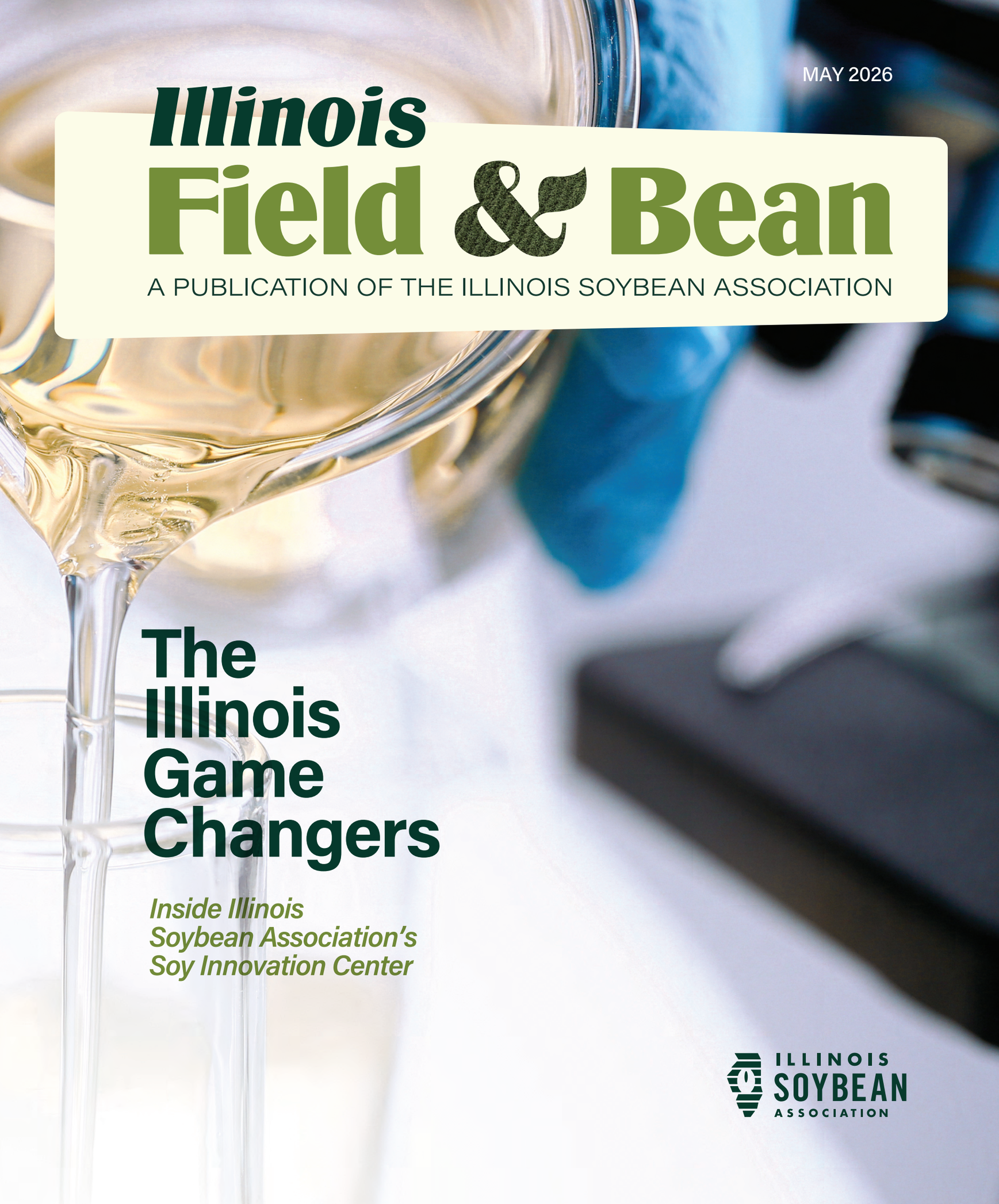
MAY 2026

Illinois Field & Bean

A PUBLICATION OF THE ILLINOIS SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION



The Illinois Game Changers

Inside Illinois Soybean Association's Soy Innovation Center

ILLINOIS SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION

JOHN DEERE

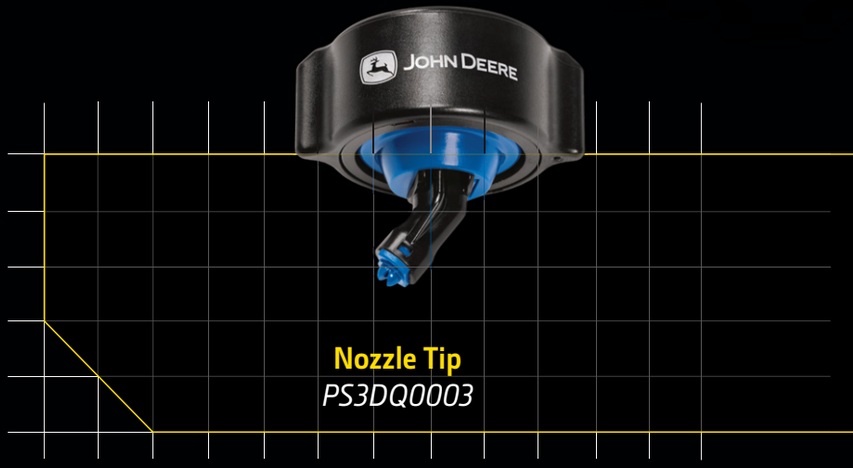
STILL TRUSTED. STILL PROVEN.

STILL RUNNING.

WITH PARTS FROM YOUR JOHN DEERE DEALER.

Seasons change. The work doesn't. John Deere parts provide the same quality and reliability as the day your equipment was built. When every part does its job season after season, you keep running with confidence.

Visit JohnDeere.com/StillRunning or your John Deere dealer.



Nozzle Tip
PS3DQ0003

AMERICA 250

Contents

May 2026 Volume 6 Issue 7

COVER: In this "Illinois Game Changers" issue, we're spotlighting the innovations reshaping the future of farming. From breakthroughs at the Soy Innovation Center to real-world examples of Illinois farmers using cutting-edge tools such as autonomous grain carts and AI systems, this issue is all about progress in action.

FROM THE BOARDROOM

Funded by the Illinois Soybean Checkoff

Tim Clark
District 8 Director | Illinois Soybean Association

Rooted in Experience, Growing in Leadership

Hi, my name is Tim Clark, and I was elected to the Illinois Soybean Board (ISB) as District 8 Director last year. District 8 is in the western part of the state and includes Adams, Brown, Hancock, McDonough, and Schuyler Counties.

I reside in Macomb with my wife, Stacy. My three children are Kalli, Britta and Austin, and my three grandchildren are Veronica, Bruce and Colston. I've worked as a seed manager for Augusta Farmers Co-op for 14 years. Before that, I owned a construction company in Macomb for 18 years.

OUR FARM

Our farm has been in the family since the 1970s and includes 160 acres in McDonough County. The farm has been cash-rented ever since my parents bought it 50 years ago. But last year, I started farming it myself.

Growing up around the farm, where my mom still lives today, sparked my interest in agriculture. Because this past year was our first to farm the land ourselves, we had to purchase all of the equipment to do the job. Overall, we had good yields on our soybeans, and we're looking forward to our second growing season this year.

WHY I BECAME AN ISB DIRECTOR

I've always had an interest in soybeans, and I've tried to learn as much as I can while at Augusta Farmers Co-op. That's the reason I attended a field day hosted by Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) in western Illinois a few years ago. During the event, I learned about current agronomic research and was introduced to ISA in general. Once I became a Director, I decided to join the ISA Soybean Production Committee because of my background and interests.

Given my background and interest, as a Director, I joined the ISA Soybean Production Committee. The committee is composed of farmer-leaders who bring regional knowledge, production experience and strategic guidance to ensure the committee remains focused on advancing soybean-farmer priorities across Illinois through research and education.

During my first year at ISA, I have learned a lot about the important work also being done by the Government Relations and Market Development committees on behalf of farmers in Springfield and Washington, and around the globe.

I'm looking forward to my second year serving as your District 8 Director.

STAFF CREDITS
Editor in Chief, Betsy Osman
Assistant Editor, Olivia Shafer
Lead Writer, Ashley Haddon
Staff Contributor, Brynna Sentel

OTHER ISA STAFF
Chief Executive Officer, John Lumpe
Executive Employee Relations, Nicole Butler
Director of Government Relations & Strategy, Kevin "KJ" Johnson
Director of Market Development, Todd Main
Director of Marketing Communications, Betsy Osman
Director of Finance, Kati Owen
Director of Agronomy, Abigail Peterson
Director of Operations, Dustin Scott

Illinois Soybean Growers (ISG) is owner of Illinois Field & Bean, a publication for Illinois soybean farmers, designed and written to provide timely and Cuseful industry information. Illinois Field & Bean is published by the Illinois Soybean Association, 1108 Trinity Lane, Bloomington, IL, 61704.

Comments and statewide news articles should be sent to the above address. Advertising space reservations must be made by the first of the month preceding publication. In consideration of the acceptance of advertisement, the agency and the advertiser must, in respect of the contents of the advertisement, indemnify and save the publisher harmless against any expense arising from claims or actions against the publisher because of the publication of the content of the advertisement.

Illinois Field & Bean Magazine may contain information or advertisements for third-party products, services, or companies. Any reference to a specific commercial product, process, service, or manufacturer does not constitute or imply endorsement, recommendation, or favoring by the Illinois Soybean Association.

FOR ADVERTISING INFORMATION OR ADDRESS CORRECTIONS, CONTACT:
Betsy Osman | Editor in Chief
Email: betsy.osman@ilsoy.org

CEO'S MESSAGE

Funded by the Illinois Soybean Checkoff

John Lumpe
CEO | Illinois Soybean Association

Changing the Game

I love the word **opportunity.** It means "a favorable set of circumstances." And from where I sit, those circumstances are aligning in powerful ways for Illinois soybean farmers and their checkoff and membership programs. Legislative progress, expanding markets and continued innovation in soybean production are all building meaningful momentum.

As we head into planting season, that momentum feels especially tangible. Each acre planted represents more than a new crop—every one of them reflects the potential to grow both yield and impact. **From advancements in research to rising global demand, the work happening today is laying the groundwork for tomorrow's success. It's a season defined by optimism, resilience and a shared commitment to moving the industry forward.**

This month's issue of ***Illinois Field & Bean*** builds on that momentum, highlighting how opportunity is being put into action across the state. Our focus is Illinois Game Changers—the people, tools and ideas shaping the future of soybean farming here in the nation's top soybean-producing state.

Among those Game Changers are the innovative pieces of farm equipment already in your fields or poised to come there soon. You will read about farmers using autonomous grain carts and artificial intelligence tools to improve efficiency and decision-making. These tools are helping operations move faster, manage labor and make better use of every acre. They are practical solutions that fit into real soybean-farming conditions.

We are also investing in places where innovation can be tested and proven. The ISA Agronomy Farm is testing plant and input advances at scale so you don't have to. That research provides you with agronomic insights you can use. The goal is simple: Deliver information that works.

At the same time, we are working to change the game when it comes to demand for soybeans.

Back in late March, we hosted the second annual SpringBoard Challenge in Bloomington. This effort was focused on expanding markets by developing new, nonfood uses for soy-based products. It brought together farmers, researchers, university experts and industry leaders to move ideas forward.

The SpringBoard Challenge helps fuel our work at the Soy Innovation Center. Together, these efforts are building a stronger system for research and development. We are working with Illinois universities and other partners to turn good ideas into real products that create demand.

One of the biggest hurdles in innovation is the transition from research to real-world use. Too many ideas stall before they reach the marketplace. Through SpringBoard and the Soy Innovation Center, we are connecting innovation with investment and helping move those ideas forward. That work matters at the farm level. New uses for soybeans mean stronger demand, more stability and greater opportunity over time.

This issue also introduces a few more Game Changers, our 2026 IL Soy Envoys. These industry experts share agronomic information and regional crop updates with Illinois soybean farmers. They represent the next generation of leadership and another way we are working to move the industry forward. Changing the game is not always one big flip-the-board moment. Rather, this effort is built on the foundation of steady progress, smart decisions and a willingness to adapt.

As you move through this issue and into the heart of planting season, I encourage you to keep that word—opportunity—top of mind. It exists in the decisions you make each day, the technologies you choose to adopt and the partnerships that strengthen our industry. Together, these moments add up to meaningful progress. Illinois soybean farmers have always found ways to adapt and lead, and that spirit continues to position us for what comes next.

The opportunities ahead are real—and so is our ability to make the most of them.

I wish you continued safety and productivity this planting season.

Funded by the Illinois Soybean Checkoff

Driving Demand

Inside Illinois Soybean Association's Soy Innovation Center

SOY-BASED SWEETENER

SOY-BASED BIOLUBRICANTS

ILSOY WORKS

By Todd Main, Director of Market Development, Illinois Soybean Association, and Badri Narasimhan, Venture Advisor, Soy Innovation Center

Innovation often begins with a simple question: What else can soy do? At the Illinois Soybean Association's Soy Innovation Center (ISA's SIC), we're asking that question every day. Increasingly, the answers are opening doors to entirely new markets for Illinois soybeans.

The work underway at the SIC is about more than scientific curiosity. It's about identifying new industrial-scale uses for soy that could strengthen demand, create manufacturing opportunities closer to home and ultimately support long-term profitability for Illinois soybean farmers.

In this article, we'll take you inside the SIC's approach to building new markets. We'll share how two promising projects, soy-based lubricants and soy-derived xylitol, emerged from our research pipeline. And we'll demonstrate what makes them commercially promising and how they could become meaningful new demand drivers for Illinois soybeans.

HOW THE SIC FINDS NEW SOY OPPORTUNITIES

The SIC exists to facilitate research, development and commercialization of new and innovative uses for soy at an industrial scale. The program is funded through the soybean checkoff.

One of the center's key engines for innovation is the SpringBoard Challenge. This research competition is designed to stimulate the broader ag-tech economy and encourage entrepreneurs and scientists to explore new applications for soy-based materials.

Before any project receives checkoff investment, we evaluate it through a rigorous lens. Several core questions guide every decision:

- **Does soy provide a real competitive advantage?** We look beyond environmental benefits and ask whether soy truly performs better than other feedstocks for this application.
- **Is the potential market large enough to matter?** Internally, we call this our "move-the-pile" scorecard. If a product category can't consume meaningful soybean volume, we pass on it.
- **Does it align with where the U.S. economy is headed?** We prioritize materials and technologies likely to matter in the next decade.

We've used these criteria during the SIC's first 18 months to cast a wide net and explore opportunities across several categories: bioplastics, lubricants, PFAS substitutes, biopolymers and biofibers.

From that initial exploration, and after extensive review of existing industry work, we began our work focused on two particularly promising opportunities: biolubricants and xylitol.

SOY-BASED LUBRICANTS FOR FARM EQUIPMENT

Of the many opportunities we evaluated, lubricants stood out immediately for one practical reason: Our own members would be natural early adopters.

Farm equipment relies heavily on grease and other lubricants to protect moving parts from friction and wear. Today, nearly all commercially available products used in agriculture contain petroleum-derived ingredients and are rated under the NLGI-2 performance standard.

Yet soybean oil contains several properties that make it an exceptional lubricant ingredient:

- Its large triglyceride molecules create high viscosity, making it similar to the long-chain hydrocarbons used in petroleum-based lubricants.
- Soy offers best-in-class polarity, meaning it adheres exceptionally well to metal surfaces.
- It provides a compelling combination of performance, cost and sustainability advantages.

We knew that if this product met commercial standards, Illinois farmers could help generate the field data needed to bring it to market.

The journey has been far from simple. After several unsuccessful formulation attempts, we partnered with a Chicago-area manufacturer that developed a grease recipe using soybean oil that not only met but far exceeded NLGI performance standards.

In January, we delivered the first 100 pounds of soy-based grease to ISA board members for initial testing. The next step is scaling production toward approximately 15,000 pounds in time for pre-harvest greasing this fall, with a longer-term goal of producing 50,000 one-pound cartridges by the third quarter of 2026.

If even a modest share of the ag lubricant market adopts soy-based grease, the potential demand impact becomes meaningful. Our early projections suggest Illinois farmer use alone could represent roughly 66,667 bushels of soybean demand annually at a 5% market capture.

FROM SOYBEAN HULLS TO HEALTHY SWEETENERS

If lubricants emerged from strategic planning, the second project—soy-derived xylitol—began with an unexpected moment of serendipity.

During a tour of the U.S. Department of Agriculture research facility in Peoria, scientists explained that the lab had spent decades studying different agricultural feedstocks for potential industrial applications. Curious to learn more, we asked if they had a database summarizing that research. Sure enough, they did, and they agreed to share it with us.

After spending several Saturdays exploring its contents, we identified a fascinating opportunity that had never been pursued commercially. Researchers had previously extracted xylitol, a widely used sugar substitute, from corn cobs, but no one had attempted to produce it from soy-based materials.

We launched a project to explore that possibility using soybean hulls as the input material.

The choice was deliberate. Soybean hulls are often considered one of the lower-value components of the soybean processing stream. They're commonly used as animal feed filler. Yet they contain hemicellulose, a compound

Funded by the Illinois Soybean Checkoff

well-suited to sugar extraction processes.

This humble byproduct, which as of this writing sells for about $100 per ton, might hold the key to producing a high-value ingredient used in products such as mouthwash, sugar-free gum, toothpaste and other sugar-free foods and oral care products.

Xylitol also offers several compelling consumer health advantages. Unlike traditional sugar, it doesn't trigger an insulin response, making it suitable for people with diabetes. Even more remarkably, it can help prevent tooth decay.

The research has already reached a promising milestone. Phase 1 of the project concluded in December 2025 with the successful production of small quantities of xylitol from soybean hulls. The team is now working to scale output to 10 kilograms while evaluating manufacturing costs and commercial feasibility.

North America already represents the world's largest xylitol market, consuming more than 20,000 tons annually, much of it imported from China. Several industry partners including a major sugar-free product manufacturer and a national consulting firm specializing in sweetener formulations have expressed strong interest in establishing a domestic supply chain.

If the technology proves commercially viable, the potential demand impact could be substantial. At just 5% market penetration, soy-based xylitol could require approximately 2.7 million bushels of soybeans annually.

Photo credit: Badri Narasimhan, Soy Innovation Center

Commercial-scale production is currently targeted for 2027 following additional testing, food-safety certifications and pilot-scale development throughout 2026.

TURNING INNOVATION INTO MARKETS

Discovering promising technologies is only the SIC's first step. Transforming them into viable products requires extensive work across manufacturing, logistics and supply chains.

One challenge we quickly encountered while developing soy-based lubricants illustrates this reality. Illinois once had a large-scale grease manufacturing facility, but a fire destroyed the plant several years ago. Today, no large-scale grease manufacturing remains in the state.

Building a supply chain required creative problem solving. At one point, the logistics plan involved sourcing empty cartridges from Canada, manufacturing grease in Wisconsin, shipping drums to Iowa for packaging and finally returning finished cartridges to Illinois retailers.

Through persistent work with partners, we have simplified the process to a two-step system with the ultimate goal of bringing the entire production chain back to Illinois.

Like all new ventures, some projects might encounter obstacles or even fail. But our focus continues to be identifying opportunities where soy can compete and build new demand for Illinois farmers. The SIC exists because Illinois growers invest checkoff dollars to explore these possibilities.

NEW FRONTIERS FOR SOY-BASED INNOVATION

Lubricants and xylitol represent just the beginning of the SIC's research pipeline. Several additional projects and opportunities are already underway, including:

- **PFAS substitutes:** biodegradable, soy-protein-based coatings designed to provide waterproofing without the environmental concerns associated with conventional PFAS chemicals.
- **Soy-based magnets:** early-stage research exploring unique properties of soy materials in laboratory-produced magnetic applications.

Photo credit: Badri Narasimhan, Soy Innovation Center

- **Other commercial products:** projects exploring soy-based plastics, rare-earth mineral processing and other technologies emerging from the 2025 SpringBoard Challenge.
- **Illinois farmer engagement:** Farmers who want to stay involved can play a role in identifying potential partners. The SIC periodically seeks connections to manufacturers, logistics providers, storage partners and other collaborators who can help bring innovations to market. If you would like to help us in this process, email ***soyinnovationcenter@ilsoy.org*** and we will add you to our mailing list to which we will send queries.

Innovation rarely follows a straight line. But with curiosity, persistence and the continued support of Illinois soybean farmers, the SIC will work to unlock the next wave of soybean demand, one breakthrough at a time.

Your return on investment for your 0.5% checkoff contribution?

Soy-Based Innovation.

ILLINOIS SOYBEANS, FROM LAB TO MARKETPLACE;
YOUR CHECKOFF BRINGING NEW PRODUCTS TO LIFE.

Learn more at ilsoy.org

Through the Soy Innovation Center, the Illinois Soybean Association unites academia, entrepreneurs and industry to invest, scale and commercialize innovative soy-based products. The It's Sustainably Certification program further recognizes companies and products leading the way in sustainable soy innovation.

100+

Already certified "It's Sustainably Soy" products on the market

Funded by the Soy Checkoff

USB UNITED SOYBEAN BOARD

ILLINOIS SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION

Funded by the Illinois Soybean Checkoff

Growing Season 2026 on the ISA Agronomy Farm

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

In its first full season, the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) Agronomy Farm began to take shape as more than just another research site. It is emerging as a long-term, systems-focused farm designed to answer real-world questions about soybean production, crop rotations and return on investment (ROI) in Illinois.

Located just 20 minutes south of the ISA Bloomington office, the farm is uniquely positioned to serve as a hands-on classroom and demonstration site for farmers, researchers, policy makers and industry partners.

THE FARM'S FIRST YEAR

The first year focused on laying a strong foundation.

We began with breaking out the front of the field into several larger, 10-acre plots, which included a corn maximum return to nitrogen (MRTN) trial in partnership with Dan Schaefer at the Illinois Fertilizer and Chemical Association (IFCA) and the Illinois Nutrient Research and Education Council (NREC). Soybean acres were dedicated to the variety and breeding program at the University of Illinois with Dr. Eliana Monteverde, and wheat was added to introduce crop rotation into the system. Cover crops were planted in the remaining acres to support weed control and to prepare the field for future trials.

ISA also partnered with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to establish a cover crop species demonstration plot. This plot features a range of species commonly used by Illinois farmers, along with others they might be less familiar with. It will continue to expand in the coming years.

In collaboration with Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever (PFQF), a long-term pollinator plot was established at the very front of the field. **Designed to showcase what farmers could implement on their own operations, the plot will require ongoing maintenance to demonstrate the steps needed when incorporating pollinator habitats.**

The farm also features a waterway that was previously implemented by NRCS to address field-specific concerns. Today, it serves as both a teaching tool for erosion control and drainage management and an access route to the back of the field for tours and field days.

Thank you to our 2025 partners for helping establish the first year of plots on the farm. Through collaboration with local farmers and university researchers, large-scale demonstrations were successfully implemented and will continue into next year. Focusing on refining field measurements and logistics, and managing wheat, double-crop soybeans and crop production, will support meaningful demonstrations and long-term success for years to come.

DEMONSTRATIONS GUIDING DECISIONS

Demonstration plots at the ISA Agronomy Farm explore varying management approaches with a focus on understanding both economic performance and agronomic impacts.

Some of the cover crop plots will be established in the fall within the typical regional planting window. An additional plot will be

planted in the spring to allow farmers and visitors attending in July and August to better observe and compare cover crop development across different species.

This approach will allow researchers and visitors to answer some important questions. For example: When making cover crop decisions, what considerations influence the selection of annual ryegrass, winter barley, cereal rye or triticale? How do species such as balansa clover and berseem clover differ in performance and management? Other topics of study will explore questions of winter survival. For example, can winter barley reliably withstand a central Illinois winter?

These comparisons are typically not easy to observe in one location. The plots at the farm are designed to demonstrate these differences side-by-side, with a focus on agronomic management considerations and soil health principles.

Ultimately, our goal is to create a place where farmers can experience practices they might not typically see on their own farms or in traditional agronomy trials.

WHAT'S NEW THIS YEAR

For the 2026 growing season, several new trials and demonstrations are being implemented.

On the back 60 acres of the field, we're implementing an action trial evaluating sulfur applications using ammonium sulfate. This work is part of ISA's broader On-Farm Trial Network, with similar protocols being conducted on farms across the state.

By comparing results from the ISA farm with data from other locations, farmers can better decide whether sulfur fits their system, how timing and rate affect yield and ROI, and if they want to participate in the On-Farm Trial Network themselves or run similar comparisons on their own.

Similarly, a 7-acre biomass demonstration plot comparing winter barley and cereal rye will be implemented this year, which also mirrors the On-Farm Network protocol.

In addition, we're establishing longer-term plots that compare management approaches such as continuous tillage versus no-till, strip-till systems and cover crops used in systematic rotations. These plots are designed to help farmers visualize how management decisions play out over time, not just in a single growing season.

The high oleic soybean demonstration will also expand to include additional varieties, giving farmers a closer look at differences in oil composition, grain quality and how these traits might align with emerging market opportunities.

LOOKING FORWARD

The future of the ISA Agronomy Farm is to serve as a long-term, farmer-driven systems operation that continuously evolves to address the emerging needs of Illinois soybean farmers. By providing opportunities to showcase a wide range of soybean-system approaches, the farm will continue testing combinations of practices with a clear focus on ROI and real-world practicality.

The farm represents one location within a broader network of on-farm trials being implemented by farmers across the state. **Together, these efforts strengthen regional relevance by capturing insights from diverse soils, weather conditions and management environments.**

Over the next five to 10 years, the ISA Agronomy Farm is intended to grow as a hub for education and engagement, not only for farmers, but also for students, consumers, market and trade partners, and policymakers. It will serve as a demonstration site for how Illinois soybean systems can adapt to evolving challenges and emerging opportunities.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR: JULY 16 FIELD DAY

We're looking forward to welcoming farmers, agronomists and partners to the farm for a field day on July 16. Attendees will have the opportunity to walk the plots, explore the systems up close, ask questions and hear directly from researchers and farmer partners.

Watch for more details and registration information on ***FieldAdvisor.org***.

We hope to see you in the field!

Funded by the Illinois Soybean Checkoff

Progress in Action

How Digital Agriculture Is Changing Illinois Farms

By Dennis Bowman, Extension Specialist, Digital Agriculture, University of Illinois Extension

Technology has always played a role in agriculture, but the pace of change farmers are experiencing today is unlike anything we have seen before. From GPS guidance systems to autonomous equipment and artificial intelligence (AI), digital agriculture tools are steadily transforming how Illinois farmers manage their operations and make decisions.

In my work as an Extension Digital Agriculture Specialist at the University of Illinois, I spend a great deal of time talking with farmers about what these technologies mean in practice. What I see across the state is a mix of curiosity, caution and optimism. Many farmers recognize that technology can help address challenges such as labor shortages, rising input costs and the need to farm more acres efficiently. At the same time, farmers are practical. They want to know whether a tool will solve a real problem and whether the return on investment makes sense for their operation.

EARLY TECHNOLOGIES THAT CHANGED THE GAME

Among the first digital tools widely adopted by farmers were yield monitors and GPS guidance systems. Guidance systems, in particular, quickly demonstrated clear benefits. Some of the feedback I heard early on from farmers when they began using guidance technology was how much less fatigued they felt at the end of the day. Long hours in the cab can be mentally draining, and guidance systems help reduce some of that strain. For some older farmers, that reduction in fatigue even helped extend their time working in agriculture. Guidance technology also improved precision in the field. Even highly skilled operators cannot consistently match the accuracy of modern GPS systems, which can maintain equipment alignment within centimeters. That level of precision reduces overlap and skips during planting, spraying and fertilizer application.

With the high cost of inputs today, minimizing waste is extremely important. Avoiding overlap and ensuring products are applied exactly where they are needed helps farmers get the most value from every acre. The benefits become even more apparent as equipment sizes continue to increase. With some of today's wider planters and applicators, manually estimating overlap would be nearly impossible. Guidance systems handle that task automatically while allowing farmers to operate comfortably at higher speeds and cover more acres faster.

DIGITAL TOOLS USED IN AGRICULTURE TODAY

Digital agriculture tools are also giving farmers new ways to understand what is happening across their fields. Drone imagery, for example, provides a perspective that was previously difficult to obtain. From aerial images, farmers can quickly identify drainage issues, areas of compaction and sections of the field where equipment might not be performing correctly. Instead of trying to evaluate problems at the edge of the field, producers can

now see exactly where issues occur and quantify the affected area.

Yield maps provide another valuable source of insight. Over time, many farmers accumulate years of yield data that can reveal patterns across fields. Those maps allow producers to compare how different hybrids, fertility programs or crop protection strategies perform under real farm conditions.

These tools also make it easier to conduct on-farm experiments. By using yield monitors and digital maps, producers can test those claims through side-by-side comparisons within their own fields. The ability to verify results on their own operation gives farmers greater confidence when making management decisions.

THE EVER-CHANGING ROLE OF FARM LABOR

Labor availability is one of the most common topics that comes up when farmers consider adopting advanced technologies. Many operations struggle to find enough skilled workers, especially during busy seasons. Automation and autonomous equipment can help address some of those challenges by allowing fewer people to manage more machines. However, adopting these tools often requires a shift in how operators interact with equipment. There is typically more training involved upfront so operators understand how the systems work and how to troubleshoot them.

Instead of manually driving the machine across the field, the operator becomes more of a manager, monitoring equipment performance and ensuring everything functions as intended. That shift represents a broader transformation in agriculture. Farmers are increasingly managing technological systems rather than simply operating machinery.

ADOPTION DRIVEN BY REAL-WORLD VALUE

In my experience, the technologies that gain the fastest adoption are those that solve everyday problems for farmers. Guidance systems, automatic row controls and yield monitors quickly gained acceptance because they provided immediate, visible benefits.

Other technologies have delivered benefits that are less obvious economically. Variable-rate fertilizer application is one example. Although the technology allows nutrients to be applied more precisely across a field, it has not always produced the yield increases some farmers expected.

In certain cases, farmers found they were applying slightly more fertilizer overall, but placing it more accurately in areas that needed it. From a conservation standpoint, that precision is valuable, but it does not always translate into an immediate yield gain. Understanding those tradeoffs is an important part of evaluating whether a technology fits a particular operation.

THE EMERGING ROLE OF AI

AI is receiving significant attention across agriculture, and its potential applications are growing rapidly. Many farmers already have years of field data stored in their farm management systems. Yield maps, soil tests and application records all contain valuable information. The challenge is turning that data into practical insights.

In the future, AI tools could help farmers analyze those large datasets more efficiently. AI systems might function as digital assistants that sort through information and highlight trends or opportunities farmers might otherwise miss.

LOOKING AHEAD: AUTOMATION AND INTEGRATED SYSTEMS

Looking ahead over the next five to 10 years, I see several technology trends that could significantly influence Illinois agriculture. One promising area involves integrating drones, imaging technology and precision application systems. Researchers are exploring systems where drones could scout fields, identify weed species and automatically generate prescription maps for targeted herbicide applications. That integrated workflow would allow farmers to apply the right product, at the right rate, in the right place with minimal manual intervention.

Robotics and autonomous equipment are also likely to become more common. Autonomous grain carts, for example, often draw attention at farm shows, though widespread adoption is limited. However, as labor challenges continue, technologies that automate routine tasks could become increasingly valuable.

In some parts of Illinois, broadband coverage gaps still exist, even in areas where people might not expect them. As technologies that depend on connectivity become more common, those gaps might become more noticeable for farmers trying to adopt new tools.

NEXT STEPS

For farmers interested in adopting digital agriculture tools, one of the best pieces of advice I can give is to connect with other producers who have already used the technology. Learning from peers' experiences can help farmers understand both the advantages and the challenges involved, especially when considering a significant investment.

Digital agriculture will continue evolving, and not every new tool will fit every farm. But the technologies that successfully address real challenges have the potential to help farmers operate more efficiently, make better decisions and position their operations for long-term success.

2026 IL Soy Envoys Share Common Concerns & Optimism

As Illinois soybean farmers head into the 2026 growing season, they are facing a familiar mix of challenges and opportunities. Tight margins, volatile markets, rising input costs and weather uncertainty continue to shape on-farm decisions. At the same time, new technology, stronger genetics and shared learning across the industry are opening new doors. That balance of pressure and progress is exactly what this year's Illinois Soy Envoy class will be updating us on.

The Illinois Soybean Association's (ISA) 2026 Soy Envoys are representative of the depth and breadth of soybean industry expertise found across Illinois. They offer perspectives on agronomy education, field research, retail agronomy, production ag, digital storytelling and more. What brings them all together is the goal of helping Illinois farmers navigate the season ahead.

For Matt Montgomery of Chatham, Ill., returning to the program was an easy decision. Montgomery is an agronomy education lead at Beck's Hybrids. He served as a Soy Envoy in 2025 and said the experience made him want to come back.

"My teammates and the staff at ISA made it a great experience, enough so that I decided I really wanted to come back and do it again in 2026," he said. "Thankful folks would have me."

Montgomery brings deep agronomic experience to the role, including nearly 19 years with the University of Illinois Extension. He said financial pressure is the biggest concern he hears from farmers.

"I think tight margins, and all the ripple effects that come from that, are my No. 1 concern," he said. "I think most growers feel like this is about as tight as it has been for 40 years."

Still, he sees opportunity in getting back to the basics.

"This moment gives us the opportunity to reiterate foundational agronomic practices," Montgomery said.

"The conversations that come out of that will not just help people survive, they will help operations thrive over the longterm."

Timothy Laatsch of Altamont, Ill., also sees economics as the defining issue of the growing season. Laatsch is the owner and president of Field Hawk Ag Research LLC. He pursued the Soy Envoy role as a way to share knowledge and give back to the industry.

"I see this role as an opportunity to serve my God-given calling to acquire knowledge and share insights so that people in

agriculture are empowered to innovate, produce abundantly and practice profitable stewardship," he said.

Laatsch said the challenge for many farmers is figuring out how to reduce costs without sacrificing yield.

"Economics remain the challenge of the day," he said. "With disrupted trade due to tariffs and elevated input pricing due to global conflict, many farmers are being forced to tighten the belt on input costs to remain profitable."

Even so, he believes difficult times can create room for new ideas, especially when it comes to collaboration among smaller farms.

"If we both don't need a planter or a combine, why are we each carrying all those costs against our bottom lines?" he said. "What could we accomplish if we simply loved our neighbor and worked together to help each other succeed instead of always competing?"

Jamie Horton of Woodlawn, Ill., said the Soy Envoy program comes at the right point in her career. Horton is an agronomist with Pitchford Elevator. She said that she considered applying years ago but that the timing now makes more sense.

"Now that I'm back working directly with growers, it feels like the perfect time to step into this role, bringing a fresh perspective and representing the farmers and production practices of southern Illinois across the state," she said.

Horton said many of the concerns she hears are practical and immediate.

"Market volatility and input costs remain top concerns for many farmers, along with continued pressure from weeds and diseases," she said.

But recent conditions have also brought some encouragement.

"Recent rains have helped replenish soil moisture, which is encouraging after the drought conditions we experienced in southern Illinois last year," Horton said, adding that strong performance from double-crop soybeans following wheat remains another bright spot for growers in her area.

Scott Krone of Rantoul, Ill., said becoming a Soy Envoy was a goal from early in his soybean career. Krone is a product development agronomist at GDM Seeds. He said the program stood out to him right away.

"I discovered the Soy Envoy program shortly after stepping into the soybean industry, and it immediately caught my attention," he said. "It quickly became clear that this was an opportunity I truly wanted to be part of."

Krone said his outlook for 2026 reflects both caution and optimism.

"The biggest challenges I'm hearing from farmers and seeing myself are tight margins from rising input costs and soybean prices that are still expected to stay below the cost of production," he said. "China's unpredictable export demand only adds to the difficulty of marketing and planning."

At the same time, he sees meaningful progress ahead.

"New domestic crush plants should boost demand and steady the market," Krone said. "Stronger Sudden Death Syndrome tolerant varieties, improved seed treatments, and advances in AI, genetics and infrastructure also offer better protection and more efficiency going forward."

Brandon Hall of Wataga, Ill., said his interest in the program grew out of his respect for ISA's agronomy work. Hall is a location operations manager at West Central FS. He said the organization's resources have had real value in his day-to-day work.

"I have always been incredibly impressed with the transparency and mission of the Field Advisor platform, as well as the direction of the agronomy team here at ISA," he said. "From field days to webinars, I believe ISA has given me tools and resources used in my everyday work."

Like others in this year's class, Hall said profitability is top of mind.

"The financial scope that farmers are facing currently is the biggest challenge heading into the season," he said.

"These times bring challenges in many ways but also can present opportunities as well," Hall said. "It is my personal challenge to help farmers navigate products and systems to protect the bottom line."

Marissa Scott of Newark, Ill., offers a farmer's perspective grounded in both production agriculture and communication. Scott is a fifth-generation farmer who grows corn and soybeans with her family in Kendall and Grundy counties. She also shares farm life online through Central

Sisters, the social media platform she started with her twin sister. "I've grown up around farming and now work in it, so I've seen both the challenges and the pride that come with raising a crop," Scott said. "I wanted the opportunity to learn more about the industry beyond our family farm and to better represent the people and stories behind the crop we grow."

Scott said her family shares many of the same concerns facing farmers across Illinois.

"Like many farmers, we're thinking about input costs and market uncertainty," she said. "At the same time, there are really exciting opportunities in new technology like improved seed genetics."

As the 2026 season unfolds, these six Soy Envoys will help tell the story of soybean production in real time. Their perspectives come from different regions, roles and experiences, but together they offer a broader view of what Illinois farmers are facing and where the industry might be headed next.

OPENING DOORS, BUILDING TRUST, AND EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR U.S. POULTRY AND EGGS AROUND THE WORLD

USA Poultry & Egg Export Council

DIFFERENT ROLES, COMPLEMENTARY MISSIONS, ALL FOCUSED ON DRIVING VALUE BACK TO THE U.S. SOYBEAN FARMER.

SOY CHECKOFF™

ASA American Soybean Association®

USA Poultry & Egg Export Council

WISHH WORLD INITIATIVE FOR SOY IN HUMAN HEALTH

U.S. MEAT EXPORT FEDERATION

USSEC U.S. SOYBEAN EXPORT COUNCIL

Surplus Program Aids Military Veterans Who Farm

By U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.)

U.S. Veterans have long demonstrated the leadership, discipline and resilience it takes to build successful businesses, including farms. But today, the number of Veterans leading their own companies is plummeting compared to generations past. Too many servicemembers return home to Illinois ready to take a chance on themselves yet struggle to get their businesses off the ground. That's a trend we can't afford to ignore.

At the same time, scattered in warehouses throughout the country are federal resources that could help those same entrepreneurs thrive. These include farm tools and construction equipment, laptops and office furniture. They've gathered dust, unused and unseen, year after year.

> **"For years, the General Services Administration has overseen the distribution of federal surplus personal property through partnerships with the Small Business Administration and state agencies for surplus property."**

It simply makes no sense for these two problems to coexist.

EXPANDING ACCESS TO CRITICAL RESOURCES

That's why I introduced the Veterans Small Business Enhancement Act in 2018. As a Veteran, I was proud to see it signed into law in 2019. This legislation helps Veteran small-business owners, including farmers, access the resources they need to succeed.

Now as much as ever, we need to provide our Veterans with resources that could help change their future and bolster our nation's economic success. Veterans are twice as likely to start or lead their own companies as civilians, and we should be doing everything we can to support that entrepreneurial spirit, not let it fade.

HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS

For years, the General Services Administration has overseen the distribution of federal surplus personal property through partnerships with the Small Business Administration and state agencies for surplus property. Public agencies and nonprofit organizations have long benefited from this program. I've even used it to help furnish some of my offices in Illinois.

My goal was simple: expand this existing program to include Veteran-owned small businesses.

Today, eligible businesses, including Veteran-owned farms, can access a wide range of surplus equipment through their state agencies. Although inventory is constantly changing, past items have included trucks, trailers, mowers, tractors, skid steers and backhoe loaders. It's the kind of equipment that can make a real difference for ag operations.

Because the federal government doesn't need these things anymore, Veteran-owned businesses can purchase them at a steep discount. And taxpayers benefit because the government no longer has to store and maintain them.

HOW THE SURPLUS PROGRAM STRENGTHENS ILLINOIS AG

Illinois is an international hub for agriculture, and our farmers play a critical role in feeding and fueling the world. When we strengthen

our ag economy, we're also strengthening job growth, supporting our energy future and reinforcing our leadership on the global stage.

Programs such as this one help lower the barrier to entry for Veterans starting or growing a farm business in a highly competitive industry. Access to affordable equipment can be the difference between getting started and staying on the sidelines.

I continue to work in Congress to ensure that programs supporting Veterans and American farmers are strengthened, not cut.

Our Veterans have already demonstrated their commitment to this country. When they return home, we should honor that service by making it easier for them to succeed, whether that means helping them go back to school, find a good-paying job or start a small business of their own.

We can't let them down.

How Veteran Farmers Can Access Surplus Equipment

Step 1: Register your business Create a unique entity at ***SAM.gov.***

Step 2: Get certified. Apply for Veteran-Owned Small Business (VOSB) certification through the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Step 3: Contact the Illinois Department of Central Management Services by calling 217-785-6903 or emailing ***cms.gsa@illinois.gov***.

Step 4: Apply for the Federal Surplus Program.

Once approved, you can view and purchase available inventory online at cms.illinois.***gov/business/surplus/fedsurp.html.*** You can then pick it up or pay to have it shipped, depending on the item.

Step 5: Browse and request equipment. Inventory changes regularly, so check back often for new items.

Funded by the Illinois Soybean Checkoff

The Future of Digital Ag

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

What does the farm of the future look like? Does it have robots? Automation? Fewer workers? The University of Illinois is researching those questions and more through its digital agriculture initiatives.

CDA

The Center for Digital Agriculture (CDA) at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) was formed to connect agricultural producers, university researchers and industry professionals. The CDA's research initiatives center around automation, data, animals, crops and people. This requires connecting researchers in computer science, engineering and agriculture to tackle big-picture ag technology questions. University researchers collectively refer to these topics as digital ag.

"In the last six years, we have focused on making gains to the mission of the CDA," said Jessica Wedow, Ph.D., CDA's Associate Director of Research. "CDA combines foundational artificial intelligence research with use-inspired agricultural projects. We systematically pair together researchers from different departments within the projects, building a diverse team to tackle big challenges."

AIFARMS

The Artificial Intelligence for Future Agricultural Resilience, Management, and Sustainability Institute, or AIFARMS Institute for short, was supported by a $20 million U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) grant. Andrew Margenot, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Crop Sciences at UIUC, was charged with leading the soils component of AIFARMS.

Margenot's team used soil samples from the University of Illinois Morrow Plots, which he directs. This year, UIUC is celebrating 150 years of the plots, which are the oldest experimental crop field in the U.S. and the second-oldest in the world. The plots are split into three sections: a continuous corn rotation, a corn-soybean rotation and a corn-oats-alfalfa rotation.

How easily can artificial intelligence (AI) be integrated into soil science research, including research using soil from the Morrow Plots? According to Margenot, not that easily.

"We realized we were using AI for the wrong things," said Margenot. "For AI, you need tens of thousands of data points, but with soils, we don't have nearly that many observation points. We have a 'small data problem' in soil science using traditional wet-chemistry methods. That's when we found out there was a lot of promise in using imaging methods instead."

By taking magnetic resource imaging (MRI) and computed tomography (CT) scans, the team could get 3-D images of the soil core and was able to see the pores, aggregates (tiny lumps of soil formed by gluing mineral particles with organic matter) and even worm channels.

"One outcome of AIFARMS was that we were able to three-dimensionally image soils using advanced machine-learning techniques," said Margenot. "Basically, we took MRIs of the soils to look at the microscopic pore structures under varying management practices."

The first part of this study was recently published in the top-ranked soil science journal, *Geoderma*.

AI can then analyze hundreds of these images per day, as compared to a few a human could do, markedly speeding up the research process.

"I think what this research does for farmers is lay the foundation for pipelines of data processing and build the basis for future techniques that may be offered by soil testing labs," said Margenot. "This technology and level of soil analysis, which was unthinkable 20 years ago, is on the horizon in 10 to 20 years from now."

At the end of the day, AI and advanced imaging techniques are enabling researchers such as Margenot to fundamentally rethink how they assess soils by expediting data processing. In this case, quantifying porosity of soils enables measurement of soil physical responses not captured by current methods.

But Margenot noted that farmers should also factor in their own experience when it comes to soils.

"Farmers should not doubt their instincts," said Margenot. "In research, we should do more to validate what farmers perceive, which is probably real but we're just now being able to measure and put numbers on some of these things. Sometimes, we confuse measurability with reality."

OTHER CDA RESEARCH

Boris X. Camiletti, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Crop Sciences at UIUC, is leading a research project funded by the Illinois Soybean Checkoff. His project, Red Crown Rot Management in Soybeans, is studying how to detect red crown rot (RCR) in soybeans with remote sensing, i.e., satellite imagery and drones.

The research, which started in 2024, is taking place on multiple soybean fields across Illinois with a history of RCR, in addition to research plots and greenhouse trials.

"The problem is that we cannot physically scout every corner of a field," said Camiletti. So, we use satellite imagery to have a big picture of how a field looks. Then, we are doing the drone work to have a close look at the disease and to estimate the disease severity."

RCR is spreading in Illinois and can cause up to 70% yield loss in a field by infecting plant roots. But it often goes unnoticed until too late because it develops in patches in soybean fields.

The goal of this research is to enable targeted fungicide applications by identifying RCR hotspots, which will reduce unnecessary chemical applications and thus chemical costs. The project will also track disease progression over multiple seasons and map the statewide distribution. At one location, satellite analysis showed an RCR-infected area increasing from 6% to 26% of the field in just two years.

Camiletti noted that his team is looking for farmers with known or suspected RCR in their fields to participate in his research in the 2026 growing season. If you are interested in participating, contact Dr. Boris Camiletti at ***bxc@illinois.edu.***

THE FUTURE

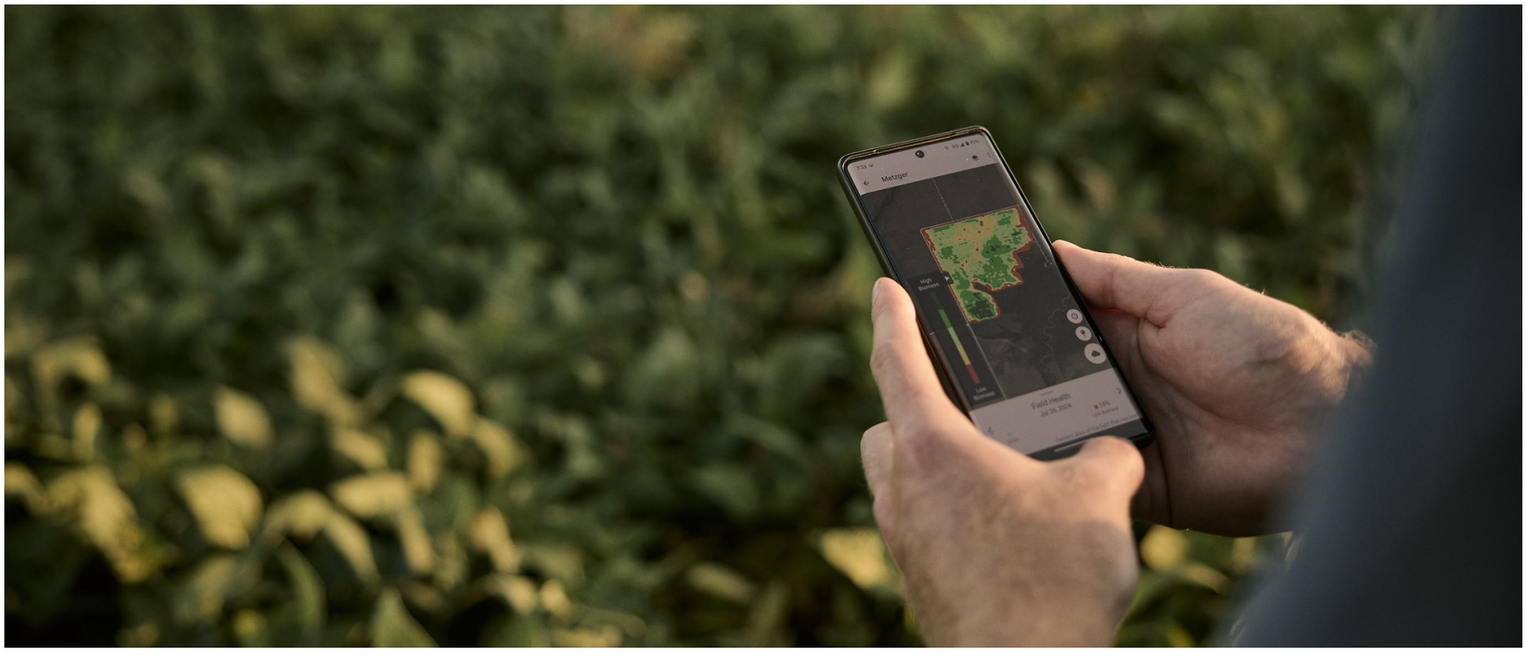
University of Illinois Extension sees the importance of connecting farmers with the digital ag research happening at the university. Dennis Bowman is helping producers understand and implement digital ag solutions in his role as Extension Digital Agriculture Specialist.

"I work to take the farmer perspective to the researchers and then bring research to the farmers through outreach activities and field days," said Bowman. "The goal of the research is to help farmers make better and more profitable decisions and to develop smarter systems that farmers can get greater value from."

Many research projects at CDA showcase the convergence of different types of technology, for example the ag benefits of using AI, satellite imagery and drone imagery together. Bowman compared this to how cellphones now contain cameras, maps and apps, rather than only helping farmers make calls.

"From these research projects, there are going to be applicable things for agriculture in the near future, but there are always going to be things we're going to be researching further out," said Bowman.

"Going into the next five to 10 years, we want to work with farmers even more to ensure we're incorporating their thoughts and feedback and making sure the research is helping them get real gains," added Wedow.



Seeing Red Crown Rot Before It Spreads

By Boris Camiletti, Ph.D., Plant Pathologist, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Red crown rot symptoms

Red crown rot (RCR) is becoming a growing problem in Illinois soybean fields. In some cases, it can cause significant yield loss of up to 70%. But one of the biggest challenges is that it often goes unnoticed until it is too late. Unlike many diseases, RCR does not spread evenly across a field. It develops in patches, creating hotspots that are easy to miss with traditional scouting.

Research at the University of Illinois, funded by the Illinois Soybean Checkoff program, focuses on improving early detection of RCR and mapping where it occurs within fields using satellite imagery and artificial intelligence.

Using satellite data, the research team can identify subtle changes in crop growth and canopy reflectance associated with disease stress. These tools allow researchers to distinguish healthy from diseased areas and estimate how much of a field is affected (Figure 1). This matters because disease is often limited to a small percentage of the field.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR FARMERS

Most management decisions, such as seed treatments, are applied uniformly across the field. However, the return on that investment depends heavily on how much area is affected.

In commercial fields, yield losses of up to 70% have been observed when comparing plants within RCR hotspots to nearby asymptomatic plants. However, these losses occur at the plant or patch level. The overall impact on field yield depends on how much of the field is affected; that is, the percentage of area occupied by these hotspots.

By combining satellite detection with field validation and yield data, this project aims to answer key questions:

- How much of my field is affected by RCR?
- Is disease pressure high enough to justify treatment?
- Where should I focus scouting and management?
- What is the estimated yield loss at the field scale?

In addition, identifying hotspots within fields can help guide more targeted management strategies. These might include focused scouting efforts or application of more intensive management practices in those areas, including higher rates of in-furrow fungicide applications.

The goal is to move toward data-driven, field-specific decisions rather than relying on assumptions of uniform disease pressure across the field.

TRACKING DISEASE OVER TIME

One important finding from this research is how quickly RCR can expand within a field.

At one Illinois location, satellite analysis showed diseased area increasing from about 6% of the field in 2022 to 26% in 2024.

Beyond documenting this expansion, current efforts aim to estimate how the disease is likely to spread over time under different scenarios, including with and without management interventions. This type of information can help evaluate the potential benefits of timely management and guide decisions on when and where to act.

Together, these insights highlight risk and reinforce the importance of early detection and continued monitoring.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Researchers are currently looking for farmers interested in participating during the 2026 growing season. Fields with known or suspected RCR are especially valuable for improving and validating these tools under real-world conditions.

Participation will help:

- Improve detection accuracy
- Expand validation across Illinois environments
- Support development of practical decision tools for farmers

If you are interested in participating or learning more, contact me, Dr. Boris Camiletti, at ***bxc@illinois.edu.***

LOOKING AHEAD

RCR is a challenging disease, but new technologies are changing how it can be understood and managed.

Ongoing work is expanding beyond detection to incorporate environmental and agronomic factors, including soil moisture, temperature, topography (Figure 2), and field management practices that influence disease development and spread. Integrating these variables with satellite data will improve the ability to predict where and when disease risk is highest.

By combining satellite imagery, field research, environmental data and agronomic information, this project aims to provide farmers with clearer, more practical tools to anticipate disease pressure, target management strategies and improve return on investment.

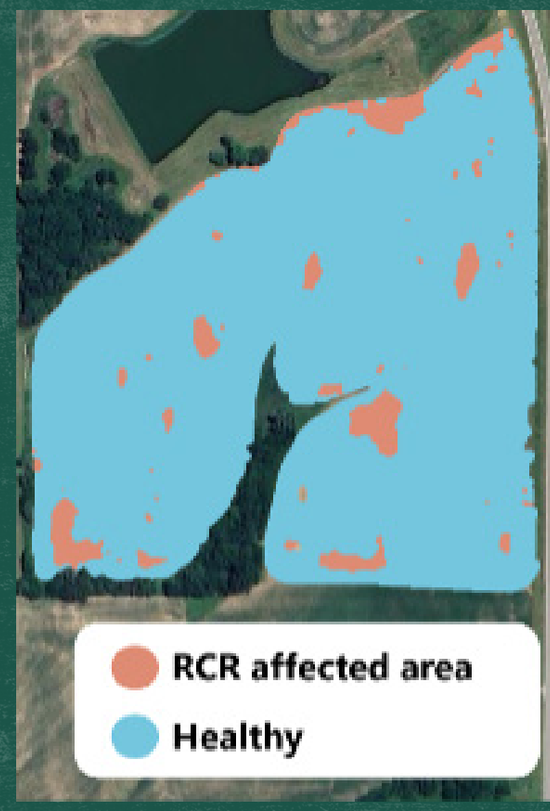


Figure 1. Satellite map showing patches of red crown rot in a soybean field.

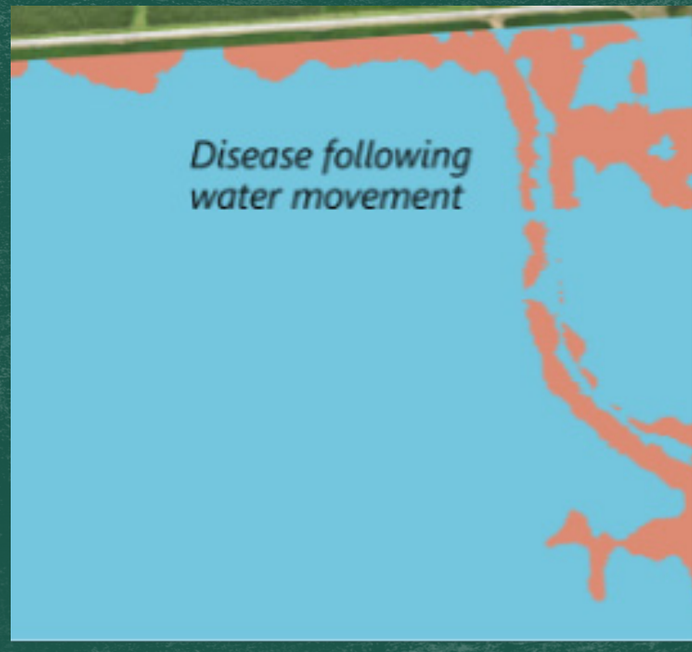


Figure 2. Satellite map showing red crown rot spreading along water movement patterns within the field (orange = RCR-affected areas, blue = healthy areas)

Betsy Osman
Director of Marketing Communications | Illinois Soybean Association

Recognizing Young Farmer Leaders

Every farm has someone who goes the extra mile. The one who always shows up early, stays late and still finds time to give back to their industry and community. Too often, these dedicated individuals go unrecognized until later in their career, yet they are the farmers who are shaping the future of agriculture.

That's why the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) created the Illinois Top 20 Under 40 Farmer Award program: to shine a light on the young farmer leaders who represent the very best of our industry.

Since 2022, ISA has recognized 80 outstanding young Illinois farmers from nearly every sector of agriculture. From row crops and produce to cattle, swine, poultry, fish and sheep – and even pumpkins, mums and cut flowers – the 20 Under 40 program celebrates the dedication of farmers across all commodities and operations of every size.

For instance, while every member of the 2025 class grows corn and soybeans, many bring additional diversity to their operations. Christine and Joe Migliorini in Granville raise pumpkins and produce alongside their row crops, while Jaeleigh Waller of Lawrenceville also raises beef cattle, pigs and chickens, demonstrating the wide range of agricultural production

represented across our state.

Not only do these young farmers set great examples with the work on their farms, many of them have also built successful careers within the agriculture industry. For example, 2025 20 Under 40 Winner Krista Swanson of Oneida serves as the Chief Economist for the National Corn Growers Association. Fellow winner Sydnee Shafer of Arcola manages the Piatt County Farm Bureau, while Michael Bernhard of Mazon works as a Farm Manager with First Mid Ag Services.

> **Since 2022, ISA has recognized 80 outstanding young Illinois farmers from nearly every sector of agriculture.**

Community involvement is another hallmark of the program's winners. Full-time farmer, seed salesman and 2025 winner Jacob Calhoon of Goreville serves as the FFA Alumni President for his local chapter, where he has helped strengthen the board to better serve students through scholarships and learning opportunities. Similarly, Dietrich corn and soybean farmer Devin Aherin supports students through his involvement with his local Board of Education and as a mentor for the Dieterich Schools Mentoring Program.

These farmers don't do it for recognition; they do it because it matters. Across Illinois, these leaders are quietly building stronger farms, stronger communities and lasting legacies for this generation and the next. Chances are, you know someone like this: a neighbor, colleague or young farmer in your community who is already making a difference.

Help ensure their work doesn't go unnoticed. Visit ***ilsoy.org/20-under-40/*** to nominate a deserving young farmer for the 20 Under 40 program by Sunday, May 31, and join ISA in celebrating those cultivating the future of Illinois agriculture.

Kevin "KJ" Johnson
Director of Government Relations & Strategy |
Illinois Soybean Association

Building on a Strong Foundation for Illinois Farmers

Illinois soybean growers, I hope this finds you well. As I step into my role as Director of Government Relations & Strategy with the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA), I wanted to take a minute to introduce myself.

Transitions into new organizations can be tricky at times, but the strong foundation that is ISA has made it easy. There's a good team here, strong relationships and a track record of showing up for Illinois soybean farmers. My focus is to build on this foundation and to stay focused on the issues that matter most to you.

Before coming to ISA, I spent several years working alongside many of you through the Illinois Fertilizer & Chemical Association, and before that on Capitol Hill as an agriculture liaison. I also farm with my family in Champaign and Vermilion counties. I will use this experience to ensure the work we do in Springfield and Washington, connects back to the farm.

Government Relations is straightforward: stay engaged, stay focused, and make sure Illinois farmers are represented where decisions are being made.

There are four areas ISA will remain centered on.

First, we will continue to work closely with the ag family and our partners. We have strong relationships across agriculture, and that's a good thing. Whether we are partnering with other commodity groups, industry partners or stakeholders across the value chain, we're more effective when we're working together.

Second, we will stay focused on issues that affect the farm economy. There's no shortage of issues we could spend time on, but not all of them move the needle for farmers. We will be disciplined here. That means supporting biofuels and the demand they create, making sure you have access to crop protection tools and continuing to strengthen markets. If it doesn't tie back to profitability, it's not where we need to spend our time.

Third, we will hold a seat at the table for Illinois farmers. A lot of decisions that affect your operation are made in rooms you're not in. Our job is to be in those rooms—bringing a practical, real-world perspective to the conversation. That means staying engaged early and often.

And fourth, we will be present and build relationships. This work comes down to relationships. We're going to continue to be active in Springfield and in D.C., meeting with legislators, regulators and partners. When we show up consistently, it makes a difference. It gives Illinois farmers a stronger voice.

There's a lot going on right now. In Springfield, we saw B20 tax credits expand in April, and in D.C., recent advancements in RVO decisions will help biofuels demand. However, at the same time we are seeing attacks on crop protection tools and pressure from unpredictable movements such as Make America Healthy Again (MAHA). These aren't abstract issues; they directly impact our farm operations and our ability to plan ahead.

> **Transitions into new organizations can be tricky at times, but the strong foundation that is ISA has made it easy. There's a good team here, strong relationships and a track record of showing up for Illinois soybean farmers.**

What gives me confidence is the advanced work our team has already put in and the support from the farmers we represent. We will be disciplined, focused and ready to take on whatever challenge arrives that threatens our family and farm profitability.

As always, if you have questions or want to share what you're seeing on your farm, don't hesitate to reach out. That feedback matters and helps guide where we spend we spend our time.

I look forward to working with you.

FROM YOUR FIELDS TO FIREFIGHTERS' HANDS

The more we discover about soybeans, the more valuable they become. One innovative product, SoyFoam™, creates a new, sustainable use for your crop that protects firefighters and the planet.

See how your Soy Checkoff is unlocking new markets for soybeans at **unitedsoybean.org**

SOY CHECKOFF™

SENT TO YOU COMPLIMENTS OF
ILLINOIS SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION

1108 Trinity Lane
Bloomington, IL 61704

NONPROFIT
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
ILLINOIS SOYBEAN
GROWERS

ILLINOIS SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION

ilsoy.org