

OCTOBER 2026

Illinois **Field & Bean**

A PUBLICATION OF THE ILLINOIS SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION

The State of **The State**

*Where Illinois soy stands today -
and where it's headed.*

 **ILLINOIS
SOYBEAN
ASSOCIATION**

Calcium Clarified: Why Calcium is Vital for Your Soybeans



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

The Role of Calcium in Soybeans

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

Addressing the Calcium Needs of Soybeans

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

Get More from Every Acre with SUL4R-PLUS

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

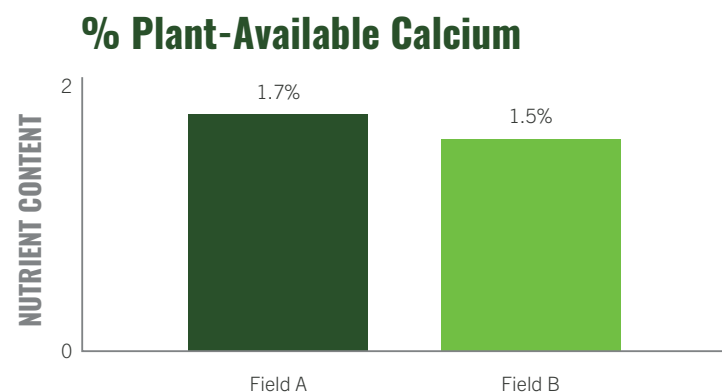


Figure 1.

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

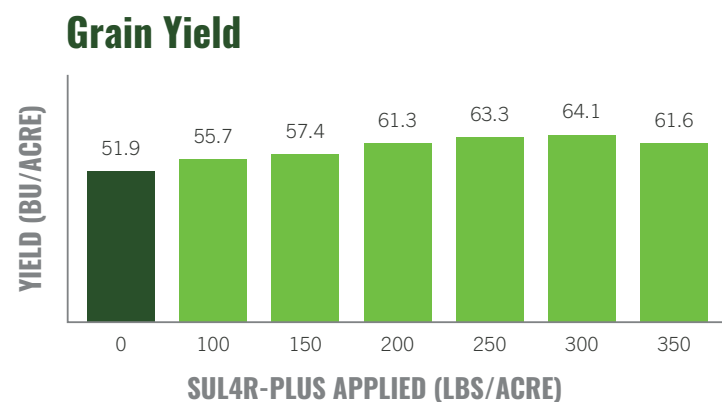


Figure 2.

Secure SUL4R-PLUS from HELM

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

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

Discover more about SUL4R-PLUS at sul4r-plus.com.

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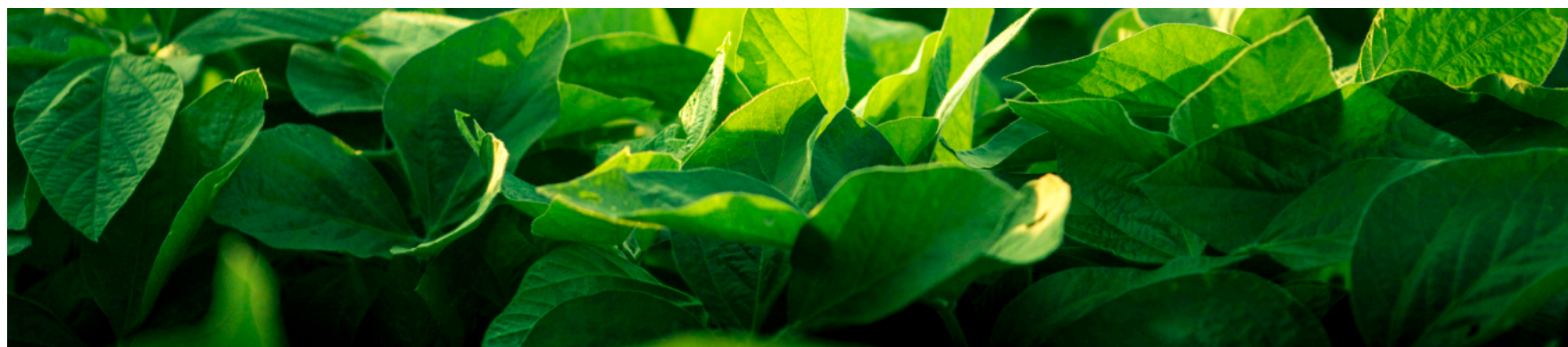
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VISIT US ONLINE AT

ilsoy.org/illinois-field-bean/



In this issue of *Illinois Field & Bean*, we're taking a big-picture look at where Illinois soy stands today—and where it's headed. Get to know the new ISA board, catch the latest on trade projections, explore an overview of Illinois soybean production, hear from ISG members and more.



FROM THE BOARDROOM

Funded by the Illinois Soybean Checkoff



Bryan Severs

Chairman | District 7 Director | ASA Director
Illinois Soybean Association



The Work Continues

I am honored to serve a second term as Chairman of the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA). As a corn, soybean and cattle farmer in Vermilion County, I have seen firsthand the value of your soybean checkoff dollars at work during my past seven years on the ISA board.

LOOKING BACKWARD

Earlier this year, I had the privilege of visiting Vietnam and Thailand as Chairman of the U.S. Identity Preserved Alliance. Southeast Asia is seeing an increase in imports of U.S. soy because of their growing livestock and aquaculture sectors and their appetite for soy-based foods such as tofu.

In August, ISA hosted more than 500 soybean buyers from nearly 60 countries on three Illinois farms as part of Soy Connex in Chicago. The tours served as an opportunity for buyers to connect directly with Illinois farmers and gain a deeper understanding of U.S. soy.

Another notable highlight was when the state of Illinois and the Republic of Indonesia signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU). The MOU focuses on expanding trade, opening new markets for Illinois farmers and strengthening cooperation across multiple sectors. This is a win for soybean farmers because Indonesia is one of our most important soybean markets.

On the soybean production front, ISA initiated five new On-Farm Trial Network (OFTN) research trials, collaborating with 34 farmers and partners. The OFTN allows for testing across a wide range of locations, weather and soils in Illinois. The team also established more than 20 unique demonstration and research plots at the ISA Agronomy Farm, while successfully hosting multiple farm visits and a field day.

MOVING FORWARD

Heading into 2027, three Illinois policy issues stand out as top of mind: the estate tax, wetlands and pesticide use around schools. Illinois Soybean Growers (ISG) will continue to be actively engaged in Springfield on behalf of farmers just like myself. ISG is also proactively working in D.C. on key federal issues, including passing a farm bill and keeping the U.S. in the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA).

None of this work would be possible without the dedicated staff working day in and day out at ISA, and I tip my hat to them for their commitment to serving farmers.

All in all, I'm looking forward to another year of staying engaged with policymakers, collaborating with industry partners and working on behalf of the more than 43,000 soybean farmers in Illinois. I encourage any interested farmer to get involved in ISA through opportunities such as our LEAD program. There is no shortage of work to be done, and we are always looking for our next ag leaders.



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CEO'S MESSAGE

Funded by the Illinois Soybean Checkoff



John Lumpe

CEO | Illinois Soybean Association

Lessons From the Morrow Plots

Agriculture has always required us to think in two timeframes at once.

Farmers have to make decisions for the season in front of them—what to plant, where to invest, how to manage risk and how to protect profitability. But the decisions we make today will also influence the future—five, 10 and even 50 years down the road.

Few places illustrate that better than the Morrow Plots at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

I had the opportunity to visit the plots this summer as they marked 150 growing seasons. Established in 1876, they are the oldest agricultural research plots in the U.S. and among the longest-running agricultural experiments in the world.

What struck me most wasn't simply their age. It was how many of the insights Illinois farmers now consider fundamental were once unanswered questions.

Among them: Does crop rotation really improve yields? Does fertilizer pay? How much difference can improved genetics make?

Today, we know the answers. But generations ago, farmers and researchers didn't. It took years of planting, harvesting, measuring and learning to build the body of knowledge we rely on today.

That is an important reminder for agriculture in 2026.

We are still asking big questions: How can we produce more while using resources more efficiently? How do we build healthier, more resilient soils without sacrificing profitability? How will new technologies change the way we farm? How do we prepare for changing markets, weather and production challenges we can't fully anticipate?

We might have better technology and more information at our fingertips compared to farmers in 1876, but our basic responsibility hasn't changed. We've got to keep asking questions, keep testing ideas and keep building knowledge that farmers can use.

That's one reason research remains so important to the Illinois Soybean Association. Our job isn't simply to invest in interesting ideas. It's to help turn research into practical value for Illinois soybean farmers—better information, better tools and ultimately better decisions on the farm.

The Morrow Plots also demonstrate something that can be difficult to appreciate in an industry measured in growing seasons: meaningful progress takes commitment.

Andrew Margenot, Professor of Soil Science at the University of Illinois and current director of the Morrow Plots, described his responsibility as "taking the baton from a long line of people." I think that's a fitting description for agriculture itself.

None of us starts from scratch. Today's farmers benefit from generations of people who were willing to experiment, take risks, share what they learned and leave agriculture better than they found it. Our responsibility is to do the same for the generation that follows us.

That doesn't mean holding tightly to the way things have always been done. In fact, the legacy of the Morrow Plots suggests exactly the opposite.

The university is now developing the Alma Mater Plots, a large-scale crop experiment area designed to tackle the kinds of practical questions facing modern agriculture. I like that idea because it captures what Illinois agriculture does best: honor what came before it without being afraid to build what comes next.

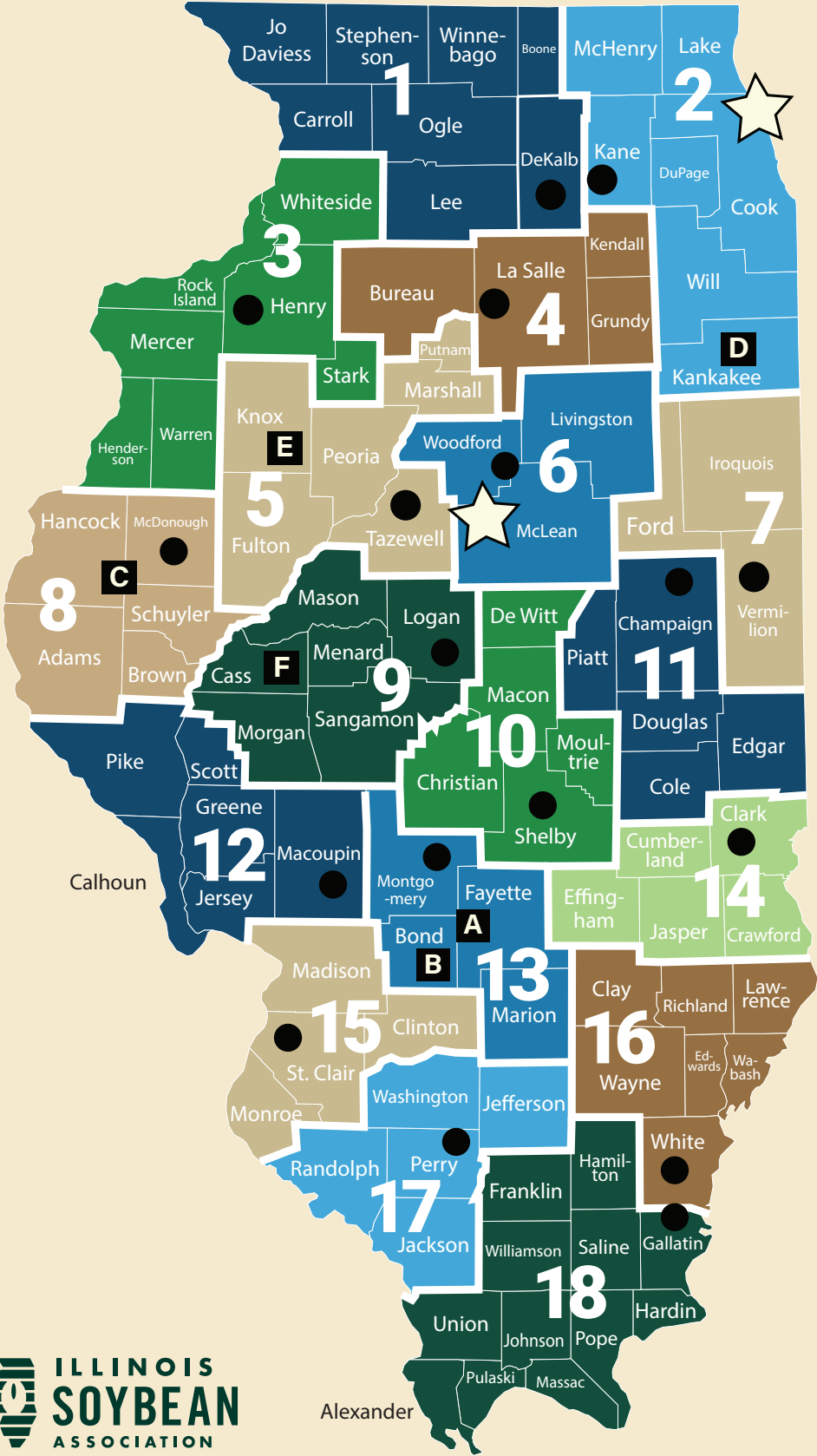
As we recognize 150 years of the Morrow Plots, their greatest lesson might not be found in any single research finding. Instead, it's this: There is value in curiosity, patience and a willingness to invest in answers we might not fully benefit from ourselves.

Illinois farmers inherited 150 years of hard-won knowledge about what this land can do. What we learn, build and invest in today will become someone else's inheritance.



Get to Know ISA's New Board Directors

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



DISTRICT DIRECTORS ●

- 1 Ryan Frieders
- 2 Steve Pitstick
- 3 Dwayne Anderson
- 4 Weston Olson
- 5 Brad Zimmerman
- 6 Rob Shaffer
- 7 Bryan Severs
- 8 Tim Clark
- 9 Doug Martin
- 10 Elliot Uphoff
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- 14 Trent Maxwell
- 15 Jeff Parker
- 16 Tim Scates
- 17 Emily Lovelady
- 18 Martin Duffy

AT-LARGE DIRECTORS ■

- A Betsey Emerick
- B Scott Gaffner
- C Brady Holst
- D Jeff O'Connor
- E Lance Tarochione
- F David Wessel

Five new soybean farmers were elected this past summer to serve as Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) Board Directors.

These five directors and farmers represent central, western and southeastern Illinois. They join the ISA Board consisting of 24 volunteer farmers who govern our organization's use of checkoff and non-checkoff funds. Broken down, 18 district directors represent regional areas, and six at-large directors represent the state.



"I have had many people pour into me, and I would like to give back," said Brad. "Also, I enjoy meeting new people."

BRAD ZIMMERMAN **District 5 Director**

Brad resides in Groveland with his wife, Angela. He farms in Tazewell County, raising conventional and organic corn, soybeans and wheat with Wildermuth Farms and Wild Organics.

Brad is also the owner of SeedOnomy and Targeted Plant Nutrition. SeedOnomy helps farmers grow more corn by placing the right hybrid on the right acre to maximize performance. Through Targeted Plant Nutrition, Brad manufactures liquid crop nutrition.

He also has been a longstanding Associate Director with Tazewell County Soil and Water Conservation District.

Brad is looking forward to his involvement with the ISA Board.



"When the opportunity to join the ISA Board presented itself, I decided to take it," said Doug. "I am eager to learn more about how ISA operates and how I can contribute to the organization."

DOUG MARTIN
District 9 Director

Doug resides in Mt. Pulaski and raises soybeans and corn with his family in Logan, Macon, Sangamon and DeWitt counties. He is married to Erin, and they have four children: Drew, Alec, Luke and Ella. Drew will return to the farm this fall.

Doug graduated from Southern Illinois University with a bachelor's degree in agriculture production. He is also a 2004 graduate of The Illinois Ag Leadership Program, a graduate of the 2006 Cultivating Master Farmer Program, former Chairman of the Land of Lincoln Soil Savers, former member of the Ag Advisory Council for the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, and former Director for the Logan County Soil and Water Conservation District. He recently completed the Illinois Sustainable Ag Partnership program to become a Soil Health Ambassador for Illinois.



"Soybeans are such an interesting commodity because of the diversity of products that can be made from them."

JONATHAN GRIFFEL
District 12 Director

Jon is a sixth-generation farmer in Macoupin County, where he farms alongside his dad raising soybeans, corn, wheat and a beef cattle herd. He resides on the farm with his wife, Kristin, and their two children, Jamie and Claire. Jon also works as a real estate broker.

He currently serves on the Illinois Farm Bureau State Young Leader Committee. Previously, he served three years as Chair of his county Young Leaders chapter and completed the Agriculture Leaders of Tomorrow program. In 2024, Jon was honored to serve as an Illinois Farm Families Ambassador, highlighting life on the farm through social media and consumer interactions. That same year, he was named an ISA "20 Under 40" winner. Jon was also ISA's first LEAD participant to be elected to the ISA Board of Directors.

"I joined the [ISA] Board because of the exciting potential of the crop and as an opportunity to give back to an industry that has given me so much," said Jonathan.



"Everything is about networking," said Trent. "Joining the ISA Board is a great opportunity to continue to network with people and hear different viewpoints and understand what our soybean checkoff dollars are doing. I also look forward to bringing my own perspective."

TRENT MAXWELL
District 14 Director

Trent resides in Martinsville and raises corn, soybeans and contracted feeder hogs in Clark County with his family. He also is a Beck's Hybrids dealer and does contract sales through Helena Agri-Enterprises and previously worked for Winfield United.

Trent was a volunteer firefighter 18 years and serves on both the local school board and the Martinsville Ag Fair Board.

He is married to Jordan and they have three kids: Jackson, Haddie and Peyton.



"Being a farmer, an agronomist and now an ISA Board Director gives me many opportunities to represent agriculture and farmers."

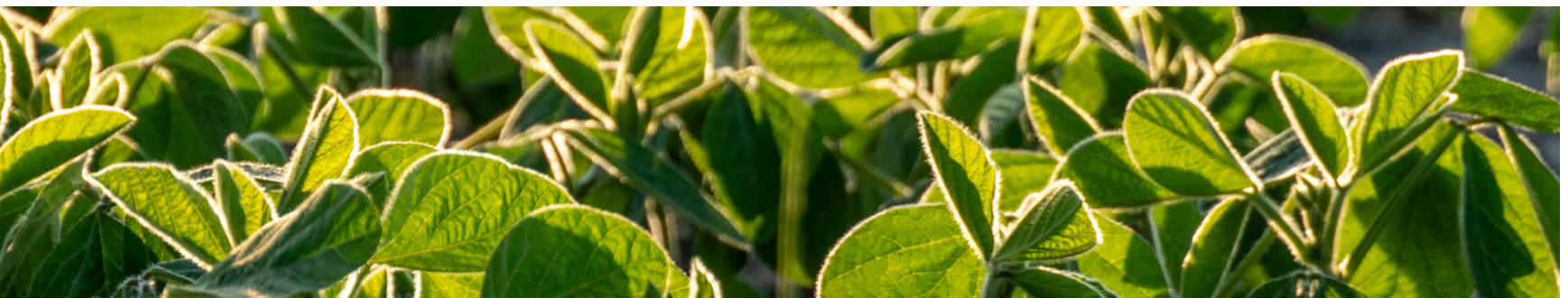
LANCE TAROCHIONE
At-Large Director

Lance resides in Maquon and farms in Knox, Fulton, Warren and McDonough counties raising soybeans, corn and hay. He also works as a Technical Agronomist for Bayer Crop Science.

Lance is a past President of the Spoon River Valley District 4 School Board, past President of the Fulton County Farm Bureau Board and formerly served on the Board of Directors for The Bank of Yates City.

Lance earned a bachelor's and a master's degree in Crop Science from the University of Illinois. His three young-adult children—Cold, Audrey and Ashley—are all involved in the agriculture industry.

"I have always enjoyed representing agriculture," said Lance. "I look forward to learning and contributing to the goals and initiatives of ISA."





THE STATE OF THE STATE

*= SOURCE

ILLINOIS IS OUR NATION'S LEADER IN SOYBEAN PRODUCTION.

*From **43,000+** soybean producers to more than **639 million bushels** harvested annually, soybean farmers play a vital role in the state's agricultural economy. Here's a look at Illinois soybean production and Illinois Soybean Growers membership by the numbers.*

TOP FIVE SOYBEAN-PRODUCING COUNTIES*

McClean



22.6

MILLION
BUSHELS

Livingston



19.5

MILLION
BUSHELS

Iroquois



19.2

MILLION
BUSHELS

LaSalle



17.3

MILLION
BUSHELS

Vermilion



14.7

MILLION
BUSHELS



FUNDED BY THE ILLINOIS SOYBEAN CHECKOFF PROGRAM

*USDA NASS

67* CERTIFIED ORGANIC
SOYBEAN PRODUCERS
IN ILLINOIS

*DTN

5% SPECIALTY SOYBEAN
PRODUCERS IN ILLINOIS

*USIPA

\$6.7 BILLION TOTAL VALUE*
OF SOYBEAN PRODUCTION
IN ILLINOIS

*USDA NASS

\$4 BILLION*
VALUE OF ILLINOIS SOYBEAN EXPORTS

*USTR

62.5* AVERAGE BUSHEL
PRODUCED PER
ACRE IN 2025

*USDA NASS

10.3 MILLION*
ACRES PLANTED IN 2025

*USDA NASS

639 MILLION*
BUSHEL PRODUCED IN 2025

*USDA NASS

9 CONSECUTIVE YEARS*
AS THE #1 SOYBEAN
PRODUCING STATE

*USDA NASS

82+* ILLINOIS SOYBEAN
EXPORT DESTINATIONS

*ISA

OVER 2000*
ILLINOIS SOYBEAN GROWER MEMBERS

*ISG

**TOP 5 ISG MEMBERSHIP
COUNTIES***

McClean	Champaign	LaSalle	DeKalb & Knox (Tie)
			
89	56	50	49

*ISG

ILLINOIS SOYBEAN GROWERS MEMBERS*



There are ISG members in
95 of Illinois' 102 counties.



*ISG

Funded by the Illinois Soybean Checkoff

Growing Season Update

*Insights from Across the
2026 Illinois Soybean Crop*

When people ask how the Illinois soybean crop is progressing, there is rarely a simple answer.

Illinois spans more than 390 miles from north to south, with substantial differences in soil types, weather patterns, cropping systems, drainage and management approaches. Although one region might be battling excess moisture, another could be experiencing dry conditions. A field planted in early April could look entirely different than one planted weeks later after repeated rainfall delays.

That variability is exactly why crop reports matter.

At Illinois Soybean Association (ISA), our goal is to provide soybean farmers with practical, timely information that helps them make informed decisions throughout the growing season. One of the most valuable tools available to farmers, agronomists, researchers and industry professionals is the Field Advisor Crop Report tool available at fieldadvisor.org.

The Crop Report tool provides regular updates from trusted agronomic experts across Illinois who are actively scouting fields, monitoring crop development, identifying disease and pest issues, and documenting environmental conditions. These reports create a statewide snapshot of crop conditions while helping farmers understand what is happening beyond their own fencerow.

In a year such as 2026, those insights became especially important.

WHY CROP REPORTS MATTER

Crop reports do much more than describe current field conditions. They help farmers anticipate challenges before they reach

their operations. Reports from neighboring regions can provide early warnings about disease development, insect pressure or weather-related concerns that might emerge later in another area.

Crop reports also encourage growers to take a closer look at their own fields.

A report highlighting sudden death syndrome, waterhemp escapes, spider mites or emergence issues might prompt additional scouting and earlier intervention. In many cases, awareness created through crop reports can help farmers make management decisions that protect yield potential.

Beyond field-level decision-making, crop reports serve another important purpose: They identify broader trends that might warrant additional research.

As ISA invests soybean checkoff dollars into research and outreach programs, observations captured in crop reports often help identify emerging agronomic questions. When contributors repeatedly report similar challenges across multiple regions, it can help direct future ISA-funded research, on-farm trials, educational programming and farmer outreach initiatives.

Perhaps most importantly, crop reports create a shared learning network.

The Crop Report tool brings together university specialists, Extension educators, crop consultants, Certified Crop Advisers (CCAs), ag retailers, researchers, students and farmers. They document the



Photo Credit: Brandon Hall, IL Soy Envoy

growing season in real time and create a valuable historical record that helps us recognize patterns, track year-to-year differences and better understand the factors influencing soybean production across Illinois.

BEHIND THE REPORTS

Illinois soybean farmers benefit from a strong network of contributors through the Illinois Soy Envoy program and Illinois Extension. The Illinois Soy Envoy program provides agricultural professionals with opportunities to share regional agronomic observations and insights with farmers across the state. It is an initiative of Field Advisor funded by the Illinois Soybean Checkoff.

Illinois Extension complements these efforts through its statewide network of educators and specialists. The expertise of local educators, combined

with the resources and research-based knowledge of the Illinois Extension system, provides a powerful source of information, insight and practical recommendations for farmers across Illinois.

These reports are particularly insightful and actionable because they come directly from firsthand observations in the field, not from behind a desk.

Contributors spend their days walking fields, evaluating crop conditions, talking with growers, identifying production challenges and monitoring crop progress. They draw from both on-farm experiences and university-based expertise, so their observations are based on practical, real-world knowledge from across Illinois that helps farmers connect local conditions to broader agronomic trends and research findings.



Photo Credit: Marissa Scott, IL Soy Envoy

SPRING CHALLENGES: TOO MUCH WATER IN NORTH-CENTRAL ILLINOIS

The value of these reports was especially evident throughout the 2026 season.

Early in the season, excessive rainfall quickly became a dominant concern in portions of Illinois.

For example, multiple severe storm systems left their mark in LaSalle County, according to a June report from Emily Hansen, Commercial Agriculture Educator with Illinois Extension serving Bureau, LaSalle, Marshall and Putnam counties.

Hansen noted a wide range of field conditions.

Well-drained fields appeared healthy and vigorous, while poorly drained areas experienced significant standing water that persisted for more than a week.

Ponded areas resulted in substantial crop losses, while other portions of fields exhibited severe stunting. Soybeans showed greater stress than corn in many affected areas, highlighting the crop's sensitivity to prolonged saturated soil conditions during early development.

Storm damage added another layer of complexity: Strong winds left their mark on crops throughout the region, and fields near Streator suffered significant impacts following an EF3 tornado.

For farmers outside the area, this report offered valuable insight into the potential consequences of excessive moisture and severe weather. It also served as an early reminder of how rapidly growing conditions can change and how much influence drainage and field variability can have on crop performance.

MID-SEASON PROGRESS: MANAGING THROUGH VARIABILITY

By late July, growing conditions looked considerably different in east-central Illinois.

Crops generally developed favorably in northern Vermilion County despite lingering effects from the wet spring, according to a report from Talon Becker, Commercial Agronomy Specialist with Illinois Extension.

Full-season soybeans had entered important reproductive growth stages, primarily ranging from R3 to R4. Corn development ranged from silking through milk stage, and overall crop progress remained encouraging.

The effects of earlier flooding were still evident in low-lying areas, where uneven crop growth and canopy development persisted. However, drier weather during midsummer helped create favorable growing conditions, allowing many fields to continue progressing with limited stress.

One particularly important observation Becker made: Disease and insect pressure levels remained relatively low across much of the region.

Although aphids and isolated disease symptoms could be found occasionally, healthy fields showed remarkably clean canopies. In contrast, weed management challenges remained visible in some locations, reminding farmers that agronomic concerns rarely occur in isolation.

This report demonstrated how crop conditions can evolve over the season. Fields that experienced challenges earlier in the year were still capable of producing strong yield potential when favorable weather returned.

AUGUST OBSERVATIONS: STRONG YIELD POTENTIAL ACROSS WESTERN ILLINOIS

As the soybean crop moved toward maturity this summer, reports from western Illinois reflected another important chapter in the 2026 story.

Brandon Hall, Location Operations Manager for West Central FS and a Soy Envoy contributor in Region 2, documented positive conditions following significant August rainfall.

Over a two-week period, the area received more than 9 inches of rain. Although excessive moisture limited field activity and kept soils saturated, the soybean crop appeared to benefit from the additional moisture during key reproductive growth stages.

Most soybean fields had reached the R5 growth stage and were actively filling seed. Corn fields were progressing through dough and dent stages as growers began evaluating yield potential ahead of harvest.

Interestingly, despite the wet conditions, disease pressure remained relatively low. Hall reported only isolated instances of gray leaf spot and northern corn

leaf blight. Weed pressure remained present in some areas, while northern corn rootworm beetles became increasingly noticeable.

The August report highlighted an important lesson from crop production: Weather events often create both challenges and opportunities. Excessive rainfall complicated field operations, but it also supplied critical moisture during a period when soybean plants were actively building yield.

WEAVING TOGETHER A STATEWIDE STORY

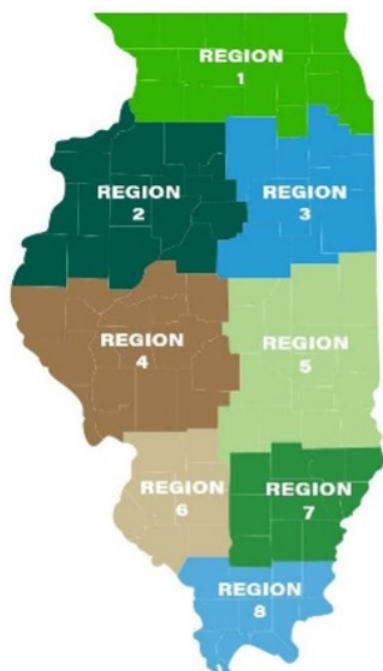
Individually, crop reports provide valuable snapshots of local conditions. Taken together, they tell the story of Illinois soybean production at any given time.

The 2026 growing season demonstrated just how diverse those stories can be. Northern regions battled severe storm damage and prolonged flooding. Central Illinois navigated uneven development caused by early-season moisture. Western Illinois benefited from late-season rainfall that supported crop development during critical reproductive stages.

No single report tells the entire story of Illinois agriculture.

However, when dozens of agronomic professionals contribute observations throughout the year, a clearer picture emerges. Farmers gain insight into statewide conditions while researchers, educators, and industry professionals gain





Source: <https://fieldadvisor.org/crop-report/>

a better understanding of emerging challenges and opportunities.

LOOKING AHEAD

As of this writing, harvest is approaching and the season's final outcomes are still being written. Yield monitors, grain-quality data and harvest observations will add another chapter to the story.

Yet the lessons learned throughout the growing season already demonstrate the value of remaining connected to a network of agronomic observers.

The Crop Report tool allows Illinois soybean farmers to stay informed, learn from challenges occurring outside their immediate area and better prepare for future management decisions. It also serves as a bridge connecting farmers with the agronomic experts, researchers and industry professionals working every day to improve soybean production across the state. To check out the latest Crop Report updates, visit fieldadvisor.org/crop-report.

At ISA, we believe informed farmers make stronger decisions. Crop reports are one way we can transform individual field observations into shared knowledge that benefits soybean farmers statewide.

Whether you're looking for disease alerts, pest observations, field conditions or a broader view of what's happening across Illinois, the Crop Report tool offers an opportunity to stay connected to the pulse of the Illinois soybean crop and the people dedicated to helping it succeed.

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Thank you to our sponsors and Oak Ridge Sportman's Club for making the **Illinois Soybean Growers 3rd Annual Sporting Clay Competition** a great success! Support for this event advances soybean farmers' voices in the work Illinois Soybean Growers does to grow influence in Springfield.

FROM THE FIELD



Dr. Nathan Schroeder

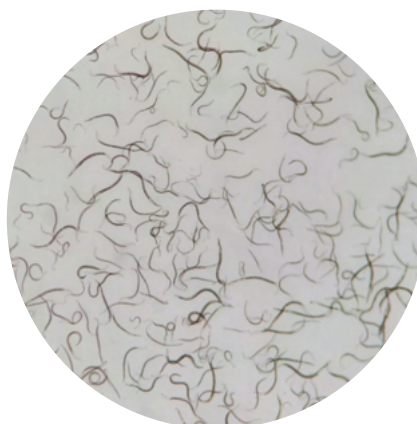
University of Illinois

More than SCN: The Nematodes Beneath Your Beans

Plant-parasitic nematodes are a constant presence in Illinois soybean fields. The most damaging of these is the soybean cyst nematode (SCN). This pest is found throughout the state and is considered the most damaging soybean pest. And unfortunately, SCN rarely causes above-ground symptoms. Instead, the nematode eats away at roots while leaving an otherwise healthy-looking plant above ground. Although most commercial soybean varieties have resistance to SCN, the repeated use of the same source of resistance, PI 88788, has allowed SCN populations to adapt.

The only way to know how much SCN is in a field is to test the soil. The University of Illinois and Illinois Soybean Association are again offering free SCN testing to Illinois farmers. Farmers can email us at freeSCNtesting@illinois.edu or visit our website <https://publish.illinois.edu/freescntesting/> to get a free testing kit and learn more about how to collect a soil sample.

We process the soil, count the number of SCN eggs and send the results back to the farmer. Since the program began, we've tested more than 3,000 samples from across the state. About 75% of those samples contained SCN, but egg counts varied tremendously—even among fields farmed by the same grower (Figure 1).



The SCN testing program is also helping us determine where SCN populations are adapting to PI 88788 resistance. We have begun asking growers which soybean varieties they are planting. This information helps us determine which sources of resistance are being used and how well they are controlling SCN. For samples with high SCN egg counts, we run an additional greenhouse test to determine which sources of resistance are still effective.

Unfortunately, these data confirm that many Illinois SCN populations are becoming less affected by PI 88788.

Although SCN tends to get the headlines, it is far from the only plant-parasitic nematode found in Illinois soybean fields. Unlike SCN, many of these species have wide host ranges that include

soybeans, corn and cover crops. Far less is known about their geographic distribution and the damage these different species cause. For example, the lesion nematode group includes at least eight different species found in Illinois (Figure 2).

A recent Wisconsin study estimated that one of these lesion nematode species could cause up to 7.6% yield loss in infested soybean fields, depending on the region (Saikai and MacGuidwin, 2022). We don't yet know whether the same relationship occurs in Illinois. We also don't know whether some cover crops might increase populations of these nematodes or whether others could help suppress them. We are addressing these questions through field experiments across Illinois and controlled greenhouse studies.

Figure 1
Distribution of
SCN determined
through Free SCN
Testing Program.

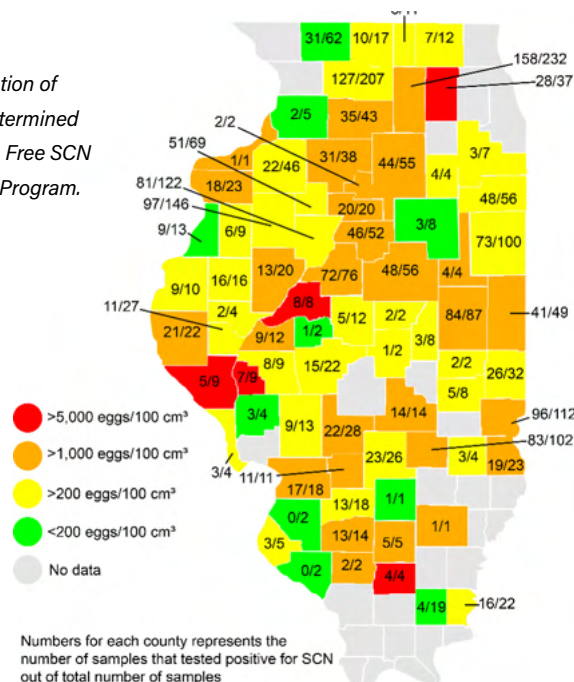
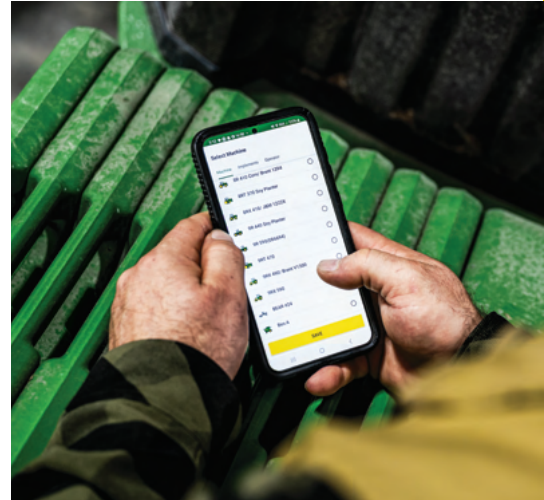


Figure 2 Microscope
image of lesion
nematodes.
Photo credit: Jaeyeong
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Voices of Illinois Soybean Growers

As the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) looks to the future, it is clear that the strength of the industry depends on more than policy, markets and research alone. The foundation is built on the soybean growers who stay engaged in shaping its direction and leading it forward.

An Illinois Soybean Growers (ISG) membership can bring a great deal of value back to your farm. That value is perhaps best understood by the members themselves. ISG members Dirk Rice, Dan Kelley, Vince Reincke, Ron Moore and Lin Warfel recently shared the different ways an ISG membership has benefited them and their farms, pointing primarily to three themes: stronger representation, broader farmer connections and perspectives, and practical savings that can support a farm's bottom line.

Illinois farmers face a multitude of issues that can impact their operations. These include regulations affecting daily production practices, crop insurance, trade, biofuels and infrastructure. Farmers are forced to adapt to decisions made miles from the farm, often without a producer in the room. Although farmers have always had to manage uncertainty, today's high input costs and tight margins leave little room for error.

An ISG membership can help farmers navigate these difficulties by connecting them with people and resources that can make a difference for their farms and the soybean industry. Through farmer connections, advocacy, continued learning and exposure to new perspectives, an ISG membership provides support that can extend well beyond the cost of dues.

For many members, the most valued aspect of an ISG membership is representation. As individuals, farmers can only do so much to make their voice heard. They cannot manage their farm and be present in Springfield and Washington every time decisions affecting them are being made. ISG gives members a collective voice and works to ensure their perspective is represented with lawmakers, regulators, agency officials and other decision-makers whose work shapes agriculture.

For longtime member Rice, the collective power of ISG has been highly valuable throughout his more than 40-year farming career. Rice recalls first joining when the organization was known as the Land of Lincoln Soybean Association. And though the name has evolved, the need for farmer representation has not.

"I always saw a tremendous value in farmers working together to develop new markets and support beneficial research and work for

good legislation and against bad legislation and regulations," Rice said.

That collective voice is then carried into conversations with lawmakers. ISG membership dollars ensure producers are represented early and often in the policymaking process.

ISG member Kelley cites representation as an integral part of his membership. "We as growers need to speak with one voice," Kelley said. "[ISG] has a great track record of representing growers in Springfield and D.C." That grower representation is essential, particularly when legislation has the potential to greatly impact a farm's future earnings. For Kelley, his membership dues are a direct way to support that work. "I see my dues as an investment in our future."

That investment is essential to sustaining ISA's legislative advocacy. Although the soybean checkoff provides funding for research, education and other industry programs, those dollars cannot be allocated for lobbying. ISG membership dues support the advocacy done on behalf of Illinois soybean farmers.

ISG member Reincke notes that distinction as a primary benefit of his membership. He said, "The Soybean Checkoff does a wonderful job of funding research to further demand for the soybeans we produce, but none of those resources can be used to educate our public servants in Washington, D.C., or Springfield about how the policies and laws they consider/enact will impact the production of soybeans and other farm products. Without the Illinois Soybean Association and the American Soybean Association memberships funding these lawmaker educational activities, our voice goes unheard."

Moore also identifies representation as a significant part of his membership. "Having [ISG] be a voice in Springfield and D.C. is extremely important," Moore said.

ISG members identified benefits beyond advocacy. Being a member presents opportunities to connect with farmers from across the state, share operational experiences and concerns with others, and identify which issues matter most to individual soybean farmers and the industry as a whole.

Rice sees this diversity of perspective as another positive of his membership. "Having a board that represents the whole state is very valuable. We all have different issues and concerns, and it is important to have all those voices at the table."

For Moore, those connections have been particularly worthwhile. "The information I have gained from other farmers across Illinois and the country have been invaluable," he said. "I learned about farming practices I never would have had a chance to see if I wasn't a member."

ISG member Warfel credits that exposure for his interest in the soybean industry. Being an ISG member has shifted Warfel's perspective as a grower. "I jumped into seed corn production right out of college, so I really only used soybeans to boost seed corn production," Warfel said. "But soybeans steadily grew more popular and more profitable. Then Illinois became No. 1 in soybeans! From just a dues-paying member, I became keenly interested in soybeans."

Warfel's interest has continued to grow along with his involvement. He points to opportunities to learn about the new uses for soybeans, international market developments and collaboration with other soybean farmers as among the membership benefits he values most.

ISG memberships don't only bring value through collaboration and exposure. In a time when margins are tight, an ISG membership can also offer discounts and partnerships that help farmers cut costs on products and equipment they might already be using across their operations. Kelley noted, "Most importantly, they are working to improve our farm income."

Through a partnership with AGI, eligible ISG members have access to discounts and rebates on equipment including grain bins, dryers, portable handling equipment and grain management technology. Three-year members can also receive a 20% MSRP discount on AGI BinManager equipment.

As the experiences of these members demonstrate, the value of an ISG membership is not tied to a single benefit. It is the combination of

advocacy, connection and practical savings. For farmers considering an ISG membership, current members make a clear recommendation: Get involved and see firsthand what a membership can do for you and your farming operation.

Kelley encourages growers to think of their dues as a commitment to their farm's future. "[ISA] is working to improve our farm income. Some of that is trade and technology, but it also is being sure that policies and regulations from what may be well-intentioned sources are not detrimental to soybean production and farm income."

Rice offers a similar message to farmers who have not yet joined. "There are simply too few of us for us not to unite to try to defend our way of life from all the forces that are working against us. I have seen firsthand how different ag organizations, commodity and otherwise, have different areas of strength and focus, and belonging to just one organization leaves us as farmers vulnerable in too many areas."

Reincke also points to the importance of making sure farmer priorities are heard. "Now more than ever, it is imperative that our elected officials hear our voices as we convey the priorities for our industry to not just survive in the future but instead thrive as we move forward."

Moore's advice to farmers considering a membership is simple and direct. "Take advantage of all the meetings and programs ISA provides," Moore said. "You will meet some of the best farmers in Illinois. Working together with other like-minded farmers can achieve great things for soybean farmers in Illinois."

Make your voice heard, connect with other growers and see what ISG can bring back to your farm. Learn more about becoming an ISG member at ilsoy.org/illinois-soybean-growers/.



Trending Trade Projections Building Demand Beyond the Bushel



For Illinois soybean growers, export projections eventually come down to a much more local question: Who wants to buy my soybeans, and what does that demand mean for their value?

After a challenging marketing year marked by decreased Chinese demand, the global customer base for U.S. soybeans is showing signs of strengthening. China remains the market heavyweight, but growing demand in countries including Mexico, Egypt, Indonesia, Vietnam and Pakistan

is giving U.S. soybeans more places to go.

That matters in Illinois, where growers have an advantage few soybean-producing regions can match: access to river, rail, highway and container transportation, combined with soybean quality that meets the needs of a diverse group of international customers.

Eric Woodie, trade analyst for the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA), sees reason for cautious optimism

as growers look toward the next marketing year. For growers, the opportunity is bigger than simply replacing lost Chinese purchases. Years of market-development work are helping to create a broader customer base for Illinois soybeans — one that could put more buyers in competition for the crop.

CHINA REMAINS THE MARKET MOVER

It is difficult to discuss U.S. soybean exports without first considering China. “China drives

our market,” Woodie said. “They are the biggest, by a lot.”

Exports to China during the current marketing year are expected to finish at one of the lowest levels in recent memory, Woodie said. Yet forward sales for the next marketing year are painting a more encouraging picture.

“August sales for the forward marketing year are quite positive,” he said. “We are seeing strong buying signals from China.” Woodie cautioned that the trade

environment can change quickly, particularly as geopolitical relationships and tariff policies continue to evolve. Still, if Chinese purchases return closer to what he considers a more typical year — around the mid-20-million-metric-ton range — the result could be a significantly stronger export environment.

The size of that market makes even relatively small changes in Chinese purchasing significant. When China buys more U.S. soybeans, the additional bushels entering export channels can strengthen overall demand. When purchases fall, finding enough alternative destinations to make up the difference is difficult.

That's why Woodie sees expanding demand in other markets as key to the outlook. "Our opportunity this year is to focus on other markets, where global demand is strong," Woodie said.

NEW CUSTOMERS, STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS

When one major customer steps back, finding new places for soybeans becomes increasingly important.

Over the past two years, market conditions have accelerated efforts to build relationships and infrastructure in other countries. Those investments can include everything from developing relationships with buyers to addressing banking, transportation and logistical needs that make regular trade possible. Once those pieces are in place, Woodie said, they can create opportunities that extend well beyond one marketing year. Markets including the European Union, Mexico, Egypt and Indonesia are particularly promising. Pakistan also had a

strong year, while Bangladesh and other developing markets could offer longer-term opportunities. In the soybean meal market, Woodie said Southeast Asia has shown notable growth.

Egypt is one example of how market development can pay off over time. Woodie said the growth in U.S. soybean exports to the country during the past seven years has been significant.

Indonesia, meanwhile, provides an especially interesting opportunity for Illinois growers. Woodie

Illinois growers, that creates an important distinction.

Illinois' Location Creates an Advantage

Illinois growers might not spend much time thinking about ocean freight while planting or harvesting soybeans, but the state's transportation network plays an important role in determining where those beans can go and how competitively they can get there.

"Illinois has an infrastructure and efficiencies that other

customers can economically compete for Illinois soybeans. The easier it is to move soybeans by barge, rail or container, the more destinations Illinois beans can potentially reach. That market access is one reason global trade matters even for growers who never directly sell a bushel for export.

The flexibility becomes particularly valuable as the industry develops smaller and emerging export markets. Container shipping can allow exporters to serve specialized customers without needing the volumes associated with bulk commodity shipments.

Woodie has watched that evolution firsthand. Markets such as Taiwan and Vietnam were developing container destinations 15 to 20 years ago. Today, they are established customers. He sees the potential for a similar evolution in places such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and other parts of South Asia.

Ultimately, he said, successful soybean trade comes down to three factors: "price, quality and consistency." Illinois is positioned to compete on all three.

SELLING MORE THAN SOYBEANS

International customers increasingly want to know more than the price of a shipment. They want to understand where a product came from and how it was produced.

"Consumers [are] wanting, needing, expecting to understand where the products they're buying are coming from, how well they're being managed, how well they're being taken care of," Woodie said.

That trend is particularly evident



estimates approximately 60% of the soybeans shipped to Indonesia move in containers. Illinois is the nation's largest container market and likely accounts for roughly one-third of total U.S. containerized soybean exports.

But location is only part of the advantage. Soybeans imported into Indonesia are primarily used for human food products, including tofu and tempeh. That creates a market where Illinois soybean quality can stand out.

"Illinois quality is exceptional and competitive," Woodie said. For

states simply lack," Woodie said. Access to the river system gives soybeans in Illinois an efficient route to Gulf export facilities. The state is also served by major Class I railroads, opening routes to domestic destinations, Mexico and other markets.

Add highways and Illinois' significant container-shipping network, and growers have multiple ways to move soybeans to customers. Those transportation options might seem far removed from decisions made at the farm gate, but they help determine how many

in Europe. The European Union's deforestation regulations are designed to provide greater assurance that imported commodities are not connected to deforestation or significant environmental change. Although implementation brings complexities, Woodie said, U.S. production practices could potentially help American soybeans stand apart from Brazilian supplies in that market.

Many of the practices international buyers value are already part of everyday farm management. "Sustainability is not something we have to coach growers on," Woodie said. "It is a part of their business. It is a part of their life."

WHAT IT MEANS FOR ILLINOIS GROWERS

Tariffs and geopolitical

uncertainty remain major factors in the export outlook. Woodie said trade policy is at the forefront of conversations among exporters and international buyers, and he does not expect tariffs to disappear from those discussions.

What has changed is the industry's ability to operate within that uncertainty. A year ago, traders faced numerous unknowns about how tariffs might reshape entire markets. Today, Woodie believes some of that uncertainty has narrowed, giving businesses a better opportunity to understand and manage their risks.

"So much work has been done over the course of the last two years, and certainly more, in fostering these other markets,"



Woodie said. The goal is not necessarily to find one market capable of replacing China. Rather, it is to build enough demand across enough destinations that Illinois soybeans have multiple places to go. For the farmer, that means more potential buyers competing

for each bushel. "There's going to be a healthy amount of global demand over the course of the next year," Woodie said. "As you look globally, there's a lot of excitement about what next year will bring."

The wetlands debate isn't over. It just moved to Springfield.

The wetlands issue didn't end with the Sackett decision. It's moved back to the States. As Illinois determines what qualifies as a wetland, future legislation could affect how farmers manage their land. The Illinois Soybean Association is following every development so you can stay informed and stay engaged.



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