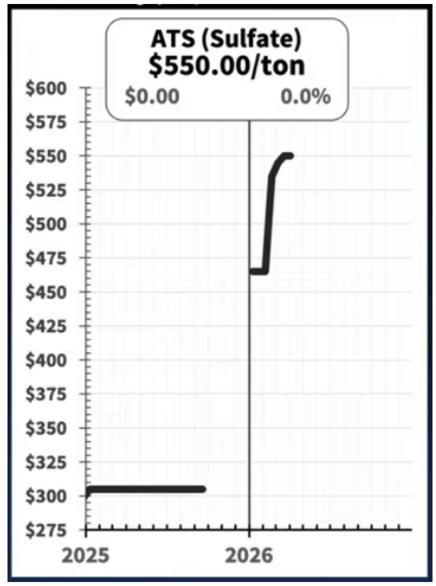
- **Early planting dates for soybeans** are here. Ensure these dates are the same as in your crop insurance policy for 2026. Call your agent if there are any conflicts.

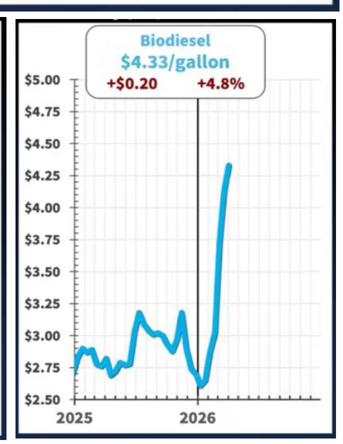


Fertilizer, Fuel, and Other Inputs—

- **IL Ag Dept. fuel and fertilizer cost** report for week ending Apr. 3, via Jim Raftis, IDoA.







- **Retail fertilizer prices are continuing to jump higher** but recent increases have become much more pronounced -- with 4 of the fertilizers seeing double-digit increases from a month ago. According to prices tracked by DTN for the 4th week of March 2026, all 8 of the major fertilizers are more expensive compared to last month. 5 of the 8 major fertilizers had considerable price increases compared to prior month. Urea led the way higher as the nitrogen fertilizer was an incredible 35% higher compared to last month. The liquid fertilizer had an average price of $826/ton; last week the price was $677/ton. Urea is more than $800/ton for first time since the third week of November 2022. That week the average price was $802/ton. Both anhydrous and UAN32 were 20% higher looking back a month. Anhydrous had an average price of $1,035/ton while UAN32 was at $558/ton. Anhydrous was above the $1,000/ton level for the first time since the second week of April 2023. That week the average anhydrous price was $1,003/ton. UAN32 was above the $500/ton level for the first time since the first week of July 2025. That week the average price was $501/ton. UAN28 was 17% higher looking back to the prior month and had an average price of $484/ton. 10-34-0 was 7% more expensive than last month and had an average price of $710/ton. This was the first time 10-34-0 has been above the $700/ton level since the second week of August 2023. The average price that week was $705/ton. The remaining 3 nutrients were slightly higher in price compared to last month. DAP had an average price of $857/ton, MAP was $906/ton and potash $489/ton. MAP has risen above the $900/ton price level for the first time since the second week of December 2025. That week the average MAP price was $917/ton. On a price per pound of nitrogen basis, the average urea price was $0.90/lb. N, anhydrous $0.63/lb. N, UAN28 $0.86/lb. N and UAN32 $0.87/lb. N. With the average anhydrous price now above $1,000/ton, (DTN data was searched) to see some of the high prices for that nitrogen fertilizer. The highest anhydrous price in our data, which goes back to the first week of November 2008, came in the third and 4th week of April 2022. The average price then was $1,534/ton. As you might recall, fertilizer prices were elevated for a couple of years because of various supply issues across the world. 4-digit anhydrous prices were present from the first week of November 2021 to the third week of April 2023. The only other time anhydrous was at $1,000/ton or higher was at the very beginning of our data. For the first 2 weeks of our data in November 2008, anhydrous was slightly above $1,000/ton. On the other end of the spectrum, the lowest anhydrous price in our data came the 4th week of October 2017. That week the average price was $393/ton. There were many weeks of sub-$500/ton anhydrous in 2017 and 2018, according to our data. Hopefully we see lower prices again. All 8 fertilizers are now higher in price compared to 1 year earlier: potash by 6%, 10-34-0 9%, MAP 11%, DAP 12%, UAN32 32%, both anhydrous and UAN28 34%, and urea by 46%. The Commerce Dept has applied various tariffs and countervailing duties on imported fertilizers at the request of US fertilizer companies to protect their domestic products. However, neither the Commerce Dept. nor the White House have responded to any of the more than 2 dozen farmer organizations seeking some price relief. Those duties vary by product and exporting nation.

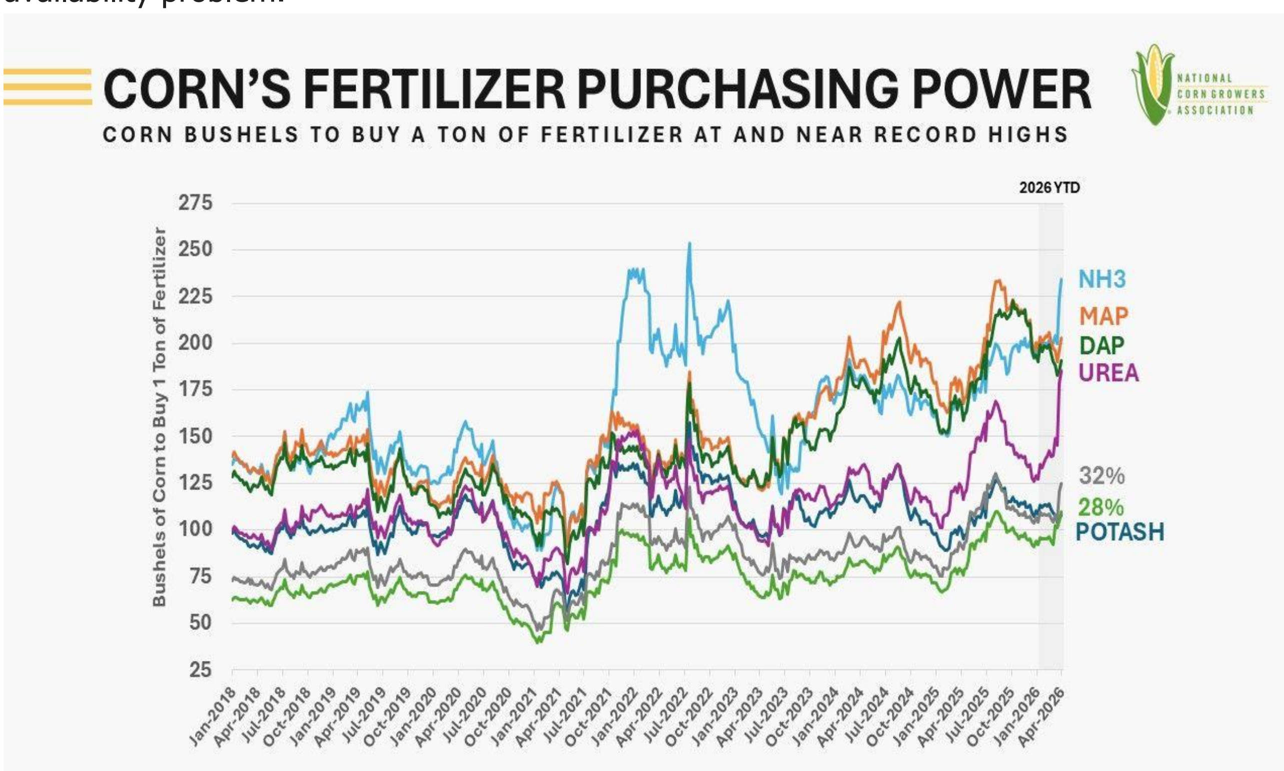
- **"Fertilizer prices are still below the 2022 peak** – but the affordability picture is getting worse fast," says Chief Economist of the National Corn Growers Krista Swanson. She says, "In our March 23rd fertilizer article for National Corn Growers Association, Gretchen Kuck (NCGA economist) and I noted a key disconnect: fertilizer spot and futures surged with the Middle East conflict, while retail prices lagged. We expected retail to catch up, and it is – quickly! Yesterday's DTN Retail Fertilizer Price Index weekly update (prior article) shows urea at $838/ton—up 37% from $611 in the last week of February. That's not a record price. Urea topped $1,000/ton in 2022. The difference today is corn price. In 2022, corn was over $8/bushel at points. Today, nearby corn is $4.52/bushel (after a 3% increase in recent weeks). That changes what fertilizer "costs" in the "currency of corn." And how hard it hits a farm budget:

  ✓ Urea: 185 bushels of corn to buy 1 ton of urea (record high in DTN weekly data dating back to Jan 2009)

  ✓ 28% UAN: 110 bushels/ton (tied for record)

  ✓ 32% UAN: 125 bushels/ton (5 bushels shy of record)

  Meanwhile, phosphate fertilizer prices are climbing further as countervailing duty measures effectively tighten the U.S. supply picture. Why It Matters: Prices don't have to hit 2022 highs to create a record affordability squeeze, especially with margins already tight. Looking ahead, this is getting even more important for 2027. If import volumes stay constrained while global risk stays elevated, today's policy-driven constraints become tomorrow's availability problem."

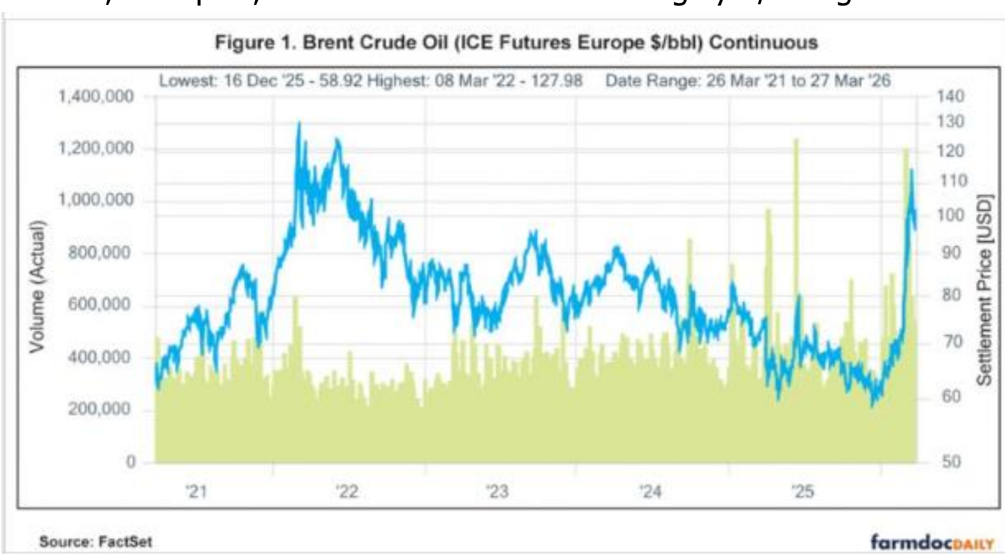


Source: DTN ProphetX DTN Weekly Retail Fertilizer Prices & Nearby Corn Price through 4/2/26, NCGA Calculations

- **What about those countervailing duties and tariffs** on imported fertilizer? They are on phosphate from Russia and Morocco and are up for a 5-year review by the Commerce Dept. to determine retention or lifting. "The tariffs on both countries' product, which range from 16.6% to more than 47%, have been in place since 2021 after Mosaic filed a countervailing duty case. The duties are up for a 5-year sunset review, in which Commerce's International Trade Administration and the International Trade Commission assess whether they are still warranted," Agri-Pulse reported. "If the domestic industry had said it no longer needs them to prevent injury, the tariffs would have been lifted." IL Corn and IL Soybean Assns. joined 4 dozen other farm groups seeking removal of the duties. DTN reported, "Countervailing duties (CVD) on phosphorus fertilizer imports have taken billions of dollars out of the U.S. farm economy during the last 4 years, according to a recent Texas A&M study. This comes at a time when U.S. crop producers struggle to remain profitable. The results of the study showed CVDs have increased the cost of phosphorus fertilizer for U.S. producers by an estimated $6.9 bil. beginning in the 2021 growing season through the 2025 growing season." "The United States simply does not have sufficient domestic phosphate resources to meet agricultural demand on its own," said a joint letter signed by several farm groups. According to the National Corn Growers Association, "For many growers, fertilizer represented 40% of operating costs in 2025, and price increases in this critical input directly affect planting decisions, long-term viability, and the livelihoods of farm families." The duties stem from a decision in 2020 by ITC to impose duties on phosphate fertilizers imported from Morocco and Russia. The decision came after the U.S.-based Mosaic Company petitioned the agency to do so. Mosaic claimed at the time that unfairly subsidized foreign companies were flooding the U.S. market with fertilizers and selling the products at extremely low prices. The petition was supported by another U.S. company, J.R. Simplot. A recent letter from farmers to Mosaic and Simplot calling on them to rescind their petition went unanswered. The final decision by the Commerce Dept. is expected in the spring of 2027.

- **Natural gas, the primary ingredient** required to make nitrogen fertilizer, has been at $6 since last summer. Here's Washington, D.C.-based economist Gretchen Kuck from the National Corn Growers Assn. said on a Farmdoc webinar, "If you had asked me in February or December what my biggest concern was for farmer profitability, I probably would have already told you fertilizer. This is not a new idea. This is not a new concept. As far back as September, we had a survey of growers saying up to 40% were planning to reduce fertilizer applications to weather some of these economic conditions." Kuck made her comments during a Univ. of IL webinar on the impact of the Iran War on fertilizer and fuel prices, "We already had a really interesting year in fertilizer markets leading up to this crisis. You had elevated high prices that we've had since 2020. We're heading into our 4th year of projected net negative returns for corn growers, which makes it really hard to cash flow some of those increased, really high production costs, and you're having farmers having to make a lot of really tough decisions already. Maybe we're hoping for prices to come down and hadn't bought, but you've had U.S. tariffs rerouting some supply chains. You've had restrictions from China on phosphate. You've had countervailing duties on phosphate, so it's been a really complicated year already, and this is not really a new idea that farmers are concerned about high fertilizer prices." Despite the war, corn prices have remained relatively low. That's forcing farmers to make difficult decisions about fertilizer applications and overall profitability. They could choose to cut back application rates. It's been clear for some time that producers aim for the highest yield per acre rather than the highest profit per acre. Land Grant University scientists across the Midwest have built this calculation into the online Nitrogen Rate Calculator at CornRateCalc.org. It optimizes the amount of nitrogen to apply, including all sources: MAP, DAP, 28, urea, and ammonia, for example, combined." On the webinar featuring Kuck, Univ. of IL Farmdoc ag economist Nick Paulson said, "Just as a comparison, because we were able to update this, we do see increases relative to the start of the conflict on the order of about 15%. If we're looking at Cornbelt locations for anhydrous ammonia prices, a higher relative increase in the Middle East, closer to a 20% increase over that time frame." Farmdoc' s Gary Schnitkey has been working on and using a simple anhydrous ammonia price forecasting model for a few years. Generally, when prices spike, it shows that these will persist for some time. Even if the conflict in Iran were to be settled, it suggests that while there are profitability issues with the 2026 corn crop, it is likely to be more of a problem in 2027. That, says Nick Paulson, is because the model shows an $860 per ton average anhydrous ammonia price this fall in IL, "And that $860 forecast that you see there, I don't want to say that's a best-case scenario, but I think there's even a pretty good chance that we'd see premiums above that, given what we saw in the 2 years following that Russia-Ukraine crisis. We did see some premiums above what you would maybe expect, given where corn and natural gas prices were, which is kind of what this model uses to forecast, premiums above those fundamental levels that extended into the fall of 2022 and again into the fall of '23. Close to $100 in 2022, and $80 in 2023. So, we could expect easily, I think, potentially $1,000 anhydrous prices in the fall, particularly if the conflict continue, and would make the economics of growing corn in particular a bit more difficult." (WILL radio)"

- **A new surge in oil prices will hit farmers right in the bottom line.** New estimates suggest a $90-per-barrel market, which could significantly raise production costs across the board. KS St. Univ. economist Gregg Ibendahl said higher oil prices are already creating a ripple effect through key farm inputs like diesel fuel and fertilizer. "$90 oil would add more than $1 per gal. to the fuel costs, and that could easily mean another $10,000 per year in total fuel expenses," he said. "The average KS grain farm spent about $20,000 on fuel last year, and that means even a moderate increase can hit budgets hard." Fertilizer prices are just as big a concern because they're closely tied to the energy markets. The study showed rising oil prices could push fertilizer expenses up by 10%. For the average grain farm, which translates into roughly $12,000 in additional costs. Despite rising costs, Ibendahl noted that supply shortages are unlikely. "The U.S. is almost self-sufficient when it comes to energy, so availability shouldn't be the issue," he said. "But we are not immune from higher prices." Ibendahl added that even if geopolitical tensions ease, prices may not return to previous levels quickly. "Oil prices and diesel prices won't come down as fast as they went up, even if the war stops tomorrow," he said. "It will likely take a few months to clear." As uncertainty continues, Ibendahl encourages producers to monitor input markets closely and utilize decision-making tools available through AgManager.info and its agricultural analysis platforms.
- **The ongoing conflict in the Middle East** is a stark reminder that, in a highly integrated global economy, localized conflicts are rarely contained, says Univ. of IL Farmdoc ag economist Gerald Mashange. Their effects are not evenly distributed. Asia is especially vulnerable because it is the main destination for oil and LNG shipments transiting the Strait of Hormuz, while many economies in Africa are particularly exposed to higher energy, fertilizer, transport, and food costs. Because roughly 1/3 of global seaborne fertilizer trade and substantial shares of oil and LNG shipments move through the Strait, disruptions there can quickly tighten global supply. With few alternative routes available and damage to Gulf energy infrastructure further limiting exports, prices are likely to remain elevated and markets volatile until there is a credible path to de-escalation and clear progress in restoring shipping and production capacity.

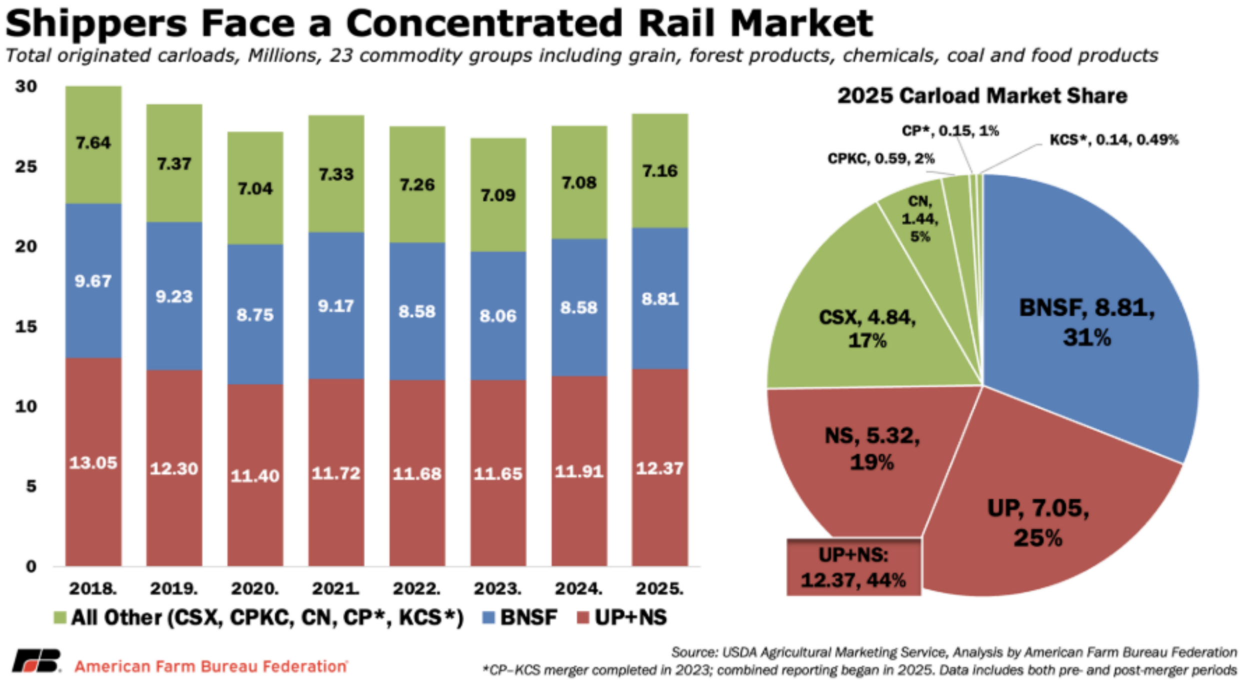


- **Oil prices have been on a rollercoaster ride** ever since the United States and Israel started bombing Iran. Initially, oil prices moved higher, but last week, oil prices dipped after President Trump paused attacks on Iran. But since those have resumed, oil prices have again moved higher. It should come as no surprise that fuel prices are moving higher because of increased oil prices, but what has perhaps surprised many in the farming world is how steep the jump has been for diesel prices, which, in Washington state, are up 14 ¢ this week to $6.50 a gal., "Diesel prices have never been higher in the areas of Washington state. Certainly, seeing some of those record-setting levels in California as well, where some cities are now getting close to $8 per gal. of diesel. So certainly, some lofty diesel numbers, increases and slowed, but I do expect them to continue this week. Of course, a lot of that is really contingent on what develops between the U.S. and Iran." DeHaan says that as far as the future of oil and fuel prices, it's hard to predict where prices are going. If the United States and Iran can reach some kind of agreement in the coming weeks, he thinks prices will start to move lower. But if President Trump sends in ground troops? "It certainly would inflame the situation and likely push oil prices up, but it depends on the degree and what any campaign, any ground troop campaign, may look like. I think that's going to be the details. Will it ultimately end or improve the situation? I think there is a possibility that sending ground troops in may result in a faster conclusion, although it just depends on the manner in which ground troops may be utilized. So, I think there are a lot of open-ended questions there. Ultimately, that may lead to a faster resolution to the situation, but it also has plenty of risk with it as well." DeHaan says either way, he expects the increases in oil and fuel prices to slow in the coming weeks. (PNW Ag Network)

Transportation Issues—

- **Southeastern IL farmers** may have some new transportation service facilities for grain and fertilizer, being expanded across the Ohio River, southeast of Carmi. Ports of Indiana has opened a new federally approved bonded storage facility at its Mount Vernon port. The new facility was developed to meet urgent customer demand for specialized services and marks a major expansion of the port's capabilities, according to a news release. Ports of Indiana said it positions Mount Vernon as a competitive hub for duty-deferred storage of high-value commodities. The facility is operated by Indiana River & Rail Terminals, which partners with Ports of Indiana to operate terminals in Mount Vernon and Jeffersonville. The port offers access to 5 Class I railroads, 10 barge berths, fleeting capacity for more than 400 barges and 600 acres available for development.

- **Ask your elevator manager what railroads are used** to transport your grain, and you may have an answer if you are uncertain about the proposed merger of Union-Pacific and Norfolk-Southern. "For agriculture and rural America, the central question is not whether

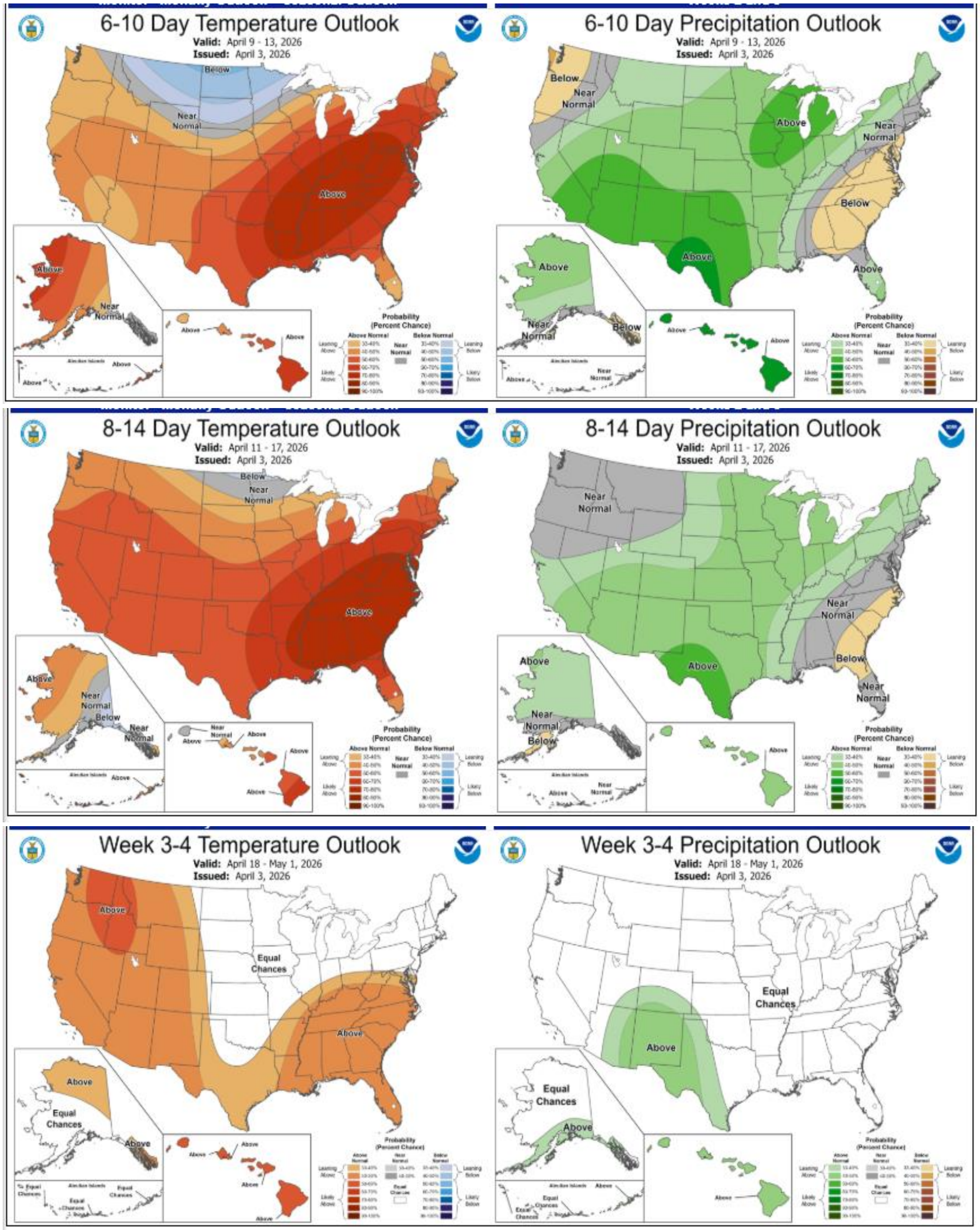


railroads could operate a larger network, but how further concentration would affect pricing power, service reliability and accountability in markets where shippers already have limited alternatives," American Farm Bureau Economist Daniel Munch wrote in a recent market analysis of the proposed merger. The UP and NS executives are scheduled to file a revised merger plan on April 30. Farmers delivering grain to an elevator served by a rail line may want to send a letter to the US Surface Transportation Board to weigh in on the decision. When rail rates rise, farmers have limited ability to offset the increase, Munch wrote. Commodity prices are set in global markets, input costs are largely fixed in the short run and production decisions cannot be easily adjusted after harvest. As a result, higher rail rates will be absorbed directly into farm margins. "The risk of the UP-NS merger is clear. It would leave farmers more dependent on fewer railroads at a time when they already have almost no ability to walk away from higher costs or poor service," Munch said.

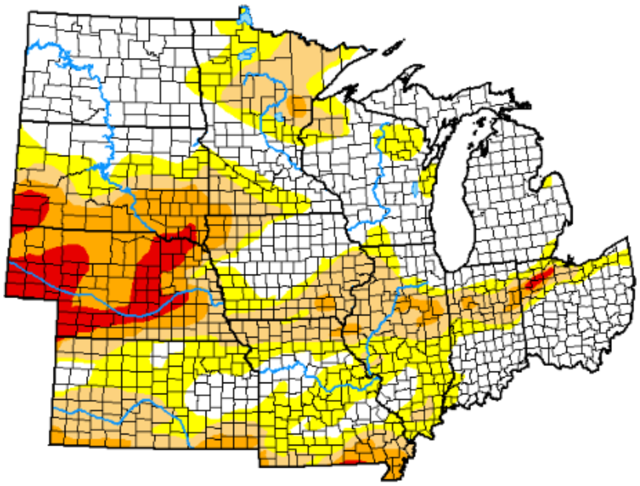
  - ✓ The Union Pacific–Norfolk Southern merger would further exacerbate agricultural shippers' already limited transportation options.
  - ✓ By eliminating independent carriers across key gateways and interchange points, the rail merger would reduce the limited bargaining leverage shippers still have today.
  - ✓ Agricultural shippers are uniquely vulnerable to consolidation because rail demand is highly inelastic.
  - ✓ As railroads are primarily accountable to shareholders rather than rural shippers, consolidation weakens the remaining competitive pressures for pricing, service quality and capital allocation.
  - ✓ Large rail mergers increase systemic and resilience risks for time-sensitive agricultural supply chains.

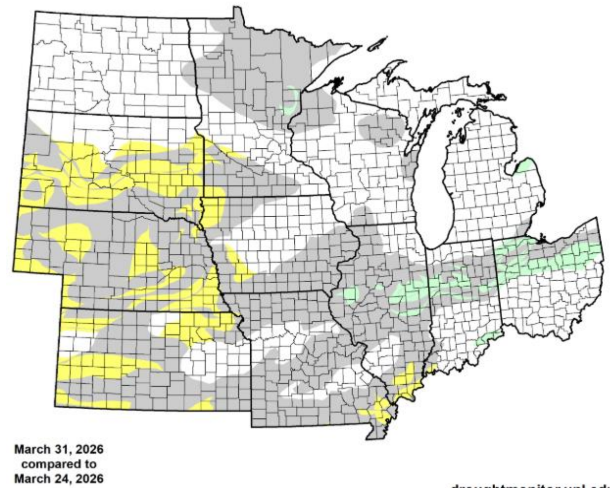
Weather and Climate—

- **Maybe, just maybe, you'll get planters in the field by Mothers' Day!**

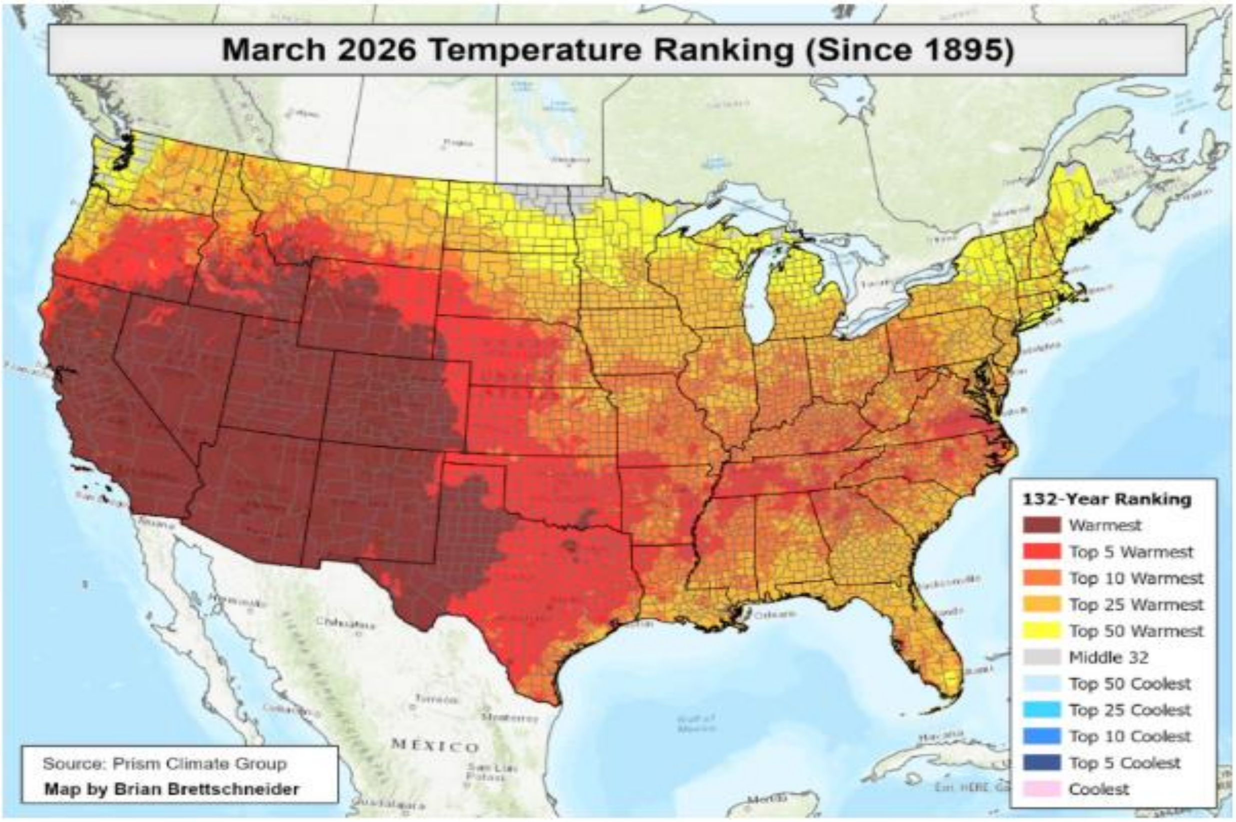


- **On this week's map,** Drought Monitor improvements were made across IA, IL, WI, and MI in response to rainfall during the past week, primarily along a narrow west-to-east band extending from west-central IL to northern OH. One-category improvements were observed in areas of Moderate Drought (D1) to Severe Drought (D3). Current drought stress is

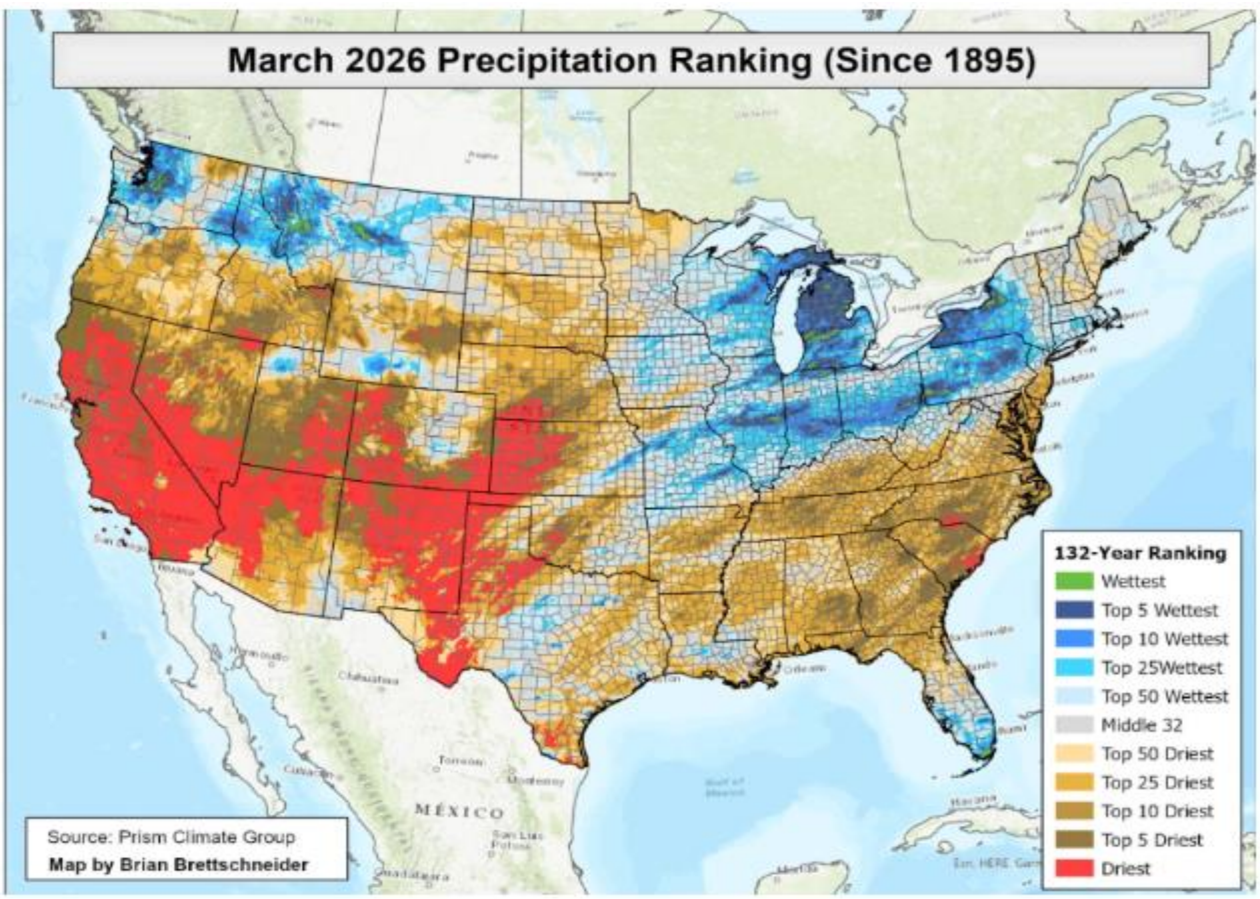




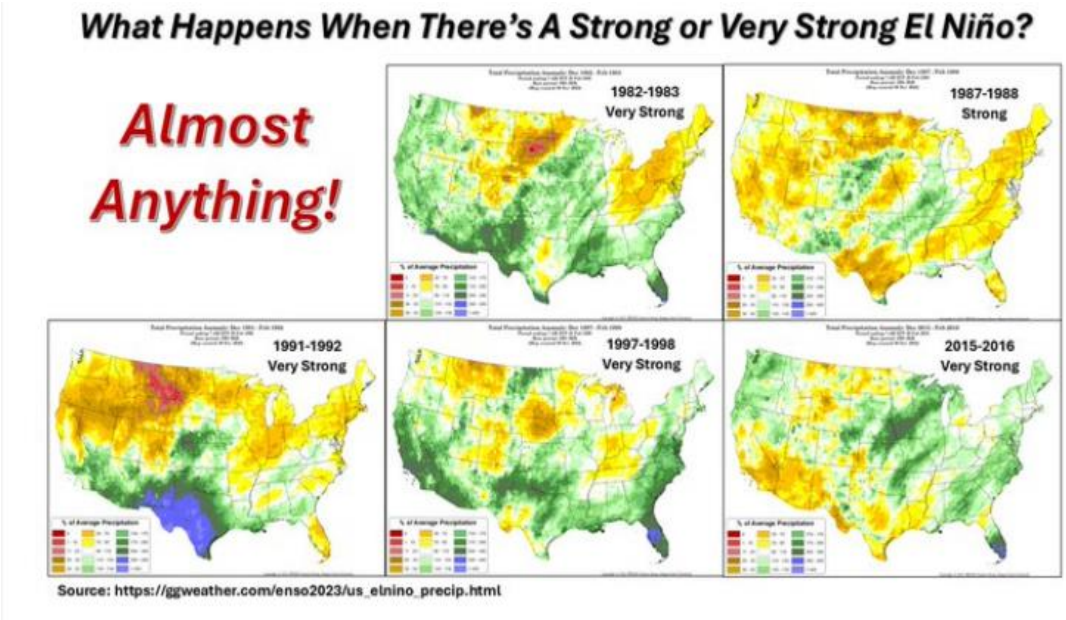
depicted in the map on the left, with the dryest areas of IL in the north central part of the state. Moisture received in IL through March 31 is reflected in green on the map on the right, which has washed out the extreme dry region in East Central IL. Some marginal dryness is returning in several counties in the Marion and Vienna areas.
- **"We had a warm and wet end to March** and start to April across the Prairie State," says IL State Climatologist Trent Ford. "Average temperatures this week ranged from the high 40s in northern IL to the high 50s in southern IL, between 4 and 10°F above normal. Some of the more impressive high temperatures this week included 93°F in Jacksonville and 88°F in Champaign. March ended around 6°F warmer than normal statewide and was the warmest March since 2012. However, last month was still a full 6°F cooler than the average temperature in 2012, which illustrates just how extreme March 2012 was. We had another very wet week across central and parts of northern IL. 7-day totals ranged from around .5 in. in northwest IL to isolated pockets of over 5 in. in central IL. The recent wetter weather has substantially improved drought conditions across central IL, and we saw the US Drought Monitor remove extreme drought in this week's map, the first time east-central IL has been without extreme drought since early October. That same Drought Monitor map, though, did expand some moderate drought in southern IL due to drier conditions over the last 2 weeks. The drought whack-a-mole continues in IL. Looking ahead, temperatures will moderate a bit this weekend, with highs only stretching into the 50°F statewide. Jackets are recommended for all those egg hunts on Saturday and Sunday. Meanwhile, we will see some additional rainfall across the state on Friday and Saturday before clearer conditions emerge early next week. 7-day rainfall totals are between 1 and 2 in. statewide. The newest outlooks for mid to late April still show a warmer and wetter tilt across the state, indicating a continuation of much of what we saw in late March."



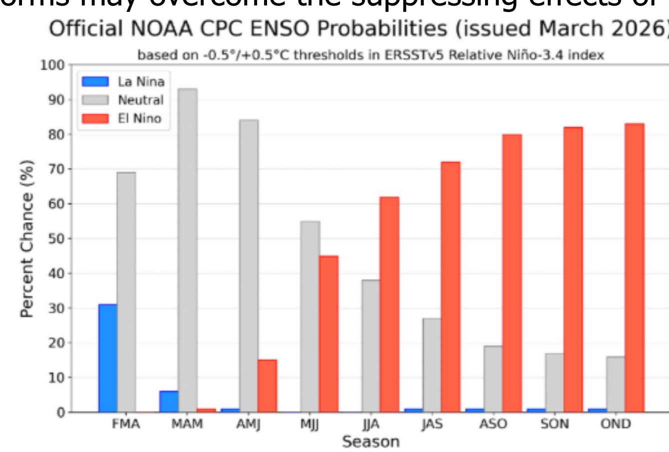
- **The following maps confirm** March 2026 was warmer and wetter than usual.



- **What have you heard about a “super EL Nino” this year?** Some forecasters are recommending “batten down the hatches.” Others are saying, “Let’s wait and see.” Blue



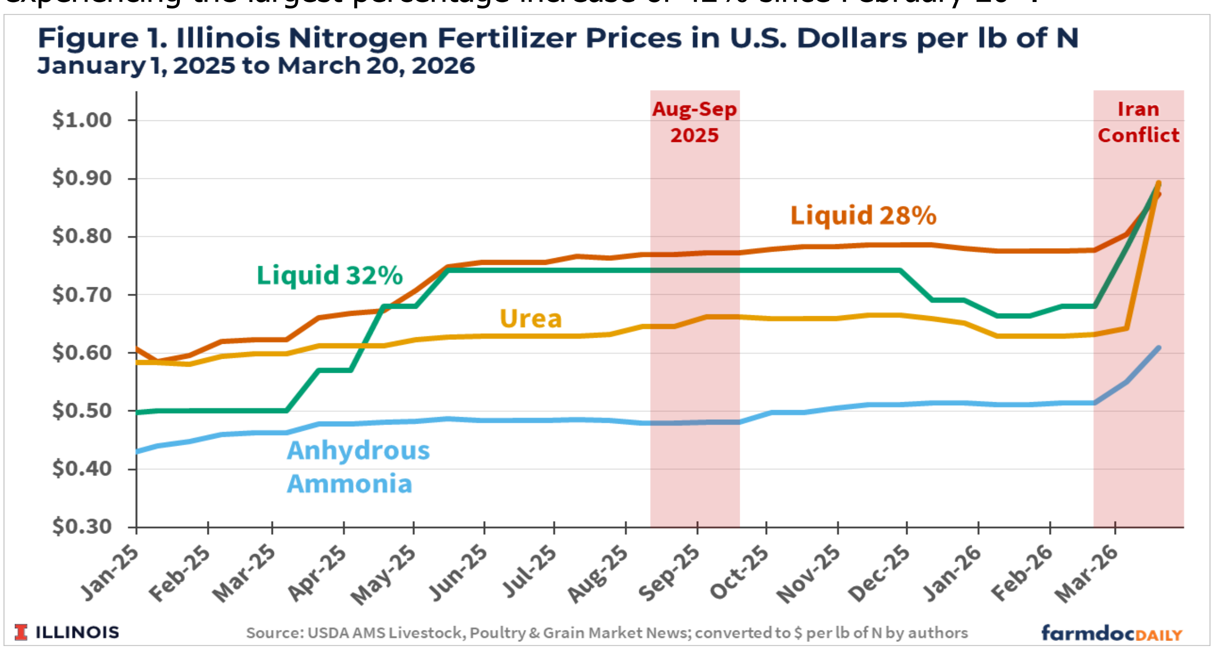
Water Outlook forecasting service says, “It all begins with unusually warm ocean water along the Equator, west of South America and stretching far eastward toward the Philippines. If this comes to pass, it would have a significant impact on land temperatures. El Niño typically releases massive amounts of heat from the ocean into the atmosphere. Because global ocean temperatures are already starting from an unprecedentedly high baseline, scientists worry that 2027 could shatter records: While 2026 will see a temperature boost, the full atmospheric response usually lags. Experts suggest 2027 is on track to potentially become the warmest year on record, surpassing the extreme heat of 2024. Traditionally, El Niño suppresses Atlantic hurricane activity by increasing wind shear. However, there is significant concern for the 2026 Atlantic Hurricane Season. While the developing El Niño might provide some "protection" from wind shear, the exceptionally warm waters in the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico may counteract it. Forecasters are very concerned about rapid intensification this year. Warm ocean "deep pools" can provide so much energy that storms may overcome the suppressing effects of El



Niño. The primary concern regarding the current state of the ocean is the extreme baseline warmth of global sea surface temperatures (SSTs) as we transition into a potential El Niño. Even without El Niño, Global Sea Surface Temperatures are already hitting daily record highs. Global sea surface temperatures continue breaking daily records. Climate models indicate a continued rapid warming over the next several months, likely reaching El Niño territory as soon as late spring or early summer.”

Agronomy—

- **With high costs of fertilizer,** are you "re-thinking" application rates? Univ. of IL Farmdoc ag economists and colleagues provide some guidance, if that is your mindset. "Nitrogen fertilizer prices have been slowly increasing since the fall, but those increases have escalated sharply since the conflict began. Price increases since late February have ranged from 20-25% for anhydrous ammonia to more than 40% for urea at locations in the Cornbelt region of the US." As a result, recommended nitrogen application rates are lower under current pricing conditions compared with last fall. For farmers who apply a portion of their nitrogen in the spring, reducing remaining nitrogen applications to be more in line with the Maximum Return to Nitrogen (MRTN) rate recommendations would be highly advised to avoid unnecessary costs and maximize returns. If you are not familiar with MRTN, the Farmdoc folks say, "It is also important to note that the MRTN recommendation accounts for all potential sources of applied nitrogen. Producers should consider the nitrogen contributions from other sources such as manure, DAP, and MAP. Higher nitrogen prices will result in lower MRTN rates holding the corn price constant. Higher corn prices will result in higher MRTN rates holding the fertilizer price constant." Figure 1 shows average prices in Illinois for anhydrous ammonia, urea, and liquid N solutions (both 28% and 32%) on a $ per lb. of N basis from the start of 2025 through the latest report released on March 20th. From February 20th to March 20th, anhydrous prices increased from $0.51 to $0.61 per lb. of N (+18%). Prices for 28% and 32% liquid N and urea have all increased to around $0.89 per lb. of N, with urea experiencing the largest percentage increase of 42% since February 20th.



Data from Precision Conservation Management covering the 10 crop years from 2015 to 2024 shows that, in many cases, farmers may be applying nitrogen at rates that exceed the MRTN by as much as 25-50 lbs. per acre. A reduction of 25 to 50 lbs. of N per acre could save $15 to $30 per acre at the current $0.61/lb. price of anhydrous ammonia.

- **Where early beans and pre-emergent herbicides cross paths,** what is the impact? Univ. of IL agronomic researcher Logan Miller has been studying that for several years. The study evaluated soybeans planted at early dates, between April 15 and April 18, compared to conventional dates around May 15 to May 18. For plots in western IL last spring (2025), the early planting date was pushed to March 26. The research addressed concerns that longer emergence times in early planted, stressful environments could increase seedling exposure to herbicides, potentially leading to higher injury and stand loss. Miller noted that weather is a primary limiting factor, as excessive rainfall can put additional stress on the crop early in the season. Key findings from the herbicide evaluation, funded by the IL Soybean Checkoff, include:

  - ✓ PPO-based premixes (Group 14 herbicides) are the most likely to cause noticeable crop injury.
  - ✓ Authority-based products, Fierce-based products, and Zidua Pro resulted in the greatest amount of early-season crop injury and stunting.
  - ✓ Some PPO herbicides performed better than others; Prefix and Preview showed hardly any injury relative to the non-treated control.
  - ✓ Trials evaluating dry metribuzin at robust rates of 10.5 to 12 ounces showed no crop response or damage.

  The study also evaluated Ilevo seed treatments, which yielded inconsistent effects on stand loss and yield across the different years of the study. Despite the varying levels of early-season crop injury and some stand reduction from PPO herbicides, the final yield data did not show a negative effect. Miller concluded that as long as a uniform stand of 80,000 to 100,000 seeds per acre is maintained, there is little evidence of a yield impact.

- **How does money-saving agronomy outyield** the effort to get high yield at any cost? That is a good question for an IL farmer who applied 168# of nitrogen in a conservation trial and reached the 308-bu. mark. Yet his second entry in the National Corn Yield contest made only 293 bu. and cost $200 per acre more because of the extra investment to gain yield. One thing that helped was the weather, with an unplanned pollination period when the temperature was 75-80° in the daytime and cooler at night, resulting in less stress. The clue to success is closer work with your weather consultants.

Conservation, Environment, and Carbon—

- **What will EPA do with triazole fungicides,** and how will that impact your effort to protect your crops from disease? While no current bans or regulations exist on triazole fungicides, future reviews by the Environmental Protection Agency could have a stifling impact on farming. Boris Camiletti, Univ. of IL plant pathologist, said triazole fungicides are a major chemical group within the demethylation inhibitors (DMI) class and are necessary for disease management and resistance prevention. "It would affect 70% to 80% of the products in the market," Camiletti said, referencing the outcome if grain farmers couldn't use any DMI fungicides, including triazoles. He noted that without DMI fungicides, other chemical groups would face a higher risk of resistance, which is why combining groups in a single product is a common practice. "If we don't have those fungicides, we'll start having high levels of disease, but also high levels of mycotoxins in those grains affecting the quality of our foods," Camiletti said. In corn production, triazole fungicides are used to combat foliar diseases, such as tarspot (left). Camiletti said if spores like *Aspergillus fumigatus* develop resistance to triazole fungicides and remain infected, it could infect humans, too. The real danger would be for people with immune disorders.

- **The National Assn. of Conservation Districts** leadership and over 100 locally elected conservation district officials convened last week in Washington, D.C., for the NACD Annual Spring Fly-In. Conservation district officials and their assns. engaged directly with members of Congress and federal agencies to advance priorities that strengthen America's voluntary, locally led conservation delivery system. As part of their advocacy efforts, conservation leaders underscored the importance of passing a Farm Bill that strengthens local conservation, maintains a strong FY 2027 funding for NRCS conservation operations, invests in the conservation workforce and local delivery infrastructure, and ensures federal programs remain flexible and responsive to local priorities. "The current model works because it is locally led, partnership-driven, and grounded in trust," said NACD President Gary Blair. "It depends on strong, sustained investment to continue delivering results."

- **Farmers to your mark, get set, GO!** If you are a cover cropper, there is a lot of prize money for placing in the race to be in the IL Dept. of Ag I-COVER program. Officially called the Infield Conservation for Operationalizing Vital Ecosystem Resilience, or I-COVER, the program is available through a $7 million grant. It's a three-year program with payments for cover crops planted in 2026, 2027 or 2028. It's a multi-state partnership that includes IL, IA, and IN. The program officially opens on April 15 at 8 a.m. The program closes on May 1 at 11:59 p.m. During the pre-enrollment period, farmers can upload their information and validate it, so the application is ready to go when the program opens. (Pre-enrollment began April 1!) It is the renewal of a program withdrawn last fall when federal money was held up in the budget battles. Even if a farmer applied during the last program, they would need to reapply. The program is designed to pay farmers who are using cover crops on specific fields for the first time or using new techniques or technology to establish cover crops earlier. Earlier establishment of cover crops includes flying cover crop seed into a standing crop prior to harvest, as long as it's a new practice for the field. According to IDOA, payment rates are as follows:

  ✓ $61.13/acre for one or more cover crop species, winter killed

  ✓ $85.65/acre for single cover crop species, spring terminated

  ✓ $105.40/acre for one or more cover crop species, spring terminated

  Prohibited programs that cannot be combined include EQIP, CSP, Fall Covers for Spring Savings and others. Applications will be selected on a first-come, first-served basis per county. If program funds remain after the first application per county, the second application per county will be prioritized and so on. For more information on the I-COVER program, see the IDOA website as well as this how-to guide.

- **EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin** (right) told a recent agriculture forum his agency's made big progress in reducing the backlog of pesticide registration reviews, while some remain controversial. Zeldin says EPA's pesticide review backlog has been reduced by more than 40%, "The pesticide review backlog when I came in was 14,500. The good news is that the backlog is now down to 8,500." Zeldin says while EPA's budget was cut at the White House, staff and IT were added at the Office of Chemical Safety, "The investment in IT, as well as increasing bandwidth with personnel, it was key to reducing the backlog." 2 widely used herbicides, dicamba and glyphosate, have been challenged in and out of the courts. EPA has rewritten rules for use of dicamba and is working on glyphosate. Zeldin says he won't predetermine outcomes, "That's not how it works. We have dedicated scientists who've been there 20, 30 years. They're going to do their review, and then I'm going to communicate their findings with the public, and I don't want to tell them at this stage of the review, politically, this is what I want your findings to show." The House will soon debate a Farm Bill that shields chemical companies from lawsuits by those harmed by pesticides and limits state and local governments' power to regulate safety warnings.

- **IL Corn Growers Assn. Water Quality Specialist Laura Gentry** (right) says while farming practices vary widely from one operation to the next, individual farmers rarely deviate once they find a system that works. Gentry says this operational consistency dictates how advocates must approach conservation. "What it means is that when you ask a farmer to do something differently, you'd better have a good reason to ask them to do it. You'd better be able to prove to them that it could be a good management change for them. And asking them, we do this all the time, we say "just do it on one field, just try this on one field". For especially nitrogen management it is a very unlikely thing. It seems that are not very likely to do that." Gentry notes farmers are unlikely to test a new nitrogen management strategy on a single field. However, she says they remain open to evaluating other specific conservation practices on a limited basis. They will look at cover crops from field to field. Where we might not say try this on one field for nitrogen management, we could say it for cover crops, and they would be more likely to try that." Gentry and Univ. of IL Farmdoc ag economist Gary Schnitkey will outline these findings and discuss current nitrogen pricing during a free FarmDocDaily webinar on Tuesday, April 7 at 11:00 AM.

USDA—

- **What you get is what USDA wants you to get.** And Farm Progress Policy Editor Joshua Baethge has discovered that first hand. He writes, "Farmers depend on information from USDA. But what happens when the agency decides the public should only be informed on a need-to-know basis? A more accurate description these days might be a "what-we-want-you-to-know" basis. Of course, that's assuming USDA even knows what this administration wants anybody to know. USDA Secretary Rollins recently announced a request for information to "help inform future efforts to deliver data that is useful to our customers. In February 2024, the USDA Equity Commission released its findings, including more than 66 recommendations on how to advance equity across the agency. That report quietly disappeared from USDA's website. Unfiltered information, big and small, is hard to come by these days. In February, I attended USDA's Ag Outlook Forum in Washington. One session was on combating New World screwworm. 5 USDA experts delved into the data for nearly an hour. It was absolutely fascinating. After the session's end, the panelists stuck around to chat. One scientist agreed to answer a couple of my questions. As I waited, a USDA staffer asked me if I was media. When I confirmed what was clearly stated on my badge, she said I wouldn't be allowed to talk with the scientist. Assuming the speakers were pressed for time, I promised to limit myself to one question. The USDA "bouncer" said it didn't matter. When the government forbids its own scientists from speaking without a government chaperone, that concerns me. It should concern you, too."

- **The USDA is moving forward** with reorganizing the agency, including relocating personnel to 5 regional hubs around the country, beginning this summer. Agriculture Secretary Rollins announced the reorganization almost a year ago, and the department took public comments on it last summer. According to agriculture industry sources, the majority of the 14,000-plus comments were against moving USDA employees out of the Washington, D.C., area. The National Pork Producers Council's public policy office is located in Washington. In comments submitted on the reorganization, NPPC raised concerns about not having USDA employees in Washington available to work with D.C.-based agriculture industry associations, which, combined, represent most of the country's farmers. NPPC supports USDA's efforts to best utilize personnel, eliminate redundant positions and better manage agency spending, employees and facilities. However, it remains apprehensive about moving department employees and functions out of the D.C. area. NPPC suggested USDA do a "more thoughtful" analysis of the impacts of the decision to avoid unintended consequences and serve the long-term interests of the U.S. agriculture industry and its producers. During President Trump's first term, USDA relocated the National Institute of Food & Agriculture and the Economic Research Service to Kansas City. That move resulted in half the employees of those agencies choosing not to relocate, leaving NIFA and ERS unable to fully carry out their missions.
- **The Departments of Agriculture and Interior** have recently announced plans to formalize collaboration between the 2 agencies when it comes to grazing on public lands. Shelby Hagenauer, senior director of government affairs for the American Farm Bureau, said these plans were announced via a memorandum of understanding, "So, they're focused on making vacant allotments available for use, more efficient National Environmental Policy Act permitting processes, having agency staff spend part of their training on actual ranches to better understand the daily lives of ranchers, and really seeking to implement a goal of no net loss of Animal Unit months within allotments, among other things." She said public lands grazing is a valuable partnership between ranchers and federal agencies to manage millions of acres of Western lands, "Ranchers are out on that land daily. They act as fire lookouts and often first responders, and livestock grazing is a proven method of fuels' reduction to prevent wildfires. Grazing helps address invasive grasses and issues in the ground, and also, these ranches are a critical part of their local rural communities and economies." Hagenauer said the next step for farmers and ranchers is to look out for updated grazing regulations that are currently going through the federal review process, "Those will likely be released for public comment in the next few months, so ranchers should be ready to provide written feedback about the proposal. Also, BLM just put out an online tool for reviewing vacant BLM, Forest Service, and National Wildlife Refuge allotments. Both of these efforts by the administration are really welcomed and appreciated by our rancher members." (American Farm Bureau)

- **Sens. Amy Klobuchar, D-MN,** (left) **and Jeanne Shaheen, D-NH**, (right) led 10 other  Senators to raise concerns to USDA about the reliability of data reports from the USDA. They said that a recent Farm Journal survey found 73% of ag producers and 78% of  ag retailers are less confident in USDA reports than in recent years. The Senators' letter to the agency expressed significant concerns regarding the reliability of USDA reports. "Farmers need reliable data to make critical decisions on what to plant, how to manage risks, and when to market their agricultural products," the letter said. "Given the importance of reliable data to U.S. farmers, ranchers, and rural communities, it's critical that USDA maintain the quality and integrity of its data." The erosion of trust comes after a loss of over 30% of the employees at the National Agricultural Statistics Service and almost 25% of Farm Service Agency employees.
- **Organic producers across the U.S.** are reporting delays in receiving federal reimbursements intended to offset certification costs, raising concerns about cash flow during a critical time of year. The payments are administered through the USDA's Organic Certification Cost Share Program. Farmers rely on the program to cover a portion of annual certification expenses required to maintain organic status. However, many say payments have been slow or inconsistent, creating financial strain as spring planting ramps up. Advocates told Civil Eats the delays could discourage participation in organic markets, which already face higher production costs and tighter margins than conventional operations. Smaller farms are seen as particularly vulnerable. USDA officials have acknowledged processing challenges but say efforts are underway to improve delivery. In the meantime, producers say timely support is essential to sustain growth in the organic sector.
- **The USDA has announced updated loan interest rates** for April, offering a key benchmark for producers making financing decisions ahead of the planting season. Operating loans are set at 4.75%, while farm ownership loans will carry a 5.75% interest rate. The rates reflect broader trends in credit markets as borrowing costs remain elevated compared with recent years. Farmers often rely on USDA-backed loans to cover expenses such as seed, equipment and land purchases. Agricultural economists say higher rates could tighten margins, particularly for producers already facing rising input costs and uncertain commodity prices. Access to affordable credit is expected to play a significant role in planting decisions this spring. Despite the increases, USDA loan programs remain a critical financing tool, especially for beginning farmers or unable to secure commercial credit.

Trade, Tariffs, (and USMCA) —

- **Neil Caskey (left) and Bryan Humphreys (right), the CEOs** of the National Corn Growers and National Pork Producers, left nothing to doubt in a strong message to the White House. "The fate of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement is one that will significantly impact the agricultural economy and the financial wellbeing of rural America even beyond our lifetimes. As the leaders of 2 of the nation's largest agricultural groups, representing a combined nearly 100,000 farmers, we have seen firsthand how USMCA has benefitted rural America, and we implore President Trump to keep agriculture top of mind throughout the mandatory USMCA review this summer. A recent economic study of 2024 exports showed agricultural and seafood exports under USMCA contributed $149 bil. in total economic output to the U.S. economy, supporting nearly half a mil. American jobs and $36 bil. in wages. The study also showed that USMCA-related agricultural and seafood trade contributed $64 bil. to U.S. GDP and supported $13 bil. in federal, state and local tax revenue. That's all-in-one year! Thanks to USMCA, American agriculture has been revitalized by significant increases in exports to Canada and Mexico, providing more certainty between the three nations and creating a mechanism for resolving trade disputes. A testament to the importance of this enforcement mechanism, a 2024 trade dispute was resolved after Mexico enacted a ban on genetically modified corn. As a result (of the USMCA dispute process), Mexico dropped its ban on genetically modified corn used for animal consumption. The USMCA maintains crucial zero-tariff access for U.S. pork to Mexico and Canada and includes robust regulatory commitments that provide a science-based framework and a strong enforcement mechanism to challenge non-tariff trade barriers. For the corn industry, USMCA represents our No. 1 corn ethanol export market and No. 1 corn market. In 2025, American corn growers exported $5.9 bil. in bulk corn to Mexico and $1.9 bil. in ethanol to Canada, totaling about 40% of each commodity's total exports. USMCA has served as a huge economic engine that has bolstered the agricultural economy and rural America in once unthinkable ways. Its benefits are felt from the farm gate to the dinner plate. That's why our associations have joined over 40 agricultural and food groups to launch a coalition to advocate for renewal of the accord. The agreement builds on the success started by President Trump and must be renewed to sustain farm families now and for generations to come."

- **The IL Soybean Assn. directors were welcomed** to the East Asian headquarters of the US Soybean Export Council, saying it was "pleased to support the IL Soybean Assn. delegation's Southeast Asia trade mission which began in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, engaging with industry partners across the soy value chain. As part of the program, the delegation participated in the U.S. Identity Preserved International Summit, exchanging perspectives on food-grade soybeans, identity preservation, and evolving market requirements. The visit also included a meeting with ADM Vietnam, where discussions focused on the role of consistent, high-quality US Soy in supporting customer requirements across the feed sector. This marks the first leg of the delegation's Southeast Asia mission, followed by continued engagements in Thailand. The team also engaged with key stakeholders through in-market visits, including discussions with the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) in Bangkok, as well as site visits to Lukkungsetthi Farm, featuring a recirculation aquaculture system and Khao Pong Farm, a seabass processing facility—providing perspectives on aquaculture production and supply chains in Thailand.

- **The USDA will lead a trade mission to the Philippines** from April 13–16, with the goal of expanding market access for America's farmers, ranchers, and producers. The mission follows a trade agreement in July 2025, which opened new opportunities for U.S. ag exports to the Philippines. "USDA is committed to getting American farmers, ranchers, and agribusinesses better access to strong markets and fair opportunities abroad," said Michelle Bekkering, USDA Deputy Undersecretary for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs, who will lead the mission. "This mission will connect U.S. exporters to reliable buyers in one of Asia's fastest-growing markets." The Philippines is the 10th-largest market for U.S. agricultural and food products, averaging $3.4 bil. in annual exports over the past 5 years. With a population of 118 mil., a rapidly expanding middle class, and strong consumer preference for U.S. products, the Philippines offers enormous growth potential for American exporters.

- **Competition in trade never stops,** and Argentina just upped the ante. China's international grain buyer COFCO is shipping corn from Argentina to China, the first in 15 years says Bloomberg. The shipment of about 1.3 mil. bu. of corn is destined for China's feed sector, the agricultural giant's trading unit said in a statement Wednesday. "The cargo  reflects increasing alignment between the 2 markets and provides an additional origin option for Chinese buyers," Cofco said. The 2 countries are maintaining a robust trade relationship under the leadership of Javier Milei, (left) who once vowed to curb ties with Beijing if he became Argentina's president, and has since received a $20 bil. lifeline for Argentina from the US White House. China has increasingly been turning to South America for crop trading. While the Asian nation in the past has bought millions of bushels of American corn, it has also worked to diversify its feed supply chains. That shift away from US crops has accelerated under President Donald Trump's tariff policies.
- **US Ag trade negotiator Julie Callahan** previewed the administration's ag trade goals for this year at a recent Washington Agri-Pulse forum. Callahan says the "bumper sticker" version of USTR's recent Ag policy report is "full speed ahead" on the administration's trade 

policy, "We have the USMCA review…very much recognize the importance of the USMCA for ag stakeholders…we will continue our agreements on reciprocal trade negotiations with additional trading partners…and we'll be pursuing other bilateral trade negotiations, including with China." Callahan says issues remain with China on beef, avian influenza and GMO crops. She says Trade Ambassador Grier recently met with the Chinese in Paris, "Ambassador Grier explained that the 2 sides had agreed on a work plan of deliverables for the presidential summit, which will take place later in the spring. And this work plan includes expanding exports of US agricultural goods to China." The US still has a 10% global duty on Chinese goods, and the 2 nations have dueling trade investigations, though those could end post-summit. Callahan says the US wants market stability in China, "We want a predictable, transactional relationship. That market should not be zero, but also, we don't want to over-rely on the Chinese market. And that's why the agreements on reciprocal trade, in addition to the conversations with China, will bring that stability back for our farmers and ranchers." Despite controversy over the administration's tariff policy, Callahan insists USTR has opened ag markets with both completed trade deals and several still being negotiated. (Berns Bureau, Washington)

***Illinois issues*---**

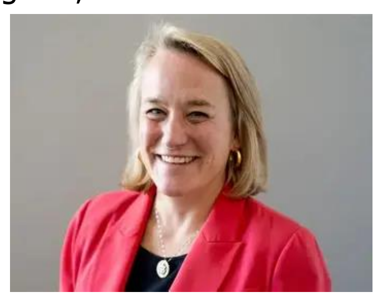
- **IL Governor JB Pritzker has added his voice** to a call for Congress to approve year-round E-15 ethanol. In a letter to members of the Congressional Committee on Energy and Commerce obtained by Capitol News Illinois, Pritzker argued that year-round E15 would help spur domestic energy production and stabilize fuel markets. "I respectfully urge you to support legislation that ensures the permanent, nationwide availability of year-round E15," Pritzker wrote, adding, "doing so would provide certainty to the market, strengthen rural economies, and reinforce America's commitment to domestic energy production." Pritzker's letter comes as fuel retailers in IL and across the Midwest have warned that without a long-term fix past just the summer months, the region could face even higher gas prices since there would be different fuel standards across different states. "Relying on administrative action does not provide the long-term certainty that farmers, producers, fuel retailers and consumers need," Pritzker said. "We must work to remove this regulatory roadblock."
- **Many agricultural issues are included in legislation** moving through the IL House and Senate. Here are some being followed by the IL Fertilizer and Chemical Assn. (IFCA)
  - ✓ **HB 4523/SB 3400 (Blair-Sherlock/Martwick)** - Amends the IL Pesticide Act and is looking to fully ban PFAS (active and inert ingredients) in pesticides. It was not approved by the deadlines in the House and Senate. IFCA had been opposed.
  - ✓ **HB 1596 (Rep. Laura Faver Dias)** - Requires 72-hour written or email notice before certain pesticide applications, including notice to schools and parks within a half mile of the application site. IFCA is opposed, but legislation is not moving very rapidly.
  - ✓ **HB 4610/SB 3227 (Hoffman/D. Turner)** - Creates the Nitrogen Reduction Program Act. Provides that the Department of Agriculture shall, in consultation with the Department of Natural Resources and soil and water conservation districts in the State, develop a nitrogen reduction incentive program by January 1, 2027 which allows for a per acre payment of at least $5 if the farmer reduces their nitrogen rate by 15% or 30 lbs. and purchases an "innovative biological product." IFCA is opposed, but legislation is not moving.
  - ✓ **HB 5305 (Moeller)** - Amends the IL Pesticide Act. Provides that, beginning Jan. 1, 2029, it is unlawful for any person to sell, offer for sale, use, or distribute within this State any corn, soybean, or wheat seed coated or treated with a pesticide containing neonicotinoids, unless a valid waiver is issued by the Dept. of Ag. IFCA opposed, and legislation did not pass committee.
  - ✓ **SB 3161 (Ellman)** - Amends the IL Pesticide Act. Provides that, except as expressly authorized under specific provisions of the Act, no person shall distribute, sell, offer for sale, or use in the State any herbicide product containing paraquat dichloride or any other chemical form of paraquat. IFCA opposed. Bill did not pass out of committee.

- ✓ **SB 3200 (Morrison)** - Amends the IL Pesticide Act. Provides that, beginning July 1, 2027, a pesticide containing a neonicotinoid may not be used on an ornamental plant, except in accordance with specified restrictions. Specifies that 'restricted use pesticide' includes any pesticide that contains a neonicotinoid unless applied by a licensed applicator or certified technician working in structural pest control. Bill did not pass committee, IFCA opposed.
- ✓ **HB 1847 (Cabello)** - Amends the Garden Act. Provides that a person may save the seeds grown in a vegetable garden for personal consumption or non-commercial sharing. Provides that a unit of local government may not adopt a regulation or ordinance that precludes saving seeds grown in vegetable gardens. IFCA is opposed, bill did not pass committee.
- ✓ **SB 3208 (Joyce)** - Amends the IL Vehicle Code. Changes the definition of "implement of husbandry" to exclude any farm wagon, wagon trailer, or similar vehicle having a gross weight of more than 80,000 (rather than 36,000) pounds. This legislation has been amended three times. It has passed out of the Senate Transportation Committee with bipartisan support. IFCA is monitoring.
- ✓ **HB 3762 (Gonzalez)** - Creates the Workplace Extreme Temperature Safety Act. Provides that the Director of Labor shall adopt rules to establish excessive heat and excessive cold standards. Sets forth temporary excessive heat and excessive cold standards. Provides that the Director of Labor shall establish by rule an occupational temperature-related illness and injury prevention plan. This legislation passed on Thursday in the House Labor and Commerce Committee. IFCA and other agribusiness groups are strongly opposed.

Agri-Politics—

- **Legislation to diversify corn demand** is in the works in Congress, thanks to a bill

introduced by Reps. Michelle Fischbach, R-MN, (left) and Nikki Budzinski, D-IL. (right) H.R. 8137 the Biobased Materials Investment and Production Act would incentivize the production of biobased chemicals and materials



from corn, which will create new markets for American farmers. The National Corn Growers Association (NCGA) is working closely with Congress and a coalition of organizations to support and expand the ag bioeconomy. In response to the introduction of the tax legislation, NCGA President Jed Bower said, “Corn growers are very appreciative of Reps. Fischbach and Budzinski for introducing this legislation that will diversify demand for our farmers, strengthen rural economies, and support domestic manufacturing. Boosting market opportunities for bioproducts made from agricultural feedstocks creates new revenue streams for growers of many different crops, which is particularly helpful during difficult economic times." The legislation could be a substantial boost to innovative products developed constantly at the Univ. of IL I-FAB lab, which is focused on fermentation and bioprocessing of corn and other agricultural products.

- **USDA's budget for the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1,** is being cut 19% in the White House proposal provided Congress. That equates to $5 bil. and did not set well with Rep. Angie Craig, D-MN, (left) ranking minority member of the House Agriculture Committee. "Now more than ever, farmers need our support. Their markets have been decimated by President Trump's tariffs, and in turn, raided by our competitors. The President's war in Iran has driven fertilizer costs sky-high, making inputs even more expensive than their historical highs. At this critical time, rather than invest in farm country and rural America, the president has decided to gut key programs critical to the growth and success of family farmers. This budget is just another signal from this White House that they take farmers — and the critical work they do to feed and fuel the world — for granted."

- **Members of the House Agriculture Committee** urged the USDA to take immediate steps to stabilize fertilizer prices amid severe global supply disruptions stemming from President Trump's war with Iran and the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz. The letter details how blocked shipments of urea and ammonia, port backlogs, and shutdowns at regional production facilities are cascading into higher input costs for U.S. farmers as planting season begins. "Even if the Strait reopens, it will take weeks to bring the plants back online and get them running efficiently. Plants that are damaged will need to be repaired. Ports will have to catch up on loading ships, leading to a backlog and prolonged supply chain slowdown. It could be months before supply chains normalize," the lawmakers write. In addition to urging Agriculture Secretary Rollins to communicate a public action plan for how the Trump administration will reduce fertilizer prices and stabilize markets for American farmers, the lawmakers request an examination of how existing tariffs can be reduced or suspended to ease fertilizer prices and for an estimation of the increase in costs to farmers because of higher fuel and fertilizer costs caused by Trump's war with Iran."
- **The Agricultural Retailers Assn.** welcomed the Environmental Protection Agency's action to address diesel exhaust fluid (DEF) system failures. The ARA called it a timely step to support farmers and agricultural retailers as spring planting gets underway. DEF system malfunctions have caused costly equipment downtime and operational disruptions across agriculture. EPA's action to remove the problematic sensor requirement will help keep equipment running and reduce unnecessary delays in the field. "America's agricultural retailers and growers continue to face high fuel costs and tight margins," said ARA President and CEO Darren Coppock. "This commonsense relief will help them stay productive and profitable at a critical time of the year." ARA also emphasized that the timing of the announcement is especially important as farmers prepare for and begin spring planting. ARA's Board of Directors recently ratified this issue as a policy priority for 2026.

- **During the recent National Ag Day Event in Washington, D.C**., advocating for agriculture was one of several important topics. A common question from people with boots on the ground in the ag industry is "Does talking to officials in Washington, D.C., truly make a difference for agriculture?" Zippy Duvall, president of the American Farm Bureau Federation, wondered the same thing when he stepped into his current role at Farm Bureau, "Engagement is everything, and I know coming to Washington as president of this organization, I even had my wonders as to how effective we can really be in one of the most important cities in the world. And when I got here, what I discovered over my tenure here is that we are really important. We're very relevant, and people sit up and pay attention to the American Farm Bureau because of the engagement of our membership. Our farmers and ranchers are the power and strength of this organization, and they need to know that." He said farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural stakeholders need to know they don't always have to travel to Washington, D.C., to make a significant impact, "Every time they call or send an email, go to a town hall meeting, tell their story, open up their farms for someone to come in and tour and tell their story to them, every time they do that, they make the future of this industry and our farms and ranches brighter, but they're the only ones that can do that. Our stories from the farm are the most powerful tool we have, and it's the most powerful coming from the man and woman who's experienced it on their own farm." Duvall said he first understood advocacy after taking over the family farm, "When it became real to me is when I took the farm over, and I was sitting one morning at the breakfast table, complaining to my daddy about federal regulations around dairy and milk pricing and the lack of labor, and all the problems, some we still talk about today. And he said, 'Well, son, if you want to do something about those issues, you've got to get outside your fence rows and be part of something bigger than you.' And he took me to a Farm Bureau meeting that night, and I became the young farmer chairman in my county, and the Young Farmer program has shaped and molded me to take on this position today, and it took 40 years for them to rub the rough edges off his old farm boy." (WMBD radio)

Farm Bill 2.0—

- **Uncertainty surrounding the next Farm Bill** continues as lawmakers remain divided on several key agricultural and nutrition policy issues. Members of Congress from both parties agree on the need to update farm programs, but disagreements over funding levels, nutrition assistance and regulatory provisions have slowed progress. Reuters reports key sticking points include the future of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, disaster aid funding and proposals to expand year-round sales of higher ethanol blends such as E15. Farm groups have urged Congress to act quickly, citing financial stress among producers and the need for policy certainty ahead of planting season. Without a new Farm Bill, many existing programs will continue under temporary extensions, leaving long-term policy questions unresolved. Lawmakers have indicated negotiations are ongoing, but no clear timeline has emerged for final passage.

- **The newly introduced Farm Bill proposal** is drawing sharp reactions from environmental advocates over provisions that could reshape pesticide regulation nationwide. The legislation, backed by leaders in Congress and informed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency framework, aims to create more uniform standards across states. Supporters argue the changes would reduce regulatory fragmentation and provide farmers with clearer guidance when using crop protection tools. They say consistent rules are critical for maintaining productivity and competitiveness. Opponents contend the proposal could limit states' ability to impose stricter protections, potentially weakening environmental and public health safeguards. Advocacy groups tell Food Tank the shift may reduce oversight in sensitive ecosystems. The debate comes as lawmakers continue negotiations on the next Farm Bill, with pesticide policy emerging as a key point of contention between agricultural and environmental priorities.
- **A lot has changed in farm country** since Congress adopted the most recent Farm Bill in 2018. And while elements of the Farm Bill legislation were addressed in the One Big Bill approved last summer, there were still key pieces that were missing. Rep. Dan Newhouse, R-WA, says the Farm Bill 2.0, recently approved by the House Ag Committee, addresses one of those areas, overseas marketing. Newhouse, a member of the House Ag Committee, says lawmakers doubled the amount of funds going to the Market Access Program and Foreign Market Development Program, which are so important for U.S. growers to be competitive. He added that as overseas competition for North American products grows, efforts to market American products need to grow as well, "For us to be able to step up the ability for producers to promote our products throughout the world is key to being competitive. And so, by doubling the amount of resources being made available to the specialty crop producers to accomplish that kind of work, that's going to be huge. And that's going to, I think, enhance the foreign markets that we have in existence and also build new ones, which is so important." Newhouse added that this additional FMD and MAP funding will help keep the Northwest and the overall American Agricultural industries as strong as possible. (PNW Ag Network)

Biofuels News--

- **The EPA recently granted a waiver** to produce ethanol blended fuels this summer. American Farm Bureau President Zippy Duvall says permanent year-round E15 would benefit everyone, not just farmers. "Drivers are facing $4 per gal., or even more, at the gas pumps. But there is a way to bring down prices and help the farm economy at the same time. Year-round E15 is a true win-win for America. Right now, ethanol blended fuels are only available seasonally. Year-round access would increase demand for corn by almost 50%, creating expanded markets for America's farmers. And drivers would save up to 30¢ per gal. We appreciate the EPA for granting a temporary waiver to allow E15 to be sold this summer. But now is the time for Congress to take the next step and make the availability of E15 blended fuels permanent. Drivers and farmers deserve solutions that benefit everyone."

- **In the big biofuels announcement on March 27,** what was missing from the White House support for farmers and agriculture? Pres. Mark Mueller of the IA Corn Growers said there was no White House support for year-round E-15. "I was at the White House South Lawn (that) Friday," Mueller said, "Trump was having a big announcement, and he invited, I don't know, 700 or 800 farmers from across the country… a big announcement was promised. I was hoping in my heart of hearts that it would be an announcement for year-round E15." Instead, the announcement from President Trump focused on additional financial aid for farmers who have struggled as he enters his second year back in the White House. "It was something less exciting," Mueller said. "It was, 'hey, I'm getting you another… I've gotten you $12 bil., and there might be more on the way.'" Mueller took issue with the real source of the money in that statement from the president. "No, the *taxpayer* got us $12 bil., and the taxpayer may be on the way for more," he explained. That approach from Trump, Mueller emphasized, misses the point for many farmers who would rather see stronger markets than government payments. "I'd rather make my money the honest way," he said, "which is, you know, having fair and transparent markets and trade deals. That's the biggest thing agriculture needs." While summer waivers have allowed E15 sales in recent years under both the Joe Biden administration and Trump's first term, Mueller said those temporary fixes fall short. "But that's not a permanent fix," he said. He added that ethanol production aligns directly with the administration's domestic manufacturing message. "If anything is made in America, it's crops that are grown in this country and then turned to fuel in this country," Mueller said. "Here's one that's already in place. The President has said, 'get me E15 legislation on my desk, and I'll sign it,'" Mueller said. "But he needs to make a few more phone calls."
- **The administration is stepping up** biofuels' policy amid Congress' failure to act. That's the view from a key biofuels group. Congress has been unable to pass year-round E15 legislation, and other pressing issues have slowed its agenda. But Renewable Fuels Assn. head Geoff Cooper says the White House is stepping up to fill the void, "We had several announcements that are very bullish for the industry and very supportive and really do honor the commitment that President Trump made on 'day one' of his second term, that he was going to do everything he could to support renewable fuels and support farmers." Also dealing with war-driven high fuel and fertilizer costs and fallout from the tariff wars, but now a Congress that seems ineffective, "Because Congress hasn't done its job and gotten E15 legislation done, the administration is going to take steps to allow E15 sales to continue through the summer months, using emergency waivers as they've done in the past. And then, we got the big announcement on the highest ever renewable fuel standard volume." Cooper hopes the latest developments send a signal to Congress to get year-round E15 across the finish line, "It is a very helpful signal that we're getting out of the administration, and we're very pleased to see that, and look forward to continuing to work with the administration to build on this progress." Cooper says last week was a very good and "historic" week for the biofuels industry and the farmers that support the industry. (Berns Bureau, Washington)

- **Amid rising prices at the pump** and volatile global energy markets, an overwhelming majority of registered voters support the expansion of the lower-cost E15 fuel blend and legislation that would make it permanently available nationwide. That's according to a new poll from Morning Consult, conducted for the Renewable Fuels Assn. RFA said the polling results underscore the urgency of securing federal legislation to finally allow sales of E15 year-round. "These results send a clear and unequivocal message to policymakers: American voters want expanded access to lower-cost E15, and they want it now," said RFA President and CEO Geoff Cooper (left). "By a margin of 8-to-1, voters support efforts to broaden the availability of the more-affordable, cleaner-burning fuel." RFA also said hardworking families across the country clearly understand E15 can help them save money while improving U.S. energy security during a time of great uncertainty.

- **The Environmental Protection Agency** released the long-awaited final Renewable Fuels Standard volume obligations for 2026 and 2027, and U.S. ag groups responded positively. "The final rule locks in the highest-ever renewable fuel volume obligations and provides clarity for farmers, ethanol producers, oil refiners, and fuel distributors alike," said Geoff Cooper of the Renewable Fuels Assn. Jed Bower, president of the National Corn Growers Assn., said the announcement, combined with the summertime E15 waiver last week, is a "positive move for the nation's corn growers," who are navigating an exceptionally difficult environment. Rob Larew, president of the National Farmers Union, said, "These increased targets for biodiesel and renewable diesel send a strong signal to the marketplace and create meaningful new demand for America's family farmers and ranchers." Scott Metzger, (left)president of the American Soybean Assn., said farmers "needed a win," and this announcement delivered that win in a "big way." The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has finalized new renewable fuel standards that increase biofuel blending requirements and aim to strengthen domestic energy production, according to a federal announcement. The rule, part of the federal Renewable Fuel Standard program, sets new volume targets for 2026 and 2027 and is expected to boost demand for ethanol, biodiesel and other renewable fuels. Officials said the standards are designed to reduce reliance on foreign oil while supporting U.S. farmers and rural economies. "Today's announcement is truly historic for our nation's farmers and energy producers. These numbers represent the highest levels of biofuels ever required to be blended into our fuel supply," said Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins. The policy also includes measures intended to prioritize domestically produced biofuels over imports, reinforcing energy security goals. The Renewable Fuel Standard requires refiners to blend renewable fuels into the nation's fuel supply or purchase credits to comply. Industry groups have closely watched the rule, which influences commodity markets, fuel prices and investment decisions across agriculture and energy sectors.

- **Congratulations to IL Soybean's push for higher biodiesel blends!** Clean Fuels Alliance America applauded IL for moving to a B20 biodiesel blend requirement, a major milestone that strengthens the state's leadership in expanding the use of cleaner, domestically-produced biofuels. Effective April 1, the minimum biodiesel blend required to qualify for IL state sales tax exemption increases from B17 to B20. That represents the final  phase of landmark bipartisan legislation passed in 2022. IL Soybean Assn. (ISA) Chairman, Bryan Severs, (left) is proud to see the continuation of efforts that support our state's farmers. "Increasing biodiesel blend rates is a win for farmers, consumers, and the environment," said Severs. "Every step forward strengthens our energy security, drives demand for homegrown feedstocks, and supports rural economies." The policy exempts qualifying biodiesel blends from the state's 6.25% sales tax, creating a powerful market incentive to drive adoption. "IL has created a model that supports farmers, strengthens fuel markets, and improves air quality all at the same time," said Jeff Earl, the director of state governmental affairs for Clean Fuels. The biodiesel industry generates $3.2 bil. in annual economic activity in IL and supports 8,100 jobs across the state. "This is a win for rural communities, the environment, and energy security too," Earl added. ISA extends its thanks to the key leaders behind the B20 Bill, including primary sponsors Rep. Eva Dina Delgado (D-Chicago), Sen. Patrick Joyce (D-Kankakee), and Rep. Charlie Meier (R-Okawville). Gov. JB Pritzker and Dir. of Ag. Jerry Costello were instrumental in protecting, advancing, and signing the legislation into law. State Rep. Charlie Meier (R-Okawville) (right) thanked the IL Soybean Assn. for its partnership and said legislative efforts to promote the proliferation of biodiesel are paying off in many tangible ways. "Promoting additional biodiesel use in IL has been 6 years in the making, because it creates a market for IL soybeans, and creates jobs for the ag industry. Soy biodiesel blends also reduce air GHG emissions, lower particulate matter pollution, and lower meal prices for livestock farmers. This legislation helps everyone in the State by lowering the price of diesel fuel, lowering pollution, cutting costs in the supply chain, and creating revenue for the State of IL by helping fuel retailers."

- **The Environmental Protection Agency released the long-awaited** Renewable Volume Obligations for blending renewable fuels in 2026 and 2027. Brian Glenn, director of government affairs for the American Farm Bureau Federation, said the new numbers provide some very good news for U.S. agriculture, "They included record-high obligations for those blending requirements. So, that essentially means, for the American farmer, that will help drive increased demand for our crops. And this also helps spur development of additional domestic processing capacity for these homegrown biofuels." Farmers are facing significant economic challenges, and this action should help bolster the farm economy by driving strong domestic demand for crops, "A strong Renewable Fuels Standard, with these record-high Renewable Volume Obligations, does just that. It increases domestic demand for our American-grown crops, and this means additional support and resources and money in the farmers' pockets." He said Congress can further support the farm economy by quickly passing year-round E15, "This is an immediate fix. It should be something that we can get done, and relatively quickly, get support in additional domestic demand drivers to farmers. If year-round E15 gets passed by Congress, it can lead to an additional 2.4 bil. bu. of corn per year in demand." (American Farm Bureau)
- **Sustainable aviation fuel** is emerging as a key tool in the aviation industry's effort to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, as companies look to reduce their environmental footprint without overhauling existing aircraft. Unlike conventional jet fuel, sustainable aviation fuel, or SAF, is produced from renewable sources such as used cooking oil, agricultural waste and forestry residues. Business Airport International reports these fuels can cut lifecycle carbon emissions by as much as 80% compared with traditional petroleum-based fuels while working in current engines and infrastructure. The aviation sector has already made progress on efficiency, but industry leaders say SAF represents the most immediate path to deeper emissions reductions. Business aviation, while a small share of global emissions, has taken a leading role in adopting the fuel. Challenges remain, including limited supply and higher production costs. Still, policymakers and industry groups are pushing for expanded production, viewing SAF as critical to meeting long-term climate goals.

Animal Agriculture--

- **Wildfires burning across parts** of the central and western United States are raising concerns for cattle producers and grazing operations as the 2026 fire season intensifies. Large fires in the Plains have already scorched significant acreage, damaging pastureland and reducing available forage for livestock. The Washington Post reports ranchers in affected areas are working to relocate cattle and secure feed supplies. Fire conditions have been fueled by dry weather, strong winds and low humidity, creating an elevated risk across key agricultural regions. Agriculture officials warn that prolonged fire activity could have lasting impacts on herd management and feed costs, particularly if grazing land recovery is slow. Experts say the early severity of fires may signal a challenging season ahead, with continued risks to both livestock operations and rural infrastructure.

- **A big question in the U.S. beef industry** is when or if cattle from Mexico will once again be allowed across the southern U.S. border. Lee McGlamery, the co-owner of MP AgriLytics, doesn't foresee the resumption of Mexican cattle entering the U.S. anytime soon, "No, I don't. To me, I think there are some political issues. I also believe that some of the internal interests in Mexico certainly want to keep those cattle at home. I think the packing industries made a lot of money off those cattle not being able to move to the U.S. So, I think there's limited desire on their side to allow those cattle to come north. And from the U.S., from a risk standpoint, you know, I don't know on the science side, but to me, I just don't know that the benefit outweighs the risk." When Mexican cattle are once again approved for import to the U.S., McGlamery said it won't start at levels previously seen when the ban was implemented, "Yeah, that would be our guess, because Mexico is in the process of, as we're told, expanding some of their packing capacity down there, as well as building more feed bunks and obviously being able to mitigate this kind of situation for the future." (Radio Oklahoma Network)
- **As of March 1,** there were 74.3 mil. hogs and pigs on U.S. farms, up slightly from March 2025 but down 1% from December 1, 2025. That's according to the recent USDA Quarterly Hogs and Pigs Report from the National Agricultural Statistics Service. Other key findings in the report included that of the 74.3 mil. hogs and pigs, 68.4 mil. were market hogs, while 5.89 mil. were kept for breeding. Between December 2025 and February 2026, 33.2 mil. pigs were weaned on U.S. farms, up 1% from the same period one year earlier. From December through February, hog and pig producers weaned an average of 11.9 pigs per litter. U.S. producers intend to have 2.86 mil. sows farrow between March and May 2026, and 2.9 mil. farrow between June and August of this year. IA had the largest state inventory at 24.7 mil. head, up 2% from 2025. IL total inventory was down 4% at 5.35 mil. head compared to March 1, 2025. →
- **Univ. of IL Farmdoc ag economist Jason Franken** suggests there will be [profitability for pork producers in 2026, but some caution is needed]. "As feed costs are a primary component of hog production, a hog-to-corn price ratio of 20-to-1 (for instance, $80/cwt hogs ÷ $4/bu corn = 20) is often considered an indicator of adequate profitability of hog production to initiate expansion of the hog herd. This statistic averaged over 19 for the first quarter of this year. Corn and hog futures markets for last Friday imply ratios above 20 for the coinciding contract months of May and July before dropping to the 17 range by December, with higher new crop corn prices anticipated based on prospects for higher fuel and fertilizer costs due to geopolitical and trade disruptions and the drought potential of a projected rapid transition from La Niña to El Niño weather patterns. With such rates of profitability following the losses producers incurred in 2023, a prolonged path to sufficient financial recovery to spur herd expansion is to be expected. Rather, the industry in aggregate currently seems fairly adept at managing pork supply by balancing farrowings with anticipated increases in productivity in terms of pigs per litter. Taking all of this into account, the outlook remains positive for hog producers over the next year. From January through March, this net price averaged $87.10/cwt compared to $86.06/cwt for the corresponding net prices for negotiated or spot transactions."

Farm and Check-off Organizations —

- **Leaders of the IL Soybean Assn.** were spreading soybeans from Washington to the Orient last week. ISA director Scott Gaffner reported, "I had the opportunity to be in Washington, D.C. representing the American Soybean Association and the Illinois Soybean Association, an experience that reinforces just how important our voice is as farmers. We

spent time engaging with legislative leaders to discuss the critical role soybean exports play in supporting Illinois and U.S. agriculture. We also highlighted the ongoing challenges farmers are facing, including elevated fertilizer prices and the need for additional support as we navigate continued uncertainty in commodity markets. These conversations matter. Trade relationships and sound policy directly impact the strength of our rural economies, market stability, and the long-term sustainability of family farms like ours. In a separate meeting, we connected with Chinese partners alongside US Soybean Export Council CEO Jim Sutter, Roberta Simpson-Dolbeare, and Chinese Minister Lyu Jiang to further strengthen relationships and emphasize the importance of continued collaboration in global soybean trade. As farmers, we're not just producing a crop, we're part of a global system that depends on strong partnerships and smart policy. Ensuring continued

access to international markets while addressing rising input costs is essential to maintaining demand and protecting the future of U.S. soybeans. Grateful for the opportunity to advocate on behalf of Illinois farmers and to help tell the story of what we do every day. The work doesn't stop in the field; it carries all the way to D.C. and beyond."

- **IL farmers' checkoff deduction is not chicken feed,** and that is exactly why it goes to the USA Poultry and Egg Export Council. When demand for U.S. poultry and eggs grows internationally, so does demand for the feed that fuels it - corn grown right here in IL. IL Corn leaders recently attended the [USAPEEC Strategic Planning Conference](). The event united industry leaders, global partners, and commodity groups to focus on the shared goal of expanding demand for U.S. poultry and egg exports. "Poultry is one of our largest customers," said Corn Marketing Board member Matt Raben. "When we're at the table with partners like USAPEEC, we're not just talking about exports, we're strategically planning ways to build demand for the corn we grow every day." Beyond the meetings and market discussions, the conference reinforced the value of collaboration strengthening relationships between U.S. agriculture and international partners like Mexico's poultry industry, a key buyer of U.S. products.

- **Farm Business Farm Management (FBFM)** has selected its 4th class of scholarship recipients pursuing degrees in Agribusiness or Ag-Accounting, fields that are vital to the future of agriculture. As we expand into IN, we're excited to share that this year's scholarship class includes 1 recipient from IN, with the remaining students representing IL. Even more impressive, three of the recipients previously served as interns in our offices. The group reflects a strong pipeline of emerging talent sharing $40,000 in scholarships.

Name	Hometown	School	Major
Ella Anderson	Annawan, IL	Iowa State University	Agribusiness
Miranda Reed	Cambridge, IL	Iowa State University	Agribusiness
Taylor Dieterich	Taylor Ridge, IL	Kirkwood Comm. College	Agribusiness
Grace Dykstra	Fulton, IL	University of Wisconsin-Platteville	Agribusiness
Brady Heins	Rockwood, IL	Murray State University	Agribusiness
Abby Norris	Palmer, IL	Murray State University	Agribusiness
Eric Zarse	Goodland, IN	Purdue University	Agribusiness
Kaitlyn Coombes	Paris, IL	University of Illinois	Agribusiness
Grace Birkey	Hopedale, IL	University of Illinois	Agribusiness
Lili Drinkall	Milledgeville, IL	University of Tennessee	Accounting

- **Congratulations to the IL FFA Top 10 Section Presidents** in recognition of excelling in their role as an IL FFA Section President. They will be recognized for their achievement later this year during the 2026 Illinois FFA State Convention. They are: ·
  - ✓ Jolene Blackert, Section 3, Cambridge High School, Henry County
  - ✓ Shelby Garbacz, Section 7, Earlville High School, LaSalle County
  - ✓ Tiffany Rustman, Section 9, Flanagan-Cornell High School, Livingston County
  - ✓ Isabella Bunting, Section 10, Dwight High School, Livingston County
  - ✓ Collin Johnson, Section 14, Franklin High School, Morgan County
  - ✓ Gehrig Bunselmeyer, Section 16, Maroa-Forsyth High School, Macon County
  - ✓ Levi German, Section 19, Nokomis High School, Montgomery County
  - ✓ Sydney Kuergeleis, Section 22, Waterloo High School, Monroe County
  - ✓ Haven Cash, Section 23, North Clay High School, Clay County
  - ✓ Mackenna Wesseln, Section 24, Pinckneyville High School, Perry County
- **The IL Nutrient Research and Education Council (NREC)** announced that it has retained Dr. Emerson Nafziger to serve as Interim Research Director. Nafziger will provide scientific and strategic leadership as it relates to research and will work with NREC-funded researchers to ensure projects are aligned and being carried out as presented. Dr. Nafziger will also work with the NREC research committee in identifying relevant research and that incoming proposals focus on NREC's priorities and desired outcomes. He served as an Extension specialist for the Univ. of IL and professor of crop production from 1982 until his retirement in 2017. He remains interested in research, primarily on nitrogen management in corn.

- **The Assn. of IL Soil and Water Conservation Districts (AISWCD)** will be recognizing its Conservation Farm Family of the year with a $1,500 award for their outstanding commitment to stewardship and sustainable practices. In addition, the Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) representing the winning family's county will also receive $1,500. This dual award highlights not only the dedication of the farm family, but also the vital role local districts play in supporting conservation efforts on the ground. Together, this recognition honors the strong partnership between farm families and their local conservation districts, working side by side to protect and enhance our natural resources for future generations. Stay tuned as we prepare to recognize this year's outstanding Farm Family Award winner! All additional questions, please reach out aiswcd.org.

Technology—

- **Farmers may not be considering Monarch tractors** as much as they once were. The electric tractor guided by A.I. was either too far ahead of its time or did not have enough thought behind it. Once valued at over half a billion dollars and buoyed by over $240 mil. in initial funding, Monarch is now in ruins. After burning through that mountain of cash, it laid off its entire workforce late last year, warning that it may "shut down" entirely. In March, it was reported that it vacated its Livermore, CA, headquarters, almost certainly spelling the end. What went wrong? There are myriad reasons at play, but chief among them is that it sounds like the AI tractors did not meet the venture's vast hype — a warning to AI and robotics startups everywhere that eventually reality can come crashing down. CA winemaker Patrick O'Connor was an early adopter, hoping that they could perform physically grueling work like spraying pesticides on his steep plantation, adding that the machines were designed to work in the narrow lanes of vineyards. Now it's mostly a glorified mule for O'Connor, who uses it to haul around tools in its storage container and hooks power tools up to its beefy battery. "$200 mil. log splitter," O'Connor dryly enthused in an Instagram video.
- **Autonomous machinery continues to draw attention** as a potential solution to labor constraints and operational efficiency challenges in production agriculture. A recent Purdue Univ. study evaluates whether large-scale autonomous machinery systems are economically competitive with conventional, human-operated equipment under current conditions. Sometimes there are doubts. The study looked at the full business picture, including:
  – Field efficiency of autonomous machines
  – Initial hardware purchases
  – Ongoing software or subscription fees
  – Labor requirements and wage rates
  – Machinery and whole-farm logistics
  Results indicate that, given today's technology performance and cost structures, autonomous machinery is generally not yet cost-competitive with conventional equipment on commercial grain farms. Higher capital costs and recurring technology fees currently offset labor savings in most baseline scenarios. Labor availability and cost ultimately determine whether autonomy pencils out. When labor cannot be secured, autonomous machinery offers a viable alternative to idling acres. But for farms with access to hired labor, current autonomous systems remain difficult to justify economically. Under today's performance assumptions, labor wages would need to rise above $140 per hour before autonomous machinery generates higher returns than conventional equipment. For Midwest corn and soybean farms, the question is less "Will autonomy come?" and more "When will the autonomy performance and costs align with our labor situation and growth plans?"

- **The American Farm Bureau**, in partnership with Farm Credit, is accepting applications for the 2027 Farm Bureau Ag Innovation Challenge through June 5. Now in its 13th year, this national business competition showcases U.S. startup companies developing innovative solutions to challenges faced by American farmers, ranchers, and rural communities. The overall winner of the competition will get $100,000 in startup funds, the runner-up will receive $25,000, and 2 additional business owners who advance to the final 4 round will each get $10,000. "Encouraging innovation is essential to keeping American agriculture strong," said AFBF President Zippy Duvall. "If you're building a business that can help farmers and rural communities thrive, don't wait. Apply today."
- **If you are all ready for the 2026 crop year,** do a last-minute check on your drone. Is it legal? The Federal Communications Commission, which has taken an aggressive pursuit over news broadcasters targeted by the White House, is also clamping down on any type of Chinese-made communications, which includes drone controls. This applies to all new drone models and components produced outside of the U.S. This means that even raw parts sourced from overseas cannot be used to build drones domestically, further tightening restrictions on foreign technologies. "The FCC changed its policy from covered foreign entity drones to all new out-of-country drones and critical components," said Jason Davis, Extension specialist for remote sensing and pesticide application at the Univ. of AR System Division of Agriculture. "Critical components would be navigation systems, controllers, batteries and motors." Davis acknowledged the challenges of transitioning to American-made technologies. "Right now, we don't make batteries and motors anymore. We've outsourced all of that from the U.S., so those domestic industries have to be built first before we can start building quality drones," he said. "If you currently can buy a DJI T30, T40, T50, T60X, a Talos, or any of these other drones that already have FCC regulations or licenses, those are not revoked," Davis said. However, newer models beyond existing registration will not be eligible for operation in the U.S.
- **Progressive farmers who are overwhelmed with decision making** may be finding it easier to identify alternative solutions, and have those choices evaluated by some friends with strange names. Here is a directory of tools with some "yellow pages"." "2025 tools kept you busy. 2026 tools make you productive." Pick one tool. Try it this week, another next week.

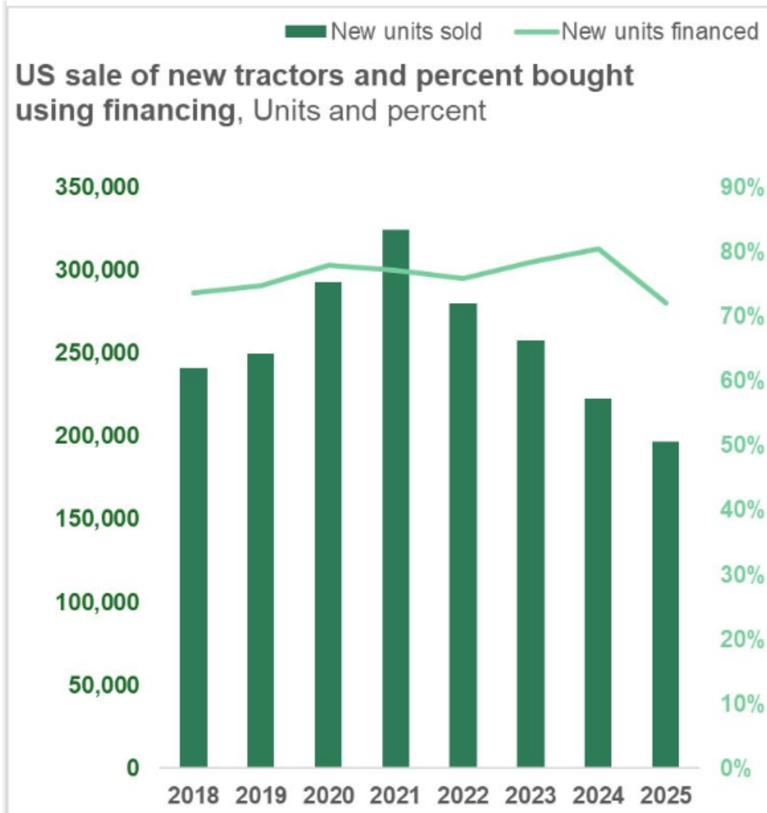
  1. **Claude.ai** - Better reasoning, better writing, doesn't sound like AI.
  2. **Grok.com** - Better than Google. Real-time answers from X.
  3. **Wispr.ai** - I talk, it types. Went from 80 WPM to 200+. Best productivity upgrade I've made.
  4. **Gemini.google.com** - Best image generation model period.
  5. **Manus.im** - Automation without the Zapier complexity. Just works.
  6. **Notebooklm.google.com** - Upload your docs, ask anything. Like having a research assistant who read everything.
  7. **Granola.ai** - Meeting notes that make sense without joining your calls.

Agribusiness—

- **CaseIH brought its star-spangled tractor.** AGCO brought its gold tractor. And the message from the White House balcony was for all implement makers to lower their equipment prices to benefit the farm economy. That raises some interesting thoughts to Graham Gleed, a Canadian farm equipment executive, looking from a neutral vantage point. John Deere, CNH and AGCO were all present on that lawn. The conversation in the industry this week has been about reducing equipment prices. Fendt brought a different answer - 3

years of fixed ownership costs, included as standard. In a market where fuel prices, fertilizer costs and commodity prices are all moving in directions nobody can predict with confidence, which is not a small thing. The argument for fixed cost ownership tends to get framed as a farmer benefit. It is. But it is also a dealer benefit and a manufacturer benefit, and that is the part the industry undervalues. For the dealer, predictable service revenue in a down sales cycle is exactly what the business model needs. When unit sales are soft, a contracted service base keeps the workshop productive and cash flow manageable. For the manufacturer, the customer relationship does not end with delivery. It runs for three years, through every service interval, every repair, every conversation about the next machine. That is where brand loyalty is built or lost. There is real risk in this model. Service contracts absorb input cost volatility that would otherwise suit the customer. Oil prices, parts costs, labor rates. The manufacturer is taking on exposure the farmer is putting down. That takes confidence in your product and your cost model. The pressure on manufacturers to cut prices is real. So is the risk of what happens when they do. Cost reduction cycles in this industry have a pattern - engineering compromises that take years to show up, service investment cut back to protect margin, parts availability that quietly gets worse. The customer pays a different price than the one on the sticker, just later and in a different column. The harder conversation is about sustainable economics across the whole supply chain. Farmers, dealers and manufacturers all depend on each other's viability. Vilifying any one of them produces the same outcome: a system that works for no one. The answer is not cheaper iron under pressure. It is finding models that are equitable enough to hold when the pressure arrives - and it always does. Fixed cost ownership is one version of that conversation. There are others worth having."

- **US new tractor and combine sales fell** to roughly 200,000 units in 2025, down about 40% from a 2021 peak near 325,000, reports Wesley Davis, chief ag economist at Meridian Ag Advisors. "The share bought using financing has also slipped from ~80% to ~70%, the lowest since at least 2018. Most new equipment is purchased using financing, so the decline in both total units and finance penetration suggest more of the farmers still buying have the cash and are using it more frequently. That lines up with what we're seeing - the operators with the strongest balance sheets are the ones still spending, while leveraged buyers sit on the sidelines.



- **A long-awaited recovery** in the farm sector appears to be in sight as Agco Corp., one of the world's biggest agriculture equipment makers, is predicting an increase in sales for the first time in 3 years in 2026. The manufacturer of Massey Ferguson and Fendt tractors estimated net sales just above last year, according to a statement. While the sale of new machines is set to remain sluggish, growers need to update soon and are increasingly retrofitting existing equipment with artificial intelligence-packed components that help them more precisely plant, treat and harvest fields. "The future looks brighter," CEO Eric Hansotia said on a call with investors. "2025 was the bottom of the trough, and the fleets in our major markets are at the peak of their age." For 2026, net sales could rise to between $10.4 bil. and $10.7 bil., Agco said. That's above a Bloomberg estimate of $10.07 bil. and surpasses sales in the year ended Dec. 31 of $10.08 bil. Fourth quarter earnings also topped analyst estimates. "Agco delivered a strong top- and bottom-line beat to finish 2025," Oppenheimer analyst Kristen Owen said in a note. The company kicked off the earnings cycle ahead of bigger rivals Deere & Co. and CNH Industrial NV, which are expected to report in the weeks ahead. Hansotia said Agco is expanding its market share with the help of its precision-agriculture PTx brand as well as its higher-end Fendt line of machines. Having parts that work on different equipment brands "remains an absolute clear differentiator," he said.

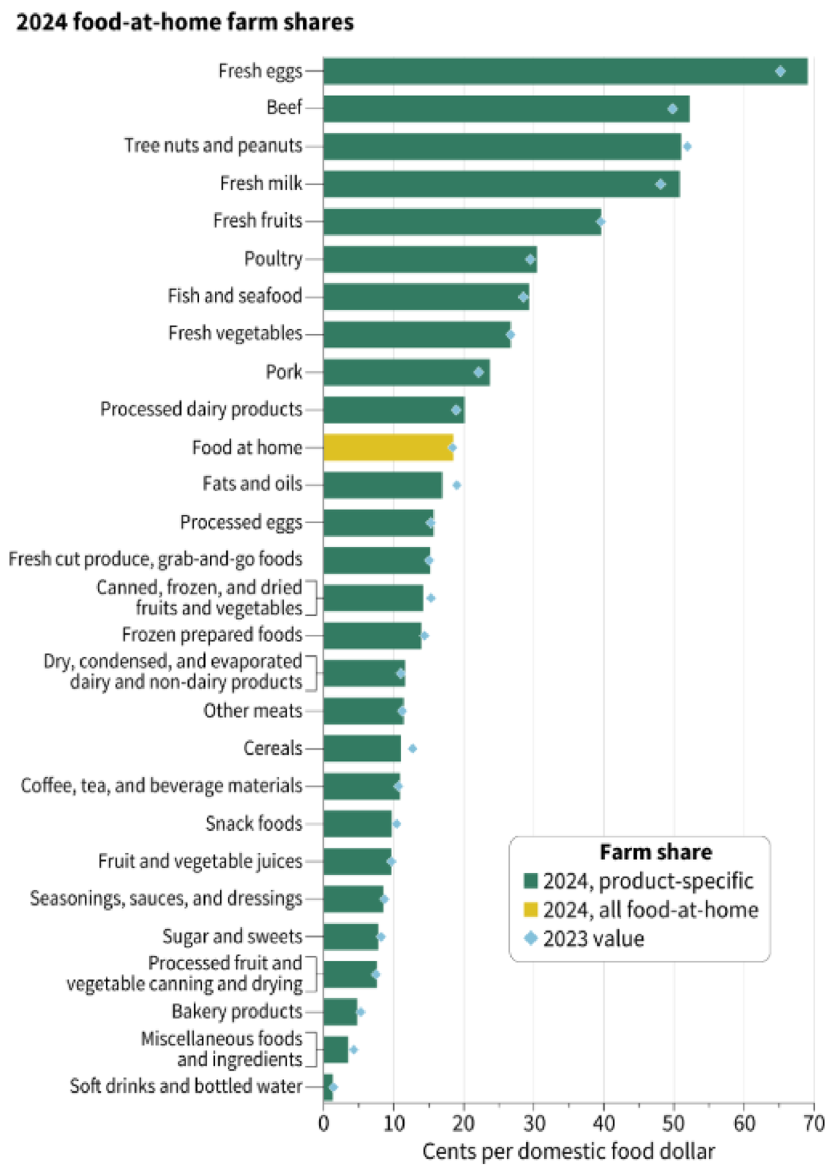
- **Incobrasa Industries Ltd. Located in Gilman**, is in the process of expanding and effectively doubling its biodiesel production capacity, up to 150 mil. gal. per year. With Brazil capturing the China market and displacing soybean exports, Incobrasa is responding to the need to have a domestic soy processing industry to pick up the slack. Incobrasa's overall expansion investment of more than $300 mil. will increase its vegetable oil and animal feed production capabilities. Overall, the growth will more than double its soybean crushing production, up to 98 mil. bu. per year. The rest of the expansion includes:
  - ✓ Upgrading the soybean oil refinery from 40 mil. to 98 mil. lbs. per month.
  - ✓ Building a new biodiesel plant, which can produce up to 240,000 gal. per day.
  - ✓ Building a new soybean oil extraction plant, to process up to 300,000 bu. per day.
  - ✓ Building a new soybean preparation plant, which can process up to 300,000 bu. per day.
  - ✓ Adding a new grain receiving and storage facility, with capacity to 90,000 bu. per hour.
  - ✓ Building a new rail loop with capacity for 400 railcars.
  - ✓ Adding a new electrical substation.
  - ✓ Adding a new solar array.

  To meet the increased production capacity, Incobrasa will also expand its soybean supply radius from 50 miles to 80 miles, effectively reaching the Illinois River. "It's important that we have a strong biofuels market and overall market for soybean oil in the U.S. so that we can guarantee a better price for U.S soybean farmers," said Aluizio Ribeiro, Chief Executive Officer of Incobrasa. Ribeiro emphasized that a strong biofuels policy is needed to support the continuance and expansion of the market. "Incobrasa is going to be ready for more expansion if the market still exists," said Ribeiro. "If the state of Illinois and the federal government keep incentivizing biofuels, especially soybean oil-based biofuels, we should be able to keep growing. It will be a big win for the farmers in our area because that will keep growing the demand."

Food and Nutrition Issues—

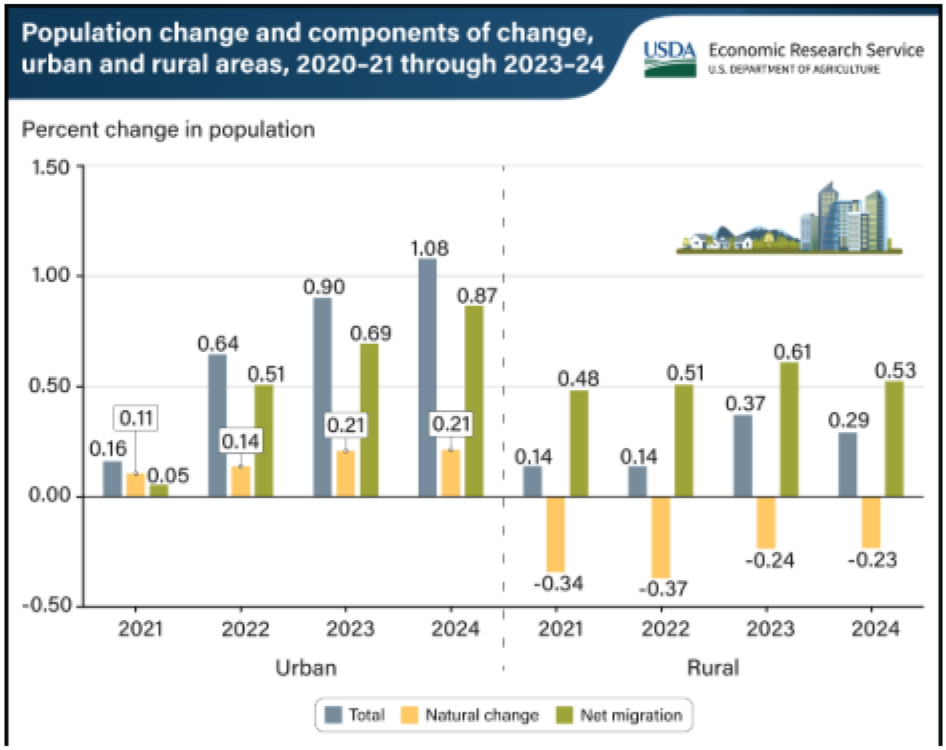
- **Are you getting your share of the food dollar?** Probably not. "Check how small the farm share is of the food dollar. Roughly 84–88% of the food dollar goes to the rest of the supply chain—processing, transportation, retail, restaurants, labor, packaging, finance, and advertising. The other surprise is the farm share of food at home for snacks, sugar and sweets is relatively low. This data explains why arguments about food often miss the point. Critics blame "industrial agriculture," but the majority of the food system is actually restaurants, retail, and processing—not farming," observes [agricultural thinker, John Osthus](), who quotes [USDA food economists](), "In 2024, U.S. consumers spent $2.58 tril. on food, up 4.0% from $2.48 tril. in 2023. Total food spending consists of domestically produced food (i.e., food dollars) as well as imported food dollars. Spending on domestically produced food was $2.17 tril. in 2024, up 3.0% from $2.11 tril. in 2023. Domestic farm establishments received $256.7 bil. in 2024 from the sale of commodities used in the food system, up 1.0% or $2.7 bil. from 2023 when it was $254.1 bil. The figure below shows how marketing value, farm value, and imported food dollars contribute to changes in total food spending over recent years.

2024 Food Dollar marketing bill for all food



Farm and Family Issues—

- **Do you have any neighbors?** Probably quite a few. Maybe 46.2 mil. or more! As of July 2024, the rural population of the US increased to 46.2 mil. people, representing 13.6% of the total U.S. population, according to the USDA's Economic Research Service. "From July 2023 to June 2024, the rural population grew by 0.29%, while urban areas saw a 1.08% increase. Rural growth happened mainly because of more people moving in than moving out, also called positive net migration. This movement in rural areas offset population losses from natural change, in which deaths exceed births. Although rural deaths still exceed births, the gap between deaths and births decreased in 2024. Since 2021, rural populations have grown steadily after a decade of little to no growth, primarily because of stable positive net migration and a reduction in natural losses. The growth rate in rural areas more than doubled in 2023 compared to 2022, from 0.14% to 0.37% because of these factors. Historically, urban areas have experienced larger population growth than rural areas because of both positive net migration and natural increase."



- **In honor of National Ag Day**, legislators introduced the bipartisan Agriculture Access to Addiction and Mental Healthcare Act. The bill aims to improve access to mental health and addiction services for farmers and ranchers in rural communities. Rep Derrick Van Orden, R-WI, one of the cosponsors, says farmers and ranchers are the nation's backbone, working tirelessly to feed and fuel America. "This legislation takes an important step toward understanding the gaps in access to mental health and addiction care for our agricultural communities," Van Orden said. Rep. Joe Neguse, D-CO, said this legislation takes an important first step towards bridging access and care gaps and ensuring that rural America has access to essential healthcare services. "Our farmers, ranchers, and producers are essential to the nation's food security," Neguse said, "and we must make sure we're supporting them with access to healthcare for them and their families."

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.
- **Extension's Crop Management Conf.** will be on-line this year, and available from Mar 1-May 31, with research updates to improve productivity and output of crop science experts. Full event details and registration are available at go.illinois.edu/CMC. CEU's available.
- **Sustaining your farm legacy** will be the focus of several 2026 meetings and on-line programs, being jointly presented by Extension and IL Farm Bureau, for IL farmland owners and agricultural stakeholders. 6/30 Sycamore, 8/25 Mt. Vernon. Details.
- **Precision Conservation Management** will conduct a webinar April 7 to detail what 10 years of field-level data tells about improving farm profitability. PCM leaders will share practical takeaways from PCM's dataset highlighting how tillage, nitrogen management, and cover crops influence farmers' bottom line, not just yield. Details and registration here.
- **IL Conservation On-Farm Network virtual meeting.** Agriculture specialists from across Illinois and the broader Midwest region for monthly discussions to explore new research, troubleshoot field conditions, and provide updates on policies and programs related to conservation agriculture. April 8. Details and registration.
- **Crowdsourcing Conservation: Financial Incentives** is the title of an on-line, virtual program April 14 at 12 noon to focus on farmers' perspectives on an alternative funding approach to conservation implementation. The session will highlight the lessons learned from initiating and growing farmer peer groups, while profiling the innovative, farmer-driven strategies that are successfully driving water quality improvement. Details and registration.
- **Virtual cover crop meeting April 15.** An informal space to exchange cover crop ideas and troubleshoot challenges with fellow farmers. Details and registration.
- **A Nutrient Stewardship Field Day** is scheduled April 18 in Clinton Co. with a bus trip on regenerative agriculture. The trip will be 10 am to 3 pm. with lunch provided, starting at the Clinton Co. Farm Bureau at Breese. Stops will include our local Cover Crop and Forage Plot, along with conversations with farmers about cover crop timing, termination. Details.
- **The Ag Water Quality Partnership Forum** at the IL Soybean Assn. office in Bloomington, April 23, from 9 am through lunch. The focus is on the IL Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy, with speakers from IL Ag Dept., Univ. of IL, Sustainable Ag Partnership, STAR, and others with a focus on steering farmers to Best Management Practices to address nutrient loss. Details.

ILLINOIS SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION

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