

APRIL 2025

# *Illinois* **Field & Bean**

A PUBLICATION OF THE ILLINOIS SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION



## **NEXT-GEN ILLINOIS FARMERS**

# READY TO ROLL

Get the most out of your hay season with John Deere 1 Series Round Balers. See real-time weight and moisture data while you work to ensure high-quality feed. Plus, store it all in John Deere Operations Center™ to make informed decisions, cutting after cutting. The 1 Series works harder for your herd.

STAY READY AT [JOHNDEERE.COM/ROUNDBALERS](http://JOHNDEERE.COM/ROUNDBALERS)



JOHN DEERE



# CONTENTS

April 2025

Volume 5 Issue 6

## 6 Training the Next Generation of Farmers

TikTok sensation Jackson Laux, age 9, partners with John Deere to inspire agriculture's future.

## 10 Growing Stronger Farms, Together

From cutting-edge research to hands-on support, discover the vital role Extension plays in improving farm operations and advancing Illinois agriculture.

## 14 ISA's LEAD Program: Where the Best of Tradition Meets the Best of Innovation

Designed for both aspiring leaders and seasoned experts, ISA's LEAD Program provides tailored opportunities for growth, collaboration and impact.

## 16 Making Illinois the Global Hub for Biomanufacturing

Learn more about the iFAB Tech Hub at the University of Illinois and how its team is harnessing the power of corn and soy to create sustainable, high-value products.

## 20 Opinion: Illinois Farmers Can't Afford Another Costly California Policy

Illinois farmer and ISA Board Director Steve Pitstick expresses his concerns over the proposed Low Carbon Fuel Standard (LCFS).

## 22 Optimizing Operations

We're here to support you. Explore the many ways the ISA Agronomy Team can help maximize your on-farm productivity.

## DEPARTMENTS

### 4 FROM THE BOARDROOM

### 5 CEO'S MESSAGE

### 26 GROWTH BY ASSOCIATION



Visit us online at  
[www.ilsoy.org/newsroom/illinois-field-bean/](http://www.ilsoy.org/newsroom/illinois-field-bean/).



**COVER:** Discover how to train the next generation of farmers, plan a successful farm transition and improve your operations with region-specific tips in our "Next-Gen Illinois Farmers" issue. Plus, learn why Illinois is set to become a global hub for ag tech and how the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) is here to support your success every step of the way!

**CHAIRMAN**  
Ron Kindred, Atlanta  
District 9

**VICE CHAIRMAN**  
Brad Daugherty, West Union  
District 14

**SECRETARY**  
Dwayne Anderson, Lynn Center  
District 3

**TREASURER**  
Tim Scates, Carmi  
At-Large

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY-TREASURER**  
David Wessel, Chandlerlerville  
At-Large

**GOVERNMENT RELATIONS COMMITTEE  
CHAIR**  
Ryan Frieders, Waterman  
District 1

**MARKET DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE  
CHAIR**  
Brady Holst, Plymouth  
At-Large

**SOYBEAN PRODUCTION COMMITTEE  
CHAIR**  
Bryan Severs, Potomac  
District 7

**DIRECTORS**  
Steve Pitstick, Maple Park | District 2  
Buck Hill, Grand Ridge | District 4  
Mark Read, Putnam | District 5  
Jim Martin, Pontiac | District 6

**STAFF CREDITS**

Editor in Chief | Betsy Osman  
Assistant Editor | Olivia Key  
Staff Contributor | Brynna Sentel

**OTHER ISA STAFF**

Chief Executive Officer | John Lumpe  
Director of Illinois Soybean Foundation | Suellen Burns  
Executive Employee Relations | Nicole Butler  
Director of Government Relations & Strategy | Andrew Larson  
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 useful industry information. Illinois Field & Bean is published by the Illinois Soybean Association, 1108 Trinity Lane, Bloomington, IL, 61704. For address corrections, contact Illinois Field & Bean at 1108 Trinity Lane, Bloomington, IL, 61704. Phone 309-663-7692. Web address: [www.ilsoy.org](http://www.ilsoy.org). Email: [ilsoy@ilsoy.org](mailto:ilsoy@ilsoy.org).

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.

**FOR ADVERTISING INFORMATION**

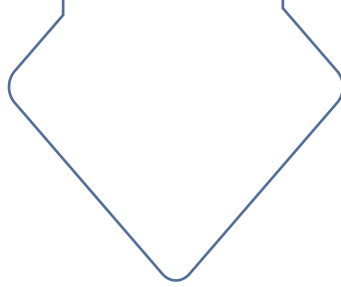
Betsy Osman  
Editor in Chief  
Email: [betsyosman@ilsoy.org](mailto:betsyosman@ilsoy.org)

David Niekamp, Coatsburg |  
District 8  
Elliott Uphoff, Shelbyville | District 10  
Matt Murray, Paxton | District 11  
Brock Willard, Pittsfield | District 12  
Heath Houck, Nokomis | District 13  
Jeff Parker, Belleville | District 15  
Brian Atteberry, Carmi | District 16  
Emily Lovelady, Tamaroa | District 17  
Rick Rubenacker, McLeansboro |  
District 18

**AT-LARGE DIRECTORS**  
Betsey Emerick, Vandalia  
Jeff O'Connor, Kankakee  
Scott Gaffner, Greenville

**UNITED SOYBEAN BOARD (USB)**  
Dwayne Anderson, Lynn Center  
Gary Berg, St. Elmo  
Lynn Rohrscheib, Fairmount  
David Wessel, Chandlerlerville

**AMERICAN SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION (ASA)**  
Stan Born, Mahomet  
Daryl Cates, Columbia  
Ryan Frieders, Waterman  
Jim Martin, Pontiac  
Ron Kindred, Atlanta  
Rob Shaffer, El Paso  
Roberta Simpson-Dolbear, Nebo  
Bryan Severs, Potomac



# Next-Gen Illinois Farmers



**ELLIOTT UPHOFF | DISTRICT 10 DIRECTOR |  
ILLINOIS SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION**

I often struggle with what the future holds for my farm. Who will be interested in farming? Will my farm focus solely on row crops, or should I incorporate specialty crops? Are there additional side businesses that could contribute to its success? How will conservation practices be implemented in the future, and will I be prepared for them? These are just a few of the factors to consider.

One thing of which I am certain: to become a next-gen Illinois farmer, you must have the drive and passion for agriculture. The challenge I face is channeling my passion toward a single aspect of my operation, whether it be production, accounting, future investments or enhancing operational efficiencies. I say all of this to simply acknowledge the fact that agriculture and its affiliated industries are very complicated and sometimes uncertain.

Every farm, no matter the size, needs a team to make the operation function and not lose focus on the task at hand. I'm lucky enough that my family has been part of that team. Grandpa taught me the value of buying land and working hard to make ends meet. Dad taught me how to work on equipment, how to master the art of doing things the right way, and why it's important to ask, "What's the worst thing that can happen?" Asking that question has probably saved me many times throughout the years. Previous generations have set me up for success by investing in proper planning and focusing on the task at hand. They made it a priority to set up our farm operation so the next generation could thrive.

Many times, the future of agriculture has been shaky or uncertain, which remains true today. We as Illinois farmers aim to produce what we want, how we want and for profit, and our support system at the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) does so much to ensure we can maintain our way of doing business.

The Market Development team is constantly seeking new uses for soy so we can continue to produce what we want. The Soy Innovation Center is currently developing multiple products aimed at increasing the utilization of soybeans. Market Development also focuses on identifying emerging markets and positioning Illinois soybeans as the preferred choice when these markets become major importers.

The Government Relations team is always on the lookout for burdensome legislation that could prevent us from producing how we want. With the number of farmers decreasing over the years, our voice becomes quieter. Through farmer-led organizations such as Illinois Soybean Growers (ISG), we have a voice in Springfield and D.C., which is vital for the future generations of our farms.

The Soybean Production team is conducting research that will help farmers find their way to long-term profitability. The sign-ups for 2025 have closed. I recommend adjusting the copy. Here's one recommendation "Recently, ISA started its On-Farm Trial Network program and many farmers have enrolled in trials for the 2025 growing season. These studies can have a direct impact on the way you produce."

ISA has become part of my team to help the next generation come back to the farm. I encourage you stay engaged with our work at ISA so you can make changes to your operation or get involved in amplifying the voice of Illinois farmers at the state and federal levels. Together, this work supports the next generation the next generation of Illinois farmers.

# Building a Strong, Resilient Soybean-Farming Community



JOHN LUMPE | CEO |  
ILLINOIS SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION

Your team at the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) is always thinking about marketing the pile of soybeans from our most recent harvest and about ways to support you as you plant seeds for the crop to come. But we are also planning for years beyond the harvest of 2025. Our motivation for this forward thinking is simple—support young and beginning soybean farmers so they're ready to lead Illinois agriculture forward.

Whether you're a young farmer looking to build your operation or an experienced farmer eager to mentor the next generation, ISA provides the tools and opportunities to create a strong, resilient soybean-farming community.

## Empowering Young Leaders

Soybean farming is driven by ideas, energy and innovation, often directly from our farmers, both young and more experienced. There is no age limit for those who step up to drive advances for the Illinois soybean community. Consistent strides toward continuous improvement for years to come depend on our ability to attract and support young people as soybean farmers.

In this issue, you'll hear more about our new LEAD Program (Leadership, Education, Advocacy, Development), which is designed to foster leadership across all stages of a farmer's journey. It also connects individuals new to the agriculture industry with seasoned advocates and retired professionals. Participants engage in interactive learning, networking and travel opportunities, gain a comprehensive understanding of the soybean supply chain and build the skills needed to step into a leadership role.

Through our *20 Under 40* program, we recognize younger Illinois farmers who are already making an impact. By showcasing their stories, we encourage other young farmers to step forward and contribute their unique perspectives and innovations to our industry.

"Our IL Soy Envoy program" also connects young farmers directly with experienced mentors, agronomists and industry experts. This mentorship helps young farmers navigate challenges and stay informed about best practices, emerging trends and new technologies.

## Advocacy and Market Development

To secure a resilient future, young farmers need effective advocacy and market opportunities. ISA equips them with the skills to influence policy through Illinois Soybean Growers (ISG) advocacy programs. They learn how to engage with policymakers, address regulatory challenges and represent farming interests effectively

at local, state and national levels.

Additionally, our market development initiatives open new opportunities for soybean products, both domestically and globally. By expanding markets and developing new opportunities, ISA helps ensure young farmers can build sustainable and profitable businesses well into the future. These efforts include trade missions, export promotions and exploration of new uses for soybeans—such as biodiesel, animal feed and industrial products. This helps young farmers diversify their market streams.

## Education and Practical Training

Learning opportunities for young and beginning farmers don't stop at advocacy and economics. ISA's hands-on educational programs offer practical knowledge to boost productivity and sustainability. From on-farm research projects to agronomic training, farmers — young and experienced — discover strategies that enhance yields, profitability and environmental stewardship.


Our industry and university connections help young farmers implement conservation practices such as cover cropping, reduced tillage and nutrient management. These practices benefit both their operation and the land's future health and productivity.

Today's farming is more technology-driven than ever. ISA also helps young farmers leverage innovations through our Soy Innovation Center. Whether they are adopting precision agriculture tools, biotechnology solutions or data-driven farming practices, they deserve the latest knowledge to succeed. ISA delivers that information year-round. Training workshops on topics such as drone technology, GPS-guided machinery and data analytics enable young farmers to optimize their resources and decision-making processes.

## Building a Legacy Together

National statistics suggest the average age of a farmer has been steadily increasing over the past few decades. The most recent ag census data show farmers' average age is nearly 60. At ISA, we are passionate about ensuring a younger generation of farmers can enter the business, successfully, through the support of a community that bridges generations and offers a balance of inherited tradition and forward-thinking innovation.

So whether you have a lot to learn, or a lot of expertise to give, this is the place where you belong.

 Funded by the Illinois Soybean Checkoff

# TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION OF FARMERS

Jackson Laux, age 9, is  
John Deere's Chief Tractor Kid

## TikTok sensation Jackson Laux, age nine, partners with John Deere to inspire ag's future

**J**ackson Laux is a nine-year-old, ball cap-wearing, tractor-loving farmer from South Whitley, Ind., who's taken the ag world by storm on TikTok with his signature blend of authentic storytelling and old-soul, down-home charm.

He's also a hilarious—and inspiring—reminder of all the potential bottled up inside the next generation of U.S. farmers who will lead the industry in the years ahead.

"His genuine passion for farming comes through in every single video, and it really resonates with people," explains Jennifer Anderson, Ag and Turf Social Media Manager, John Deere. "He's more than a cute

kid, he's a person who has a great future in the industry, and his excitement about that is really palpable and contagious. People who watch his videos get excited about the future of farming, too."

John Deere has designated Jackson its Chief Tractor Kid, and he'll produce content for the company's social media channels throughout 2025 as an ambassador for ag and the next wave of ag leaders.

"Social media brings us to the front door of next-gen farmers—those 18- to 35-year-olds who maybe aren't yet running their own operations or buying equipment, but they are learning, becoming influential in

purchasing decisions," Anderson explains. "We want our brand to be one that they have a connection with, not just their parents and grandparents."

### **Social Strategy Mirrors Leadership Transition**

On the one hand, Deere's partnership with Jackson is strategic. Young people tend to gravitate toward videos and other content produced by influencers—in other words, real people—compared to content from a faceless brand.

"While we market to current prospects, we also market to a younger demographic in order to build brand equity for when they eventually become buyers,"

explains Brian Torrey, Ag and Turf Media Manager, John Deere.

The Jackson partnership goes deeper: It reflects the ways in which U.S. ag is changing as the on-farm and industry leadership baton is passed from senior generations to younger ones.

Although it's hard to pin down such a vast and diverse demographic, Anderson and Torrey say, young people in ag tend to have some common characteristics they're eager to support.

"We typically say [they are] 18- to 35-year-olds who come from a family farm, but honestly, it starts much younger than

(See Training the Next Generation of Farmers, page 8)



With his passion for farming and extensive equipment knowledge, Jackson is a huge help on his family farm in Indiana. *Photo Credit: Quinn Kirkpatrick*

## Training the Next Generation of Farmers

(continued from page 7)

18 and it can include all youth in rural communities,” Torrey says. “They have a calling to work in ag and want to make a go at it, despite all the challenges of starting a new farm. Like their counterparts in urban and suburban America, they are more comfortable using technology thanks to growing up with computers in classrooms, smartphones and social media networks.”

One of the most foundational ways the next generation will transform ag in Illinois and beyond is through its intimate familiarity with—and eagerness

to embrace—new technology that will drive better business, lifestyle and environmental outcomes.

“It’s becoming more important for farmers to use technology to make better use of their time and resources,” Torrey explains. “Understanding how to make the most of technology on a farm, and helping other farmers adopt and become advanced users of technology, is a growing opportunity. We see a lot of farm kids head off to college, major in agriculture and return home with a focus on modernizing the family farm through advanced technology.”

Capturing the imagination of up-and-coming youth is an opportunity the John Deere team continues to explore through its work with Jackson and similar social media outreach.

“Like my kids, they are on their phones more than me,”

Torrey says. “So the best way to connect with them from an advertising standpoint is through social media apps plus streaming video and audio platforms. And since the phone is all about thumbing through content, they engage with the content that best resonates with their interests.”

### Creativity Captivates Young Minds

To inspire the next generation of farmers, John Deere has used a variety of innovative marketing strategies including a dedicated YouTube channel at @JohnDeereKids, Anderson says. It also posts a unique mix of content to Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and X (formerly Twitter) to match the interests of each channel’s unique audience.

They’ve even branched into hands-on crafting.

“We did some unique things

to launch our new 9RX 830 and the updated S7 Combines, which included a print ad in select farm magazines,” Torrey explains. “Depending on the magazine, the ad was a paper tractor or combine in pieces that the reader could tear out and build. We saw a lot of photos on social media of families doing this together. While it was an advertisement, it created a unique moment for families to spend time together.”

Another campaign featured a Transformers-style mechanical deer morphing into the new 9RX.

“That animation resonated incredibly well with nostalgic farmers and their children who are fans of the animated series and movies,” recalls Torrey, referencing the toys and spinoff media franchise that began back in the early 1980s.

But no surprise: John Deere’s



In addition to appearing in the company's social media content, Jackson attends farm shows with John Deere. Photo Credit: Chris Sivertsen



top-performing video of late was an impromptu creation thought up by the marketing team at its 2024 Farm Progress Show booth. In the video, the company's Chief Tractor Officer Rex Curtiss quizzes Jackson on whether the tractor parked next to him is the company's biggest. As it turns out, it is.

"I knew that," Jackson quips.

As they exit the screen, fellow farmer-influencer Andy Pasztor, famous for his social media posts and line of Andy Clean soap, steps in for a cameo. (To hear the punchline, watch the full video on TikTok).

"It was proof our followers enjoyed it as much as we did," Anderson says.

### Smiling Through the Challenges

There's no question that farming isn't easy, and it poses special challenges for the next generation of producers. Yet the presence of eager and enthusiastic young people in ag on social

media provides a regular reminder of the many silver linings for those ready to tackle the challenges—and the opportunities.

"Today's farmers and ranchers face rising fuel, land and input costs, and while that's far from new, it does make starting out in the business even more challenging," Anderson says. "Creators on social share inspiration, frustration, humor, new ideas and success stories, and use a medium that the next-gen farmer is already using—social media."

When she considers the future of U.S. agriculture, Anderson says, she's optimistic and excited.

"Is it too cheesy to say, 'The kids are going to be all right?'" she asks. "Because while Jackson's a very visible example, every time I get a chance to be around 4-H or FFA students, I am absolutely inspired. These kids are the hardest-working young people I know. I don't know exactly what the future holds, but I know it is going to be a great one."



Photo Credit: Quinn Kirkpatrick

Get the support you need because  
**A HEALTHY FARM ISN'T ANYTHING  
WITHOUT A HEALTHY FARMER.**

CALL  
**1-833-FARMSOS**  
(833-327-6767)



To learn more,  
scan QR Code or visit  
[siumed.org/farm](https://siumed.org/farm)

Someone is always here to listen. Anytime. Anywhere.  
We know the struggles of farming and are here to help.


NO COST | CONFIDENTIAL | 24/7

**SOMEONE YOU  
CAN TALK TO**



Across social media, 9-year-old Jackson Laux exports his own brand of Midwestern charm and affinity for all things tractors. To follow along with his adventures, go to:

- Just A Jackson Thing TikTok channel:  
<https://www.tiktok.com/@justajacksonthing>
- Just A Jackson Thing YouTube channel:  
<https://www.youtube.com/@justajacksonthing>
- John Deere Kids YouTube channel:  
<https://www.youtube.com/@johndeerekids>
- John Deere on Instagram:  
<https://www.instagram.com/johndeere/>
- John Deere on Facebook:  
<https://www.facebook.com/JohnDeereUSCA/>
- John Deere on X:  
<https://x.com/JohnDeere/>

 Funded by the Illinois Soybean Checkoff

# Growing Stronger Farms, Together



**From providing cutting-edge research to delivering hands-on support, Extension plays a vital role in improving farm operations and advancing Illinois agriculture**

*By Talon Becker, Commercial Agriculture Specialist, University of Illinois Extension*

By its own definition, Extension is dedicated to helping people find solutions to life's challenges.

Although the agricultural landscape in Illinois has changed immensely over the past century, today's Extension service still consists of a statewide network of educators, specialists, faculty experts and staff that work to provide relevant educational materials and programs, data-driven recommendations and farmer-focused research.

While many are aware of the previous decades' cutbacks to Extension and statewide agricultural research, Extension today has a renewed emphasis on restoring farmer-focused and farmer-driven research. The university has shown a revitalized recognition of the value in these researchers and their work, leading to increased investment in support of Illinois farmers.

Thanks to advocacy from Illinois farmers and others, Extension has hired four faculty members, four statewide specialists and several multi-county educators focused on providing support to the state's row-crop farmers.

Extension's hub-and-spoke system blankets the state. With offices in nearly every county, Extension provides local representatives right where you are.

University agricultural research hubs also sit across the state, enabling researchers to interact and brainstorm with local farmers to better inform agricultural practices being tested across the range

of climates, soil types and topography. Research that is relevant to farmers must be informed by farmers.

---

### **Statewide Research and Farm Facilities**

---

#### **Crop Sciences Research and Education Center**

---

**Location: Just south of the University of Illinois' campus in Urbana** Established in 1876, the Crop Sciences Research and Education Center includes the famed Morrow Plots. It's the oldest continuous agricultural research field in the country. Currently being added are Alma Mater Plots - 64 individually tile-drained plots slightly less than an acre in size. The tile drains contain sample ports to allow for better tracking of nutrient loss, improving recommendations for efficient fertilizer and input management.

**Size:** 1,500 acres  
**Current Research:** Agronomic evaluation of seed, fertilizer and other inputs; soil fertility and management; integrated management of weeds, diseases, insects and other pests; crop breeding and evaluation.

---

#### **Plant Clinic**

---

**Location: Urbana (Turner Hall)** Since 1976, the Plant Clinic has provided plant and insect identification, nematode assays, disease, insect, weed and chemical injury diagnosis, and has helped with nutrient-related



issues. It is instrumental in helping researchers track and understand the pest species occurrence and spread as well as their evolution of resistance.

---

#### **I-FARM: Farm of the Future**

---

**Location: Urbana** Testing and integrating cutting-edge technologies into agricultural production systems to help farmers improve profitability while also minimizing environmental impact.  
**Size:** 120 acres  
**Current Research:** Autonomous and semi-autonomous cover crop planting, mechanical weeding, precision nutrient and pest management. Remote sensing and artificial intelligence to monitor animal, crop and soil health and provide information for improved management. Mobile networks to allow for improved connectivity and communication for farm technologies.

---

#### **Orr Agricultural Research and Demonstration Center**

---

**Location: Perry**  
**Size:** 398 acres  
**Current Research:** Cover crops on prevented planting acres, cover crops in integrated row crop and cattle systems, integrating crop land to grazing, hay and forage, livestock.

---

#### **Northwestern Illinois Ag Research and Demo Center**

---

**Location: Monmouth**  
**Size:** 320 acres  
**Current Research:** Soil fertility

and management, agronomy of crop production, integrated management of weeds, diseases, insects and other pests, cover crops.

---

#### **Dudley Smith Initiative Farm**

---

**Location: Pana**  
**Size:** 228 acres  
**Current Research:** Water quality and nutrient management, nitrogen loss reduction, drainage water recycling, cover crops, rotational grazing, invasive plants and interstate trade.

---

#### **Ewing Demonstration Center**

---

**Location: Ewing** Home to long-term research plots since 1915 to better understand the effects of lime, phosphorus and potassium on crop productivity and soil properties in southern Illinois soils. Also home to one of the oldest continuously cropped no-till research plots since 1969.  
**Size:** 100 acres  
**Current Research:** Soil fertility and management, agronomy of crop production, cover crops, no-till management, integrated management of weeds, diseases, insects and other pests.

---

#### **Dixon Springs Agricultural Center**

---

**Location: Simpson** Largest experiment station of its kind east of the Mississippi River.  
**Size:** 5,100 acres  
**Current Research:** Invasive species, integrated pest

(continued on page 12)

# Growing Stronger Farms, Together

(continued from page 11)

management, forages, livestock, specialty crops, forestry.

---

## Research Highlights

---

In addition to trials conducted at University of Illinois farms, researchers work with farmers, landowners and community colleges to conduct research across the diversity of Illinois soils and growing environments. Here is a deeper dive into just a few of the ongoing row-crop research projects across the state:

---

### Cropping System Management Recommendations

---

Giovani Preza Fontes is an Assistant Professor and Extension Agronomist who joined the team following the retirement of Emerson Nafziger, who served as an Extension Agronomist for over 30 years. Preza Fontes is particularly interested in enhancing crop productivity while minimizing environmental impacts through evaluation of conservation cropping practices

such as 4R nutrient management, cover cropping and conservation tillage.

Among other projects, Preza Fontes is ramping up statewide planting date and seeding rate trials. With environments and genetics always shifting, it's important to conduct these continuously.

---

### Soil Fertility Recommendations

---

John Jones is an Assistant Professor and Extension Soil Fertility Specialist who joined the university less than a year ago but is already building his research program. Jones is working closely with his colleague, Dr. Andrew Margenot, and the ag industry to update soil fertility thresholds and recommendations for Illinois farmers through a series of trials at university research centers and on private farms.

Additionally, Jones is continuing the Maximum Return To Nitrogen (MRTN) project started by Nafziger, with plans to deliver more site-specific recommendations for nitrogen management. Jones hopes to develop tools similar to the MRTN Calculator for use with phosphorus and potassium fertilizer inputs so that farmers can make decisions based on local,

relevant on-farm yield data and current economic factors, such as fertilizer costs and grain prices.

---

### Data Intensive Farm Management

---

Leading the Data Intensive Farm Management (DIFM) team, David Bullock believes his research will change agronomic strategies and help farmers make more informed decisions leading to more profitable acres. Bullock and the DIFM team work with farmers using precision agriculture technology to conduct their own on-farm "checkerboard" trials.

Through these trials, farmers and researchers collect and analyze data on how crop yields respond to factors such as input rates, field characteristics and weather to better inform their future management decisions. The DIFM project includes development of software that farmers and consultants can use to design and analyze data from their on-farm experiments.

---

### Cover Crop Management Recommendations

---

Cover crop system research trials continue to advance as well. One such multi-year, multi-location trial funded by the Illinois Soybean Association is focused on evaluating cereal rye planting

date, seeding rate and termination timing and the effects of these factors on cereal rye biomass and soybean production.

Although it is known that cover crops can help suppress weeds and reduce erosion and nutrient losses from fields, excessive above-ground cover crop biomass present during soybean planting and establishment can have negative effects on crop growth and final yields.

The research team, led by Extension's Nathan Johanning, is hopeful this research will provide better recommendations that allow farmers using cover crops to manage their input costs (seed) and spring biomass levels to maximize the benefits of cover crops while minimizing interference with crop growth and yields. The end goal is to take some of the guesswork out of cover crop use, helping farmers figure out how to integrate cover crops at the lowest risk possible.

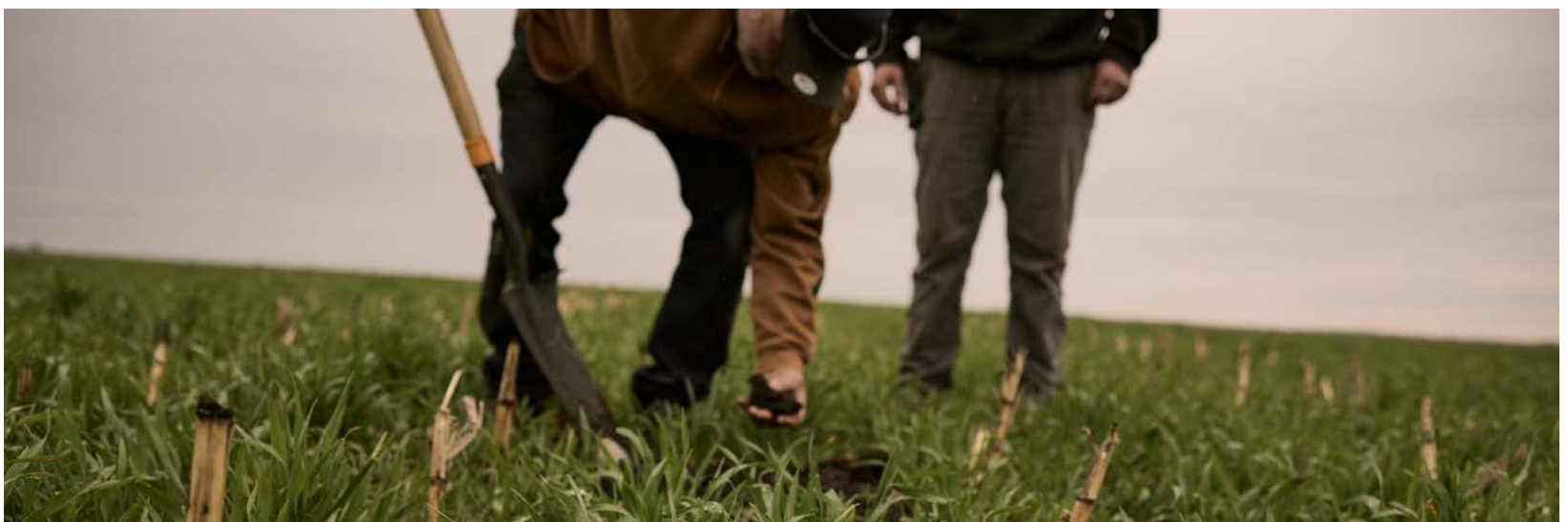
To tap into the Extension network, visit:

<https://extension.illinois.edu>.

If you are interested in conducting research on your farm, email [tbecker2@illinois.edu](mailto:tbecker2@illinois.edu).

---

Talon Becker is an Extension Specialist with the Commercial Ag Team, Illinois Extension.



# FROM INVESTMENT

# TO INFRASTRUCTURE

In the last five years, soy checkoff investments have generated a 4.5-to-1 ROI in export market development and an 18% increase in U.S. soybean exports.<sup>1</sup> Investing \$400,000 for infrastructure research, analysis and design at the Port of Gray's Harbor helped to expand the facility and increase capacity for the export of soybean meal.<sup>2</sup>



Learn more at [unitedsoybean.org](https://unitedsoybean.org)

<sup>1</sup>ROI Study: Kaiser, H.M. 2024. An Economic Analysis of the United Soybean Board and Qualified State Soybean Boards' Demand-and Supply-Enhancing Programs. Cornell University. <sup>2</sup>United Soybean Board, 2022. © 2025 United Soybean Board

## ISA's LEAD Program:

# Where the Best of Tradition Meets the Best of Innovation



**By Nicole Butler,**  
*Executive Employee Relations,  
Illinois Soybean Association*

The Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) is committed to cultivating growth throughout the agriculture industry. Whether it's conducting cutting-edge research, limiting burdensome regulations or growing domestic and international markets, Illinois farmers can be sure they have

a best-in-class support system ensuring their success every step of the way.

To take our support a step further, ISA has revamped its leadership training program to offer farmers, students and industry professionals the opportunity to develop, refine or share leadership skills while making a meaningful impact on the industry.

The ISA LEAD (Leadership, Education, Advocacy,

Development) Program is designed to accommodate individuals at all experience levels:

### Next Generation

- **Focus:** Foundations of agriculture, farming basics and market dynamics
- **Who:** FFA members, college students and recent graduates

### Navigators

- **Focus:** In-depth learning about the soy checkoff and its impact

on the industry

- **Who:** Experienced farmers and industry professionals

### Ambassadors

- **Focus:** Mentoring participants enrolled at the Next Generation and Navigator experience levels, sharing expertise and supporting ISA initiatives
- **Who:** Seasoned advocates and retired professionals

This approach ensures that

every participant, regardless of their experience level or interests, can engage meaningfully and contribute to the future of Illinois agriculture.

**Real-World Experiences**

There are a number of leadership training programs available for Illinois farmers, but what sets LEAD apart from the others is the availability of hands-on learning experiences that provide real-world insights into the industry. LEAD participants will have the opportunity to:

- Visit farms across Illinois to gain firsthand knowledge of diverse farming operations.
- Engage in lobbying efforts to advocate for policies that support Illinois agriculture.
- Participate in major industry events, including the Farm Progress Show and Soybean Summit.

Through these experiences, the program aims to build a pipeline

of leaders who are skilled to serve Illinois farmers, industry boards or other ag industry cooperatives, positively influencing the Illinois agriculture industry at large.

**A Flexible and Inclusive Approach**

The LEAD program is designed to be flexible and individualized, allowing participants to engage as much or as little as fits their schedule and goals. By offering multiple pathways for engagement, LEAD ensures that anyone passionate about agriculture can find a place within the program.

One key feature of the program is the "hybrid trainee" role participants will take on, which will provide exposure to board-level concepts without the full commitment. This structure allows individuals to build confidence, gain experience and decide whether a future leadership role within Illinois agriculture aligns with their career goals.



**Leadership Development Through Mentorship**

Mentorship is a core component of the LEAD Program. Through the Ambassador tier, experienced professionals and retirees have the opportunity to guide the next generation of agricultural leaders. This exchange of knowledge fosters growth for everyone involved: younger participants gain valuable insights, while seasoned advocates remain engaged with the industry.

And by pairing Next Generation and Navigators with Ambassadors, the program ensures that emerging leaders receive guidance in decision-making, advocacy efforts and best practices. These mentor-mentee relationships help reinforce a culture of continuous learning within the Illinois agriculture community.

**Empowering Participants to Shape the Industry**

LEAD goes beyond skill-building; it empowers participants to actively shape the future of Illinois agriculture. Through engagement with ISA initiatives, leadership training workshops and networking opportunities, participants can:

- Gain a deeper understanding of

industry trends and challenges.

- Develop strategies to advocate for agriculture at the state and national levels.
- Build connections with key stakeholders.

These experiences prepare participants for leadership roles, whether within ISA, their own farming operations or broader industry organizations.

**The Future of LEAD**

ISA envisions the LEAD Program as an evolving initiative. As agricultural challenges and opportunities change, the program will adapt to provide relevant and impactful training for both emerging and established leaders. ISA remains committed to fostering a strong leadership pipeline that will sustain and advance the soybean industry for generations to come.

For those ready to take the next step in their leadership journey, the ISA LEAD Program offers an exceptional opportunity to grow, connect and make a lasting impact.

To learn more, visit:  
[www.ilsoy.org/lead/](http://www.ilsoy.org/lead/) or  
 contact me today at  
[nicole.butler@ilsoy.org](mailto:nicole.butler@ilsoy.org).

**BUSINESS, FAMILY & LEGACY**

Are you protecting what matters most?  
 Get ag-focused insights and strategy to optimize, expand, and protect your agribusiness for future generations.

**pinion** 

**WE ARE FOOD & AG ADVISORS & ACCOUNTANTS**

pinionglobal.com



Funded by the Illinois Soybean Checkoff



# Making Illinois the Global Hub for Biomanufacturing

(continued on page 12)



By Olivia Key, *Field & Bean Magazine Assistant Editor*

Many from outside the region might assume that central Illinois is nothing more than endless fields of corn and soybeans. Which might be partially true, but it's far from the full story.

As a reader of *Illinois Field & Bean*, a soybean farmer or an industry partner, you're aware of Illinois' position as a national leader in agriculture, consistently ranking among the top producers of corn and soybeans in the U.S. With its fertile soil, vast farmlands and dedicated farmers, Illinois plays a vital role in feeding and fueling the world. But our state is more than just a leader in production — it's also emerging as a global hub for biomanufacturing and precision fermentation, harnessing the power of corn and soy to create sustainable, high-value products.

According to Dr. Beth Conerty, the Regional Innovation Officer at the Illinois Fermentation and Agriculture Biomanufacturing (iFAB) Tech Hub, there's no better place to drive agricultural innovation than central Illinois. "From an asset perspective, the University of Illinois has top programs in both agriculture and engineering, so it's a great place to drive innovation and new technologies. And in Decatur there are both ADM and Primient, which are essentially the definition of industrialized biomanufacturing," Conerty says. "Additionally, we are increasingly finding that companies want to relocate to where the feedstock is. So to have research, to have manufacturing, and then to have the feedstocks all grown here is,

according to our research, the only place in the world that can do that."

Leveraging these assets, the iFAB Tech Hub at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) is on a mission to grow biomanufacturing and precision fermentation in Illinois. "We define biomanufacturing as taking plant material and turning it into value-added products, and we consider precision fermentation to be one tool within biomanufacturing," says Conerty.

The hub is led by the Integrated Bioprocessing Research Lab (IBRL) on the UIUC campus. As one of the most comprehensive bioprocessing scale-up facilities in the nation, IBRL has the capacity to work with food ingredients, agricultural inputs, industrial products, cosmetics and more, providing companies with the infrastructure and equipment needed to develop products. Additionally, iFAB includes assets at ADM's campus and, through a partnership with Synonym, at Primient's campus in Decatur.

While there are several applications for biomanufacturing, the agriculture industry likely should continue to reap the benefits. Dr. Conerty says, "We're doing a lot of work with fertilizers and pesticides, but instead of making them from chemical processing, we're doing it through biology and bioprocessing instead."

The idea of creating a cycle of outputs powering inputs is an exciting one for Conerty and the IBRL team, but iFAB's ultimate goal is to build markets for agricultural commodities. "There are lots of



other industries, though, and if those companies want to come and grow their manufacturing here and use our corn and soy, I'm fine with that too."

Economic growth is a major driver behind iFAB's mission, and moving companies to Illinois and creating jobs is a priority. iFAB's reach includes some of the highest-yielding counties for corn and soybeans in the U.S. and has direct access to multiple commercial transportation routes. Since 2018, the IBRL facility has worked with 130 industry partners, and the goal is to retain these companies in central Illinois by building local markets. "IBRL collaborates with many industry partners, but our goal is to encourage those

companies to establish a long-term presence in Illinois. We're focused on building markets for agricultural commodities and actively engaging with companies looking to open manufacturing sites. By highlighting central Illinois' strategic advantages—its infrastructure, resources and access to feedstocks—we aim to attract businesses to set up operations here."

So what's next? iFAB recently received over \$51 million in federal funding for infrastructure projects.

Expansions and upgrades are planned for IBRL, Primient and ADM facilities, with state and industry partners also contributing

(continued on page 18)



## Making Illinois the Global Hub for Biomanufacturing

(continued from page 17)

significant resources.

"Most of this funding is being dedicated to infrastructure. IBRL will be doubling in square footage, so we'll be expanding to help more companies. The facility at Primient's campus will

be upgraded for shared use, and ADM is also upgrading some of their reactors for shared use."

And as more businesses move to Illinois, iFAB's efforts will create jobs and career development opportunities in central Illinois. "In the near future, we hope to get some training programs established here at University of Illinois, the unions in both Champaign in Decatur and with Parkland and Richland community colleges. Establishing more training programs and getting more people involved

is critical," says Conerty. "Long term, I want some of those site selection conversations to land right, and I want companies to say Illinois is the place to build our manufacturing sites."

Conerty hopes that as these improvements attract more businesses, they will continue to increase demand for agricultural feedstocks in Illinois. "If we can help more companies become more successful, they will need more feedstock. It is a slow process—we're not a huge off-take partner right now, but if we

don't put in the time now, we will never be a big off-take partner."

As the iFAB Tech Hub continues to grow, Conerty plays a vital role in coordinating grant applications and ensuring consortium members remain aligned. Stakeholders can get involved as full consortium members or strategic partners.

For more information, contact Dr. Conerty directly at [bconerty@illinois.edu](mailto:bconerty@illinois.edu), or visit <https://ifabtechhub.research.illinois.edu/>.



**"...to have research, to have manufacturing and then to have the feedstocks all grown here is, according to our research, the only place in the world that can do that."**

**Dr. Beth Conerty,**  
*Regional Innovation Officer,  
Illinois Fermentation and Agriculture  
Biomanufacturing (iFAB) Tech Hub*

ome<sup>SM</sup>



**SOYLEIC**® is a non-GMO, high-oleic option for today's soybean farmers and those they serve.



**FOR GROWERS  
IT'S THE RIGHT CHOICE**

Scan this QR code for more about why soybean farmers are embracing **SOYLEIC**® and find a **SOYLEIC**® crush plant near you.





# Opinion: Illinois Farmers Can't Afford Another Costly California Policy

By Steve Pitstick, Illinois Farmer and ISA Board Director

I've spent decades working the land near Maple Park, Ill. I grow soybeans and corn, just like thousands of other farmers across this state. But now, our economic security and our ability to contribute to our state's successful clean fuel strategy is in jeopardy. For more than a year, lawmakers have been considering misguided legislative measures to establish a state-wide Low Carbon Fuel Standard (LCFS) inspired, not surprisingly, by yet another costly California environmental policy experiment.

Last year, myself and members of Illinois Soybean Growers (ISG) took a mission trip to the West Coast, where we were able to tour several farms, speak with California farmers and meet with the California Air Resources Board to learn more about LCFS legislation. We came away from this mission trip feeling frustrated that there was not more science to support this movement; rather, it felt very agenda-driven.

Passing an LCFS measure in Illinois could devastate farmers like me. This policy, which has already failed in California, would raise fuel costs, increase

taxes and eliminate jobs in our biodiesel industry. If Illinois adopts this measure, it would make farming more expensive and less competitive—drying up our market for renewable energy, imposing exorbitant taxes on already-expensive fuels in Illinois and likely driving some farmers out of business.

One of the biggest concerns with the LCFS is the additional cost it would impose on fuel. At a minimum, our estimates indicate this could mean another 10% fuel cost increase. That could tally up to additional taxes of \$10,000 or more on Illinois farmers.

Conflicting language in the legislation suggests the new law could be applied to on-farm, off-road fuel use as well as on-road fuel use. Although aviation, ocean-going vessels, and rail are the only off-road sectors explicitly exempted, farmers are not excluded from additional off-road fuel tax. With already volatile markets, unpredictable weather and rising input expenses, these fuel cost increases could further strain farm operations by driving up the cost of essential supplies and production. Illinois farmers cannot absorb another financial blow.

## California's Mistakes Shouldn't Be Illinois' Future

We don't have to speculate about what this policy would do to Illinois because we've already seen it play out in California. The LCFS drove fuel prices in the state to the highest level in the entire nation. The cost of living skyrocketed, farmers and other businesses suffered, and many people left the state altogether. Why on earth would Illinois voluntarily follow that path?

Soy-based and biomass-based diesel dropped from over 50% of market share to under 15% of the market share. Because California holds such weight, this has caused biodiesel facilities in three surrounding states to close in 2024—hurting markets for Illinois soybean oil.

We need to educate members of the Illinois General Assembly with a clear, unified message: Don't put us out of business by adding more taxes and regulation. Leave California's risky policies in California.

## The Threat Is Real

Last year, bills were drafted in both houses of the General Assembly. The measures would have established a clean transportation standard to reduce carbon intensity in the on-road transportation sector by 20% by 2038. Some interest groups want to increase those numbers to over 25%. Although this might sound good in theory, in practice, it's another costly, ill-conceived policy that will increase fuel costs and put even more pressure on Illinois farmers. Although aviation fuel would be exempt, soy-based biodiesel would not, which means farmers will lose yet another key market for our soybeans.

Illinois soybean farmers cannot afford to sit back and watch this happen. We need to educate lawmakers about the real consequences of this legislation. It is time for us to speak out—loudly and assert-

ively. Our elected officials must understand that their decisions impact our livelihoods, our families and our communities. Informed by facts, the General Assembly should reject this California-inspired policy fiasco.

## Killing Jobs, Harming Communities

This isn't just about farmers—it's about the thousands of jobs the biodiesel industry supports. Illinois' biodiesel sector provides 2,000 good-paying jobs and generates over \$1 billion in household income. If this tax hike goes through, those jobs could disappear overnight. The ripple effect would be devastating, not just for workers in the biodiesel industry but for rural communities that rely on agriculture to survive.

We've already seen major corporations and some policymakers push agriculture aside in favor of electric vehicle mandates and carbon credit schemes that ignore the real needs of farmers. The California LCFS has even promoted feedstocks imported from China and Southeast Asia over American soybean oil. Now, they want to add another burden by stripping away the incentives that support Illinois biodiesel—a clean, renewable fuel that benefits both the environment and our economy. These incentives alone reduce the price of biodiesel blends by up to 36 cents per gallon at the pump.

Another major risk of this policy is its potential impact on fuel choice. Higher fuel costs could limit our options, forcing farmers to pay even more for fuel while making it harder to access alternatives such as biodiesel. It could also force biodiesel and renewable diesel production with fuels made with tallow and used cooking oil, which are lower quality and gel much more easily in the winter. Illinois farmers already spend a significant portion of their budget on fuel, and this legislation would only add to that burden.



STEVE PITSTICK | BOARD DIRECTOR |  
ILLINOIS SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION

Farmers are facing many threats to soybean oil-derived biofuel markets. We must remain vigilant about these threats that are on the horizon. This includes the potential to reduce soybean oil-derived biodiesel volumes from the U.S. Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS). Recent legislation, which codifies year-round E15, was negotiated with the petroleum industry to include small refinery exemption (SRE) waivers totaling over 400 million Renewable Identification Numbers (RIN) credits used to track renewable fuel production and compliance under the RFS program. Granting year-round E15 with the expense of SREs leads to overall biofuel demand destruction and is harmful to the entire domestic biofuel value chain.

Several biodiesel facilities in the Midwest—production locations that use soybean oil feedstocks—have already closed their doors, and this legislation will create a dire economic situation for the industry and further loss of jobs. Crush demand has weakened significantly and concerns about the industry have risen to very high levels.

Soybean oil-derived, biomass-based diesel is being targeted on several fronts, and if anti-agriculture interest groups are successful, we as farmers will undoubtedly feel increased

economic impacts as demand falls short.

## Farmers Must Take a Stand

Illinois farmers are already facing enough challenges. Approving a West Coast-style LCFS would add another costly layer of taxes and regulation that we simply cannot afford. These policies threaten our ability to make a living, support our families and contribute to the state's economy. We must stand together and demand that our lawmakers reject these harmful pieces of legislation.

Here's what you can do: Call your state legislators and tell them to learn more about the likely harm caused by passage of LCFS legislation. Join the Illinois Soybean Growers' advocacy efforts to actively push back against this type of LCFS policy. And help us spread the word in your community—talk to other farmers, business owners and local officials about how these policies will hurt our industry.

This isn't just about soybeans or fuel—it's about the future of farming in Illinois. If we don't act now, we risk cutting even deeper into the thin operating margins of our states farm families who have sustained our communities for generations.

We cannot afford to let Illinois become the next California. Let's fight to keep Illinois agriculture strong by speaking out about this misguided LCFS scheme. Our livelihoods depend on it.



# Optimizing Operations

**How To Maximize ISA Agronomy Team's Initiatives  
For On-Farm Productivity**

*By Stacy Zuber, Ph.D.,  
Research Data Scientist,  
Illinois Soybean Association*

Illinois soybean farmers face constantly evolving agronomic challenges in their fields. How can they navigate these changes while seizing new opportunities? One great option is the growing toolbox of initiatives that's available right now from the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) Agronomy Team.

Combined, these initiatives aim to deliver information and tools to help Illinois soybean farmers enhance on-farm profitability and manage crop production risks. Farming isn't easy, but our team is here to inform producers' decision-making and improve their outcomes.

In this article, I'll share some of the latest ways we're equipping farmers for success all season long. You can also check out the latest resources anytime at

[www.FieldAdvisor.org](http://www.FieldAdvisor.org), the online agronomy content platform funded by the ISA checkoff program.

### **NRCS Outreach and Education Partnership**

Let's start with some of our most recent initiatives, then circle back to ongoing investments we're regularly updating on behalf of soy farmers.

In August 2024, ISA entered into an outreach and education partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), specifically its Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). As part of this effort, ISA will develop materials designed to help farmers access NRCS financial assistance programs that can help pay for their implementation of conservation agriculture practices.

Farmers often tell us these

programs are difficult to understand or navigate, and our goal is to create materials to help simplify the process.

In addition to creating educational content, the partnership will launch a website of helpful resources and will host field days highlighting conservation practice opportunities. We'll also organize technical workshops diving deeper into the agronomic topics about which farmers care most.

### **On-Farm Trial Network (OFTN)**

My background is in soils, so I've always been fascinated by our state's wide range of soil types. Farmers in central and northern Illinois grow beans in black prairie soils, whereas in southern Illinois, farmers plant into forest soils and claypans.

To capture all of that variability and give regionally reliable research insights across the

10 million acres of Illinois soybean production, ISA launched the On-Farm Trial Network (OFTN) in September 2023. OFTN spans several types of research, including:

- **Legacy Trials:** Long-term sites continuously in place since 2017 focused on evaluating changes to soil health over time. Originally, Soil Health Partnership managed these sites as part of its trials. Now, ISA continues to evaluate how tillage and cover crops affect soil health. The Legacy Trials project continues to expand to capture a wider geographic area representing additional soils and climates common to Illinois farming.
- **Action Trials:** Short-term trials launching for the first time during the 2025 growing season to answer targeted

(continued on page 24)



Weed management often ranks as one of Illinois soybean farmers' top concerns in the ISA Agronomy Team's annual Soybean Production Concerns Survey.  
Photo Credit: Illinois Soybean Association Checkoff

## Optimizing Operations

(continued from page 23)

agronomic questions. The first two protocols will test sulfur fertilization and insecticides to provide a better idea of how and when they impact yield and crop production. As with Legacy Trials, more Action Trials are expected to be added in the years ahead.

Results from these trials will be shared through a variety of platforms, including in-person field days and winter events and on the web at [www.fieldadvisor.org](http://www.fieldadvisor.org).

Additionally, the inaugural Annual Insights Report will be released in the June 2025 issue of *Illinois Field & Bean*, and farmers can consult that report for results of ISA checkoff-funded research, and in the future, our on-farm trials."

### Online Crop Report Tool

Crop scouting is an essential discipline for Illinois soybean farmers looking to maximize profitability and manage risk. Field Advisor's Online Crop Report Tool released in April 2023 is designed to support that activity with up-to-date, region-specific information.

It's already proven to be an effective decision-making tool: In mid-July 2024, several Crop Report contributors reported they'd begun finding aphids above threshold levels in

certain corn hybrids. Usually, Illinois farmers don't have to worry about this pest. The most likely cause was a wide range of planting dates.

Regardless of what prompted the outbreak, Field Advisor's Online Crop Report Tool jumped in to help. We disseminated farmers' reports to the Illinois farming community via Field Advisor social media posts, podcast episodes, email newsletters and media interviews.

Because of this platform, farmers knew to carefully examine the upper whorl of corn as well as tassels for aphids. If the corn aphids were present in elevated numbers, or if 50% of plants had aphid colonies (defined as 50 to 100 aphids before R1 or during pollination), they could consider an application of an insecticide, sometimes along with a fungicide application. After pollination, we shared, no treatment was recommended.

In 2025, the Crop Report will continue with growing season updates and contributor reports featured on all Field Advisor channels. Farmers growing corn, soybeans and wheat can get crop progress updates and stay alert to the latest disease and pest threats.

To subscribe for updates about issues in your area, simply go to [www.FieldAdvisor.org](http://www.FieldAdvisor.org). You can also follow along via the Field Advisor podcast on YouTube at [http://www.youtube.com/@FieldAdvisor\\_ILSoybean](http://www.youtube.com/@FieldAdvisor_ILSoybean).

### University Research

For many years, Illinois soybean farmers' checkoff dollars have funded research conducted by university partners. And since fiscal year 2023, ISA has doubled down on its efforts to get those insights and research results out to farmers on an ongoing basis.

On the recently developed Research Hub at [www.FieldAdvisor.org](http://www.FieldAdvisor.org), each funded project has its own page with details about what questions the project will address as well as more information about participating researchers.

Project updates and data are shared on the Field Advisor blog and the individual project pages. Field Advisor also hosts monthly webinars during which researchers share findings and provide guidance to farmers.

Additionally, the data from these projects were highlighted at the first-ever Field Advisor Forum at Memorial Stadium in Champaign on Jan. 16. These recordings are available to view on the Field Advisor YouTube channel.

### What Agronomic Partnerships Mean for Farmers

Collaborating with outside researchers and organizations brings several benefits to Illinois soybean farmers. It allows us to combine different skillsets and opportunities to effectively communicate agronomic research and on-farm data.

Sometimes, that involves hands-on work from our

Agronomy Team to make sure farmers can receive the information via multiple channels. At other times, we take more of a supportive role to make sure our partners can do the jobs at which they excel.

These initiatives also are complementary in ways that will benefit Illinois soybean farmers. For example, in the future we envision testing university researchers' recommendations by leveraging the farms enrolled in the OFTN across the state. This could lead to more improved, specific and practical recommendations for farmers to enact on their fields and in their businesses.

We recognize that every farmer has unique needs and situations. We want to ensure that we are providing a variety of information so farmers can find what will be most helpful to them.

### Look Ahead, Give Input

All of this agronomic activity will be on full display at the 2025 Farm Progress Show from Aug. 26-28 in Decatur. There, ISA will provide access to its demonstration plots plus lots of information about many of these projects. You'll find our site in the southwest corner of the show near the Macon County Soil and Water Conservation District office site. We look forward to connecting with many soybean



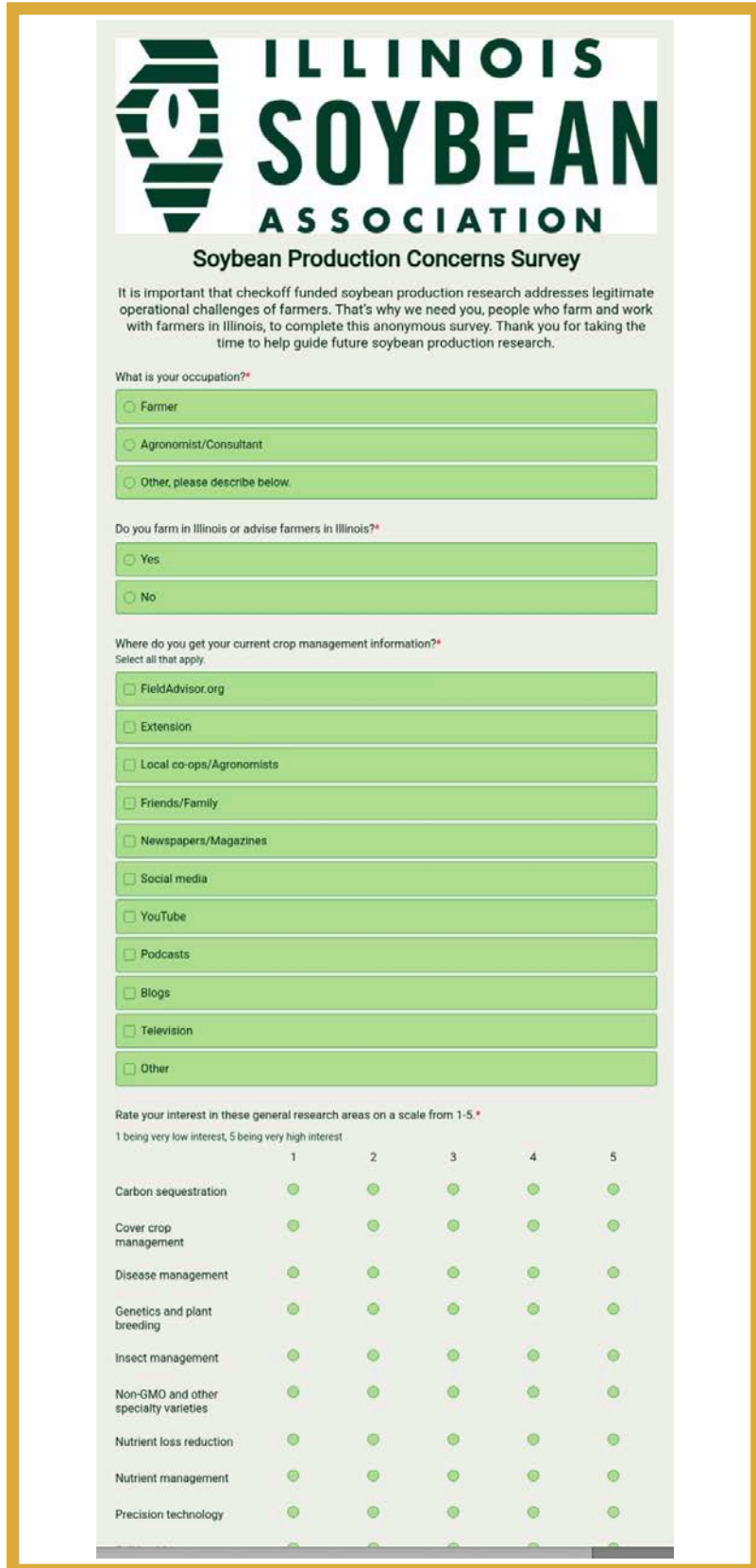


growers there.

I'll close with a final opportunity: At ISA, we're always looking for ways to make sure our research reflects your priorities. I encourage you to fill out the Soybean Production Concerns Survey. You can take the

survey at <https://bit.ly/FY26GrowingConcerns>.

Together, we can work to become better informed about the unique agronomic needs of Illinois soybean farms in all their amazing variety—and better equipped to grow a crop that's No. 1 in the nation.



**ILLINOIS SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION**

**Soybean Production Concerns Survey**

It is important that checkoff funded soybean production research addresses legitimate operational challenges of farmers. That's why we need you, people who farm and work with farmers in Illinois, to complete this anonymous survey. Thank you for taking the time to help guide future soybean production research.

What is your occupation?\*

- Farmer
- Agronomist/Consultant
- Other, please describe below.

Do you farm in Illinois or advise farmers in Illinois?\*

- Yes
- No

Where do you get your current crop management information?\*

Select all that apply.

- FieldAdvisor.org
- Extension
- Local co-ops/Agronomists
- Friends/Family
- Newspapers/Magazines
- Social media
- YouTube
- Podcasts
- Blogs
- Television
- Other

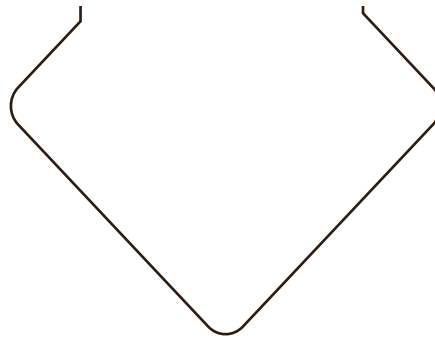
Rate your interest in these general research areas on a scale from 1-5.\*

1 being very low interest, 5 being very high interest

	1	2	3	4	5
Carbon sequestration	●	●	●	●	●
Cover crop management	●	●	●	●	●
Disease management	●	●	●	●	●
Genetics and plant breeding	●	●	●	●	●
Insect management	●	●	●	●	●
Non-GMO and other specialty varieties	●	●	●	●	●
Nutrient loss reduction	●	●	●	●	●
Nutrient management	●	●	●	●	●
Precision technology	●	●	●	●	●



Results and updates about ISA checkoff-funded research are shared on the Research Hub at [www.FieldAdvisor.org](http://www.FieldAdvisor.org). Photo Credit: Illinois Soybean Association Checkoff



CLAIRE FABER | COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER |  
ILLINOIS SOYBEAN ASSOCIATION

# Celebrating Tomorrow's Ag Leaders

On his family's dairy farm in Peotone, Dakota Cowger wakes up early each morning to feed his cattle. After finishing his morning chores, he heads to Peotone High School, where he serves as an Ag Teacher and FFA Advisor, shaping the next generation of agricultural leaders. His dedication to education extends beyond the walls of his classroom as he fosters a passion for agriculture in students. Later that evening, he'll respond to emails from members of the Will County Ag Literacy Committee, a group he's proudly chaired for five years that promotes agriculture and connects farmers with their local community.

A little over three hours to the south, Jonathan Griffel is getting his equipment ready to plant soybeans on his farm in Gillespie. While he's in the field, Jonathan also captures content for his role as an Illinois Farm Families Farmer Ambassador, sharing the story of agriculture with consumers to help connect them with the farmers who grow their food. Tonight, he'll head to the Macoupin County Farm Bureau office to lead the Young Leader Committee meeting as its President.

What do Dakota and Jonathan have in common? These two farmers exemplify the qualities that define Illinois' most outstanding young agricultural leaders: an unyielding work ethic, a passion for progress and a deep commitment to their communities. Dakota and Jonathan are among the individuals who have earned recognition as part of the

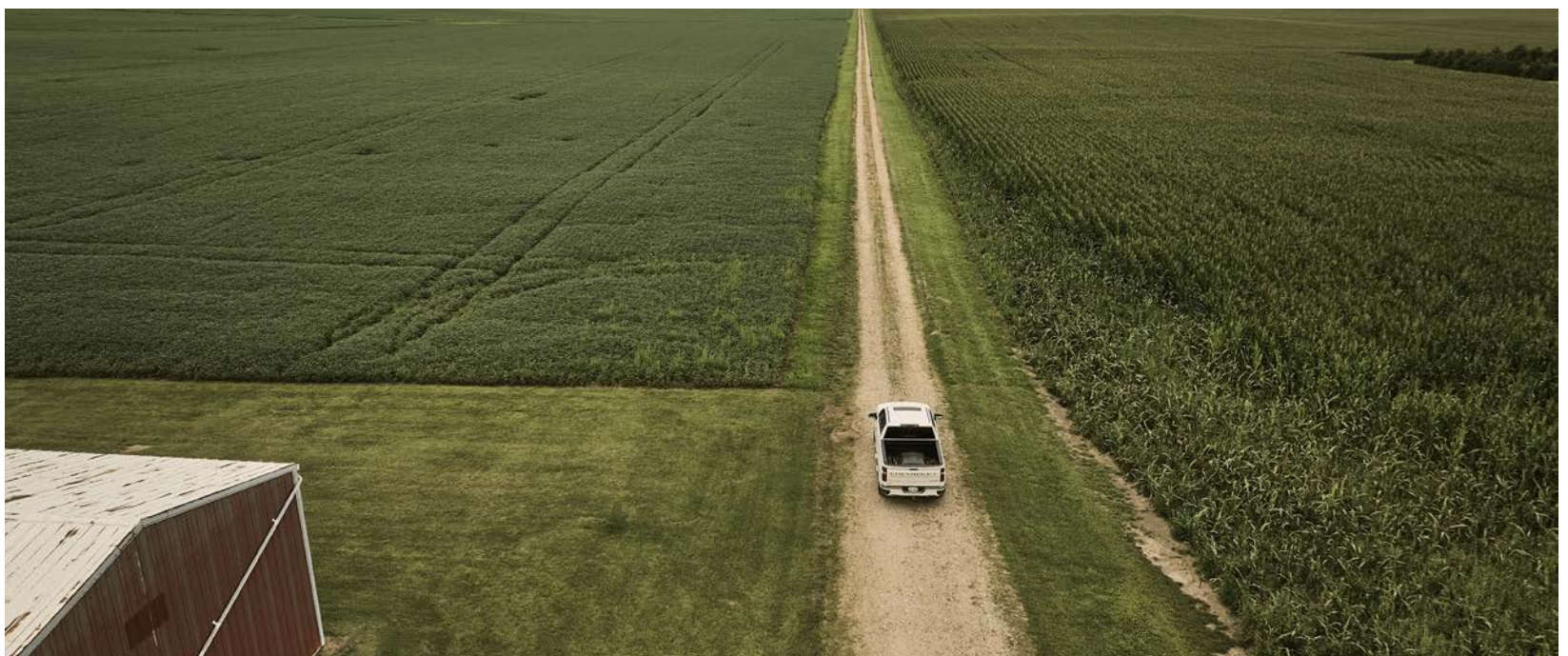
Illinois Soybean Association's (ISA) 20 Under 40—a prestigious list celebrating the next generation of agricultural innovators and change-makers.

Now entering its fourth year, the 20 Under 40 program, proudly sponsored by John Deere, continues to spotlight the next generation of leaders in Illinois agriculture. We're calling on you to help us discover these rising stars. If you know a farmer under the age of 40 in Illinois who goes above and beyond in both their farming practices and community involvement, we encourage you to nominate them for this year's class.

Through our collaboration with partners at Illinois Corn, Midwest Dairy, the Illinois Pork Producers Association, the Grain and Feed Association of Illinois, and the Illinois Fertilizer and Chemical Association, ISA continues to champion the diverse and dynamic individuals who are driving agriculture forward in Illinois.

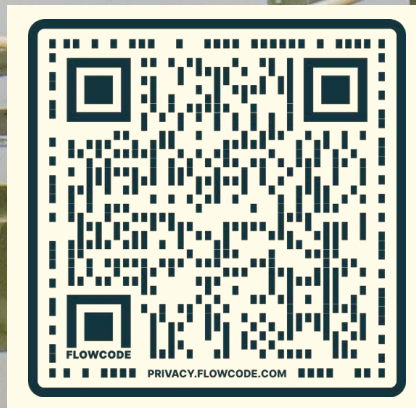
Illinois is home to some of the nation's most talented and dedicated farmers raising soybeans, cattle, pumpkins and more. These men and women are not just cultivating the land—they are cultivating the future of our state's agriculture industry. And they're just getting started.

To nominate yourself or a deserving young farmer for this year's class of 20 Under 40 farmers, or to learn more, visit [ilsoy.org/20-under-40](https://ilsoy.org/20-under-40) today.





**WISHH leverages partnerships**  
*for U.S. Soy to help meet the protein*  
*needs of 8 billion consumers*



[wishh.org](http://wishh.org)

Sent to you compliments of:

Illinois Soybean Association  
1108 Trinity Lane  
Bloomington, IL. 61704

NONPROFIT  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
ILLINOIS SOYBEAN  
GROWERS

2025



# Master Farmers

**CONGRATULATIONS  
TO THE 2025 MASTER  
FARMER RECIPIENTS**

These exceptional individuals have shown outstanding leadership in agricultural production, a deep commitment to serving both their industry and communities, and an unwavering dedication to fostering growth in all that they do.

[ilsoy.org](http://ilsoy.org)



**Chet Ester**  
*Fredrick, IL*



**Amy Hildenbrandt**  
*South Beloit, IL*



**Steve Pitstick**  
*Maple Park, IL*



**Dirk Rice**  
*Philo, IL*



**Rodney Weinzierl**  
*Stanford, IL*  
*(Honorary Master Farmer)*