



# THE FARMER'S REPORT

The *Mendota* Reporter

Established in 1854  
The *Ambury* News

Wednesday, Sept. 27, 2023



## U.S. approaching USMCA dispute with Mexico over GMO corn

By **TIMOTHY EGGERT**  
*FarmWeek*

The ongoing trade dispute between the United States and Mexico over the country's policies to ban genetically modified corn intensified after the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) called for a dispute panel under the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement.

USTR's announcement comes after officials Aug. 16 passed a 75-day deadline to reach a resolution through USMCA dispute consultations.

"The United States has used the tools provided by the USMCA in attempting to resolve concerns with Mexico's biotechnology measures," USTR Ambassador Katherine Tai said

in a statement. "Today the United States is taking the next step in enforcing Mexico's obligations under the USMCA."

Once formed, the three-member dispute panel will have 120 days to file an initial report. That work will be focused on the decree that Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador released in February. It declared his country would immediately ban GM white corn used in tortillas and dough, while directing government agencies to gradually substitute the use of GM yellow corn in all animal feed and products for human consumption.

The U.S. is Mexico's primary supplier of feed corn — nearly all of it is genetically modified —

and in 2022 exported 15.4 million metric tons of corn to the country, according to USDA data. Annual white corn imports into Mexico total about 1.6 million tons.

Tai's office contends both the decree's white corn and yellow corn measures each violate the same seven USMCA provisions, according to a copy of the dispute panel request.

"Through the USMCA dispute panel, we seek to resolve our concerns and help ensure consumers can continue to access safe and affordable food and agricultural products," Tai said.

"It is critical that Mexico eliminate its USMCA-inconsistent biotechnology measures so that American farmers can continue to access the Mexican market



and use innovative tools to respond to climate and food security challenges."

Mexico's Ministry of Economy in a statement released Aug. 24 said it does not agree with the U.S. position and was prepared to demonstrate to the panel "that the national regulation is consistent with the commitments signed in the (USMCA)" and "that the challenged measures do not have commercial effects."

American officials for months have consistently said the Mexican policies lack scientific basis and limits American farmers' access to the Mexican grain market.

Their concern was specifically addressed in March when Tai, along with other top U.S. ag and trade officials, requested "technical consultations" with Mexican officials under the USMCA's sanitary and phytosanitary chapter.

The talks did not lead to a resolution, and the USTR office requested the dispute consultations in June.

"Mexico's approach to biotechnology is not based on science and runs counter to decades' worth of evidence demonstrating its safety and the rigorous, science-based regulatory review system that ensures it poses no harm to human health and the environment," USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack said Aug. 24.

The dispute settlement panel, Vilsack said, will ensure U.S. producers and exporters have "full and fair access to the Mexican market," adding the U.S. "will continue to support fair, open, science- and rules-based trade, which serves as the foundation of USMCA as it was agreed to by all parties."

The National Corn Growers Association (NCGA) applauded USTR's request, with NCGA President Tom Haag saying the organization is "deeply appreciative" of Tai for "standing up for America's corn growers."

"Mexico's decree, which runs counter to scientific findings and is in direct vi-

olation of USMCA, is negatively impacting American corn growers," Haag said in a statement. "U.S. officials have exhausted every avenue trying to resolve this conflict and are left with no other choice but to turn to a third-party panel in hopes of quickly rectifying this issue."

American Farm Bureau Federation also welcomed the USTR move.

"Mexico's ban on bioengineered corn is not only a clear violation of USMCA, it also ignores science and denies families in Mexico safe and affordable food," AFBF President Zippy Duvall said in a statement.

"America's farmers are upholding their obligations by meeting demand while achieving important sustainability goals. Mexico must do the same."

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## ISA releases Bridge Bundling Toolkit

BLOOMINGTON—The Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) recently announced the launch of a Bridge Bundling Toolkit. The toolkit is an interactive website which provides municipal, township, and county officials a step-by-step guide on how to assess and develop a bridge bundle. Illinois has over 26,000 bridges statewide, of which 44 percent are in fair condition and 9 percent are in poor condition as designated by the United States Federal Highway Administration.

In 2020, ISA brought on board WSPUSA—a global engineering firm—to work with ISA on examining how bridge bundling could be more widely encouraged in Illinois. Bridge bundling is a project delivery concept used by many states and local jurisdictions throughout the nation, which takes advantage of economies of scale by issuing a single contract for the replacement, rehabilitation, or repair of multiple bridges. Since then, the team has held seven statewide stakeholder webinars, numerous one-on-one stakeholder interviews, conducted a legislative review, released two stakeholder surveys, wrote a bridge bundling white paper, and developed a bridge condition dashboard. These efforts led to the development of the Bridge Bundling Toolkit.

The toolkit is geared toward technical staff at the local jurisdictional level who plan, design, and construct bridges. It provides them with the information and resources needed to help guide them on the complexities of bridge bundling. “The condition of Illinois bridges is of key importance to ISA and its members. If a bridge is posted or closed it can greatly impact how Illinois soybeans reach the marketplace,” said Todd Main, Director of Market Development. “This toolkit provides resources which will help local jurisdictions bundle bridges, leading to more bridges being repaired and replaced, which ultimately impacts opportunity and profitability for Illinois growers.”

The toolkit website can be viewed at <https://www.ilsoy.org/bridge-bundling-toolkit/>

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The Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) check-off and membership programs represent more than 43,000 soybean farmers in Illinois. The checkoff funds market development, soybean production and government relations efforts, while the membership program, Illinois Soybean Growers (ISG) and the Illinois Soybean Growers PAC actively advocates for positive and impactful legislation for farmers at local, state and national levels. ISA upholds the interests of Illinois soybean farmers through promotion, advocacy, research and education with the vision of becoming a trusted partner of Illinois soybean farmers to ensure their profitability now and for future generations.

## Illinois Soybean Board elects new leadership

BLOOMINGTON—The Illinois Soybean Board (ISB) elected new leadership during its annual meeting recently in Champaign.

Ron Kindred, District 9, was elected Chairman after having served as ISA Vice Chairman for the previous two years. Kindred of Atlanta, farms with his wife, Jayne, and son Jay, raising soybeans and corn. Kindred is a previous ISA director, having served the association for 13 years, including time as vice president, secretary and legislative chairman and participation in several committees.

“I am honored and excited to serve as Chairman of ISA this next year,” said Kindred. “I want to continue to grow our collaboration with other ag groups. I want to expand the services we provide to Illinois soybean farmers, grow demand for our soybeans and continue being the leader on soybean issues in Springfield and Washington D.C. It is a very exciting time for me to be Chairman of this great organization.”

Kindred was also a past Chairman of Illinois Soybean Growers (ISG) SoyPac and a Soy Advocate for ISG’s Voice for Soy program. Kindred also represented Illinois on the American Soybean Association board and was both

vice president and secretary for that group. He is active with Illinois Farm Bureau and has served as President of East Lincoln Farmers Grain Co-op and Atlanta Township Trustee.

“Ron’s dedication to Illinois soybean farmers is highly visible through his years of service on the ISA Board of Directors,” said ISA CEO John Lumpe. “Having been with the organization for 13 years he has demonstrated his passion for the agriculture industry, commitment to farmers’ priorities, and his unwavering leadership. We are fortunate for him to lead us into what is next for the organization.”

Other elected executive committee members include: Vice-Chairman Brad Daugherty, Secretary Tim Scates, Treasurer Bryan Severs, Assistant Secretary-Treasurer Dwayne Anderson, Steve Pitstick as Government Relations Committee chair, Brian Atteberry as Market Development Committee chair and Brady Holst as Soybean Production chair. Heath Houck of Nokomis, joined ISA as District 13 director replacing Ed Murphy of Farmersville.

ISA has a total board of 18 district directors and six at-large directors from throughout the state who work on behalf of Illinois



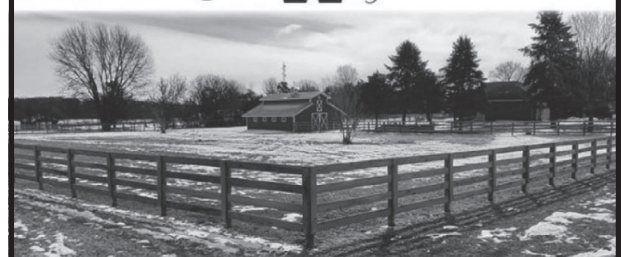
soybean producers and the checkoff. Each board member serves one of the following committees: Government Relations, Soybean

Production, or Market Development. To learn more about our board members, visit <https://www.ilsoy.org/board-of-directors/>.



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## Machinery Pete: Used farm equipment inventory rebounding

By DANIEL GRANT  
*FarmWeek*

Greg Peterson, the used farm equipment guru known as Machinery Pete, has a simple answer when asked about the meteoric rise in market values in recent years.

There just hasn't been a lot of equipment for sale in the wake of the pandemic.

But that is starting to change, said Peterson, who was the keynote speaker at the Illinois Wheat Association's Summer Forum in Sparta.

"Obviously, the last two years it's been the hottest market ever. Just unbelievable," Peterson said of used equipment. "It's not inflation. It's a supply issue."

The pandemic created all sorts of widely reported supply chain issues, which impacted production of new equipment. Labor shortages also slowed equipment output.

Many farmers seemed to respond by holding on to more of their used equipment and bidding up prices for anything that was available.

"The summer of 2022 was the absolute bottom for the used equipment inventory," Peterson said. "There was nothing for sale and everybody was shopping."

Peterson noted many of the sale prices he saw at used equipment auctions the past two years often broke records by anywhere from \$20,000 to more than \$70,000.

"When any market is about availability, that price is just out the window," he said. "It's unlike anything I've ever seen (since beginning his Machinery Pete business in 1989)."

Since bottoming a year ago, the used equipment inventory has rebounded, according to Peterson. But, so far, it hasn't slowed bids at most auctions.

"With the supply starting to go up and getting back to a more normal pattern, I'm interested to see if auction prices act correspondingly," he said. "Auction prices for good used tractors are still sky high."

Peterson has tracked the volume and value of more than 1.5 million pieces of used equipment at auctions the past 34 years and currently has about 100,000 sale listings at his website, MachineryPete.com. And his used value index for high horsepower tractors is still strong at 9.9 out of 10.

"Four-wheel-drive tractors are hot," he said. "We've not seen any drop off (in auction prices)."

Other hot spots in the market include tillage equipment, used planters, self-propelled sprayers and skid steers. The vintage market is also still doing well, according to Machinery Pete. However, one portion of the market to crack ever so slightly in recent months is used combines.

"Auction prices have started getting softer for 1- to 4-year-old used combines," Peterson said. "I think we might start to see a few more used equipment special offerings."

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## IFB director: Complacency is a farmer's worst enemy

By **TAMMIE SLOUP**  
*FarmWeek*

Brent Pollard's plentiful hay crop this spring was both a blessing and a curse.

On May 16, the Winnebago County dairy and grain farmer was turning off his chopper box after unloading the last load of silage for the day when his clothes became entangled in a cracked power take-off (PTO) safety shield, throwing him over the shaft and slamming him to the ground. "I felt it grab and I honestly thought I was dead," he said. "I felt my body to make sure everything was there and in the right spots."

The Illinois Farm Bureau District 2 director suffered a partially fractured rib and abrasions down his side from his biceps to his thigh. He also developed two baseball-sized hematomas on his thigh from the impact.

While the crack caused Pollard's clothes to catch and wind around at a high rate of speed, Pollard said

human errors also led to the accident. He hadn't been sleeping well and woke up tired that morning. As the sun set and air grew chillier, he threw on a loose-hooded sweatshirt, which is what caught on the equipment. His hay crop also yielded much higher than anticipated so the chopping continued much longer than he expected that day.

After finding his bearings after being tossed, Pollard, whose glasses and phone also were broken, stumbled across the yard to his home and asked his wife to bring him to the hospital. By the time the couple was on their way to the hospital, the adrenaline began to wear off and Pollard remembers feeling the full pain of his injuries.

The accident left him shaken and battered, but as his wounds healed, he began sharing his story.

"After we (farmers) have done an activity so many times, we do get complacent on how dangerous it is," he

said. "Something I found after I started telling my story to more people was that other people who have been affected by (farm accidents), especially PTO accidents, have started to talk about things that have happened in their lives to family members or other people in an environment where they feel comfortable, and there can be some healing.

"It does leave internal and mental scars where the fear and trauma of what could have happened has a dramatic effect."

Weeks after the accident and when Pollard was healed enough for some light farm work, he remembers his stomach dropped and feeling "shivers down his spine" as he worked with the same wagon involved in his injuries. But the work can't stop, he said.

Aside from the takeaway

that tomorrow is never promised, Pollard said complacency can be a farmer's worst enemy. A task done 1,000 times can still have life-altering outcomes, he added.

"I probably operated that lever off the chopper box 80

to 100 times that day," he said. "We have a very dangerous occupation and it's good to tell these stories, just so that we have reminders that things can be dangerous on the farm, and how important it is that we take safety precautions

seriously."

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Illinois Farm Bureau District 2 Director Brent Pollard stands between the tractor and chopper box and points to the power take-off (PTO) connecting the two. On May 16, a crack in the PTO safety shield caught his clothes, pulled them off his body and hurled him over the shaft. (Photo by Tammie Sloup)

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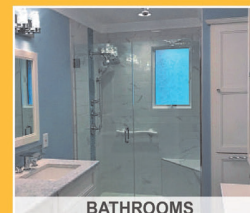
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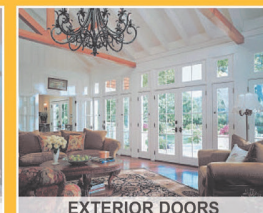
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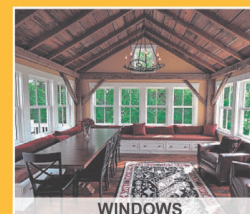
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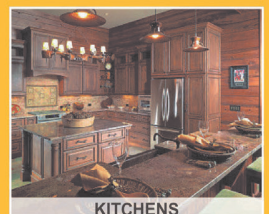
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## Illinois' House ag members share prospects on farm bill passage

By TIMOTHY EGGERT  
*FarmWeek*

Illinois farmers can expect to finish fall harvest before Congress completes work on the 2023 farm bill.

That was a central message about the \$1 trillion legislation delivered by four of the five U.S. House members from Illinois who serve on the ag committee during listening sessions, panel discussions and interviews at the Farm Progress Show in Decatur.

Their shared outlook comes a month before programs in the current bill begin to expire Sept. 30 and as lawmakers returned to Washington, D.C., Sept. 12 after their August recess. Policymakers will also need to address the 11 annual agency appropriations bills they failed to advance this summer or risk a government shutdown.

"Congress has a little bit of time. They can work some of this out," said Jonathan Coppess, University of Illinois associate professor and director of the Gardner Agriculture Policy Program. "But it also creates a lot of uncertainty, and nobody likes to manage around uncertainty. Believe it or not, not even Congress."

While U.S. Reps. Mike Bost, R-Murphysboro; Nikki Budzinski, D-Springfield; Mary Miller, R-Oakland; and Eric Sorensen, D-Moline; all said they hadn't yet seen legislative text and largely agreed the farm bill will likely not be done before the deadline, they differed on the specific timeline over the next few weeks.

Bost offered the most optimistic view, telling FarmWeek in an interview he thinks "we'll get it through the House the last day of September" and that "if the Senate isn't being

able to get their job done in time," lawmakers will pass an extension.

He said House Ag Committee chair Glenn "GT" Thompson, R-Pennsylvania, and his staff spent two days recently "writing the actual language" of the House-version of the bill. That insight came directly from Thompson when he and Bost co-hosted a listening session at a farm in Effingham County and toured other operations in south-central and southern Illinois.

Thompson told reporters after the Aug. 23 listening session that although some programs do last through the end of the year, "there'll probably be a need for some type of an extension going forward."

Miller, speaking at a listening session co-hosted with five state lawmakers who represent agricultural districts, said "the timing is going to be very important."

She noted the Senate could introduce legislation soon and that the House's September schedule has already been shortened, "so that's not good in light of timing, but we've got to work through those things."

Sorensen said "there's an optimism that we'll get it out of the House" before the end of September, but it's unclear if the Senate could advance its legislation.

"There's a lot of moving parts, but also an understanding that if we hold it over, the cuts won't be there," said Sorensen, theorizing that missing the deadline could give policymakers more time to negotiate or at least have a fuller picture of agency spending levels for the next fiscal year.

Budzinski explained to FarmWeek that Thompson

"is very reassuring that we're going to get to the business at hand, which is actually getting into committee, seeing actual language, text for the farm bill in committee."

She spent time with Bost, Miller and Sorensen at the trade show touring the ag equipment and speaking together on a panel. Asked to characterize any discussions the members had between themselves, Budzinski said there was "unanimous support around the priorities we shared and the fact that this needs to get done for our family farmers."

### Impacts of missed deadline; concerns around ag appropriations

If Congress does go past the Sept. 30 deadline, "nothing just automatically slams shut or shuts off immediately," Coppess said.

"The crop insurance program continues, it's permanently authorized, conservation programs are continuous through 2031 and the (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) basically continues and operates," the former staffer to U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Michigan, said.

Enrollment in Title I ag safety net programs tied to the current 2023 crop year also wouldn't be impacted by a missed deadline or extension because they run on a crop-year basis. But "the big issue doesn't really hit until the next crop year," Coppess added, alluding to the March program enrollment time frame.

As for his prospects on moving the bill out of the House, Coppess said that chamber "gives us a lot of things to be concerned about" because "we've seen them struggle to do some pretty standard things like appropriations bills, things



that we think are bipartisan or relatively nonpartisan."

The farm bill won't pass through either chamber of Congress without a coalition, he said.

"If members don't sort of see the big coalitional value to cross party lines, cross urban rural, those sorts of issues; If we can't get over that, then the path gets very narrow and very rocky and very steep very quickly," Coppess said.

Some of those dynamics were alluded to by the four House Ag members from Illinois, with Sorensen cautioning against "poison" in the farm bill and the appropriations bills.

"We've got to make sure, as (Thompson) has mentioned before, that we don't have a few second cousins that are sitting at this family table that are going to take it over, take the conversation away," Sorensen said. "And we can't allow this to get to the House floor."

Bost said the legislation's make-or-break status will, like previous farm bills, again depend on revisions to SNAP and the marriage of

the nutrition and commodity titles.

"Our left is definitely not wanting (cuts to SNAP) at all and our right wants more," Bost said. "It is a tricky balance, but remember, even though that's the biggest part of the farm bill, the most important part of the farm bill to a majority of my constituents is that safety net."

Miller referenced the same issue, telling the farmers and ag stakeholders gathered for her event that "I am not for dividing the farm bill into SNAP and ag production, I'm not."

"But," Miller continued, "we're on the verge of not being able to call it 'the farm bill' (because) 85% of the farm bill money is going to SNAP payments, and food production, the producers, are being left out and we need to fight back and speak up about that."

Miller, a member of the House Freedom Caucus, has advocated for steep cuts to nutrition program spending and supported reforms to SNAP work and age requirements. Some of those

revisions were included in a compromise over the debt ceiling reached earlier this year, and more cuts were included in the GOP's appropriations bill for USDA.

Budzinski, referring to the bill formulated by House Republicans, said "family farmers deserve better than that" and she would vote against it.

USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack called out the proposed spending bill during a meeting of Budzinski's agriculture advisory council at the show, framing it as "not acceptable" because "it's calling for about an \$8 billion cut in a \$24 billion budget."

"Frankly, it's kind of a punitive budget," Vilsack said, later adding "the Senate budget is a much more realistic budget. But it too, because of the debt ceiling agreement, is basically a status quo budget."

(This story was distributed through a cooperative project between Illinois Farm Bureau and the Illinois Press Association. For more food and farming news, visit FarmWeekNow.com.)



## Seed reps foresee another big year for wheat

By DANIEL GRANT  
*FarmWeek*

Illinois farmers boosted wheat plantings by 210,000 acres for the 2023 crop compared to 2022.

And did it ever pay off. Prairie State farmers harvested 65.5 million bushels of wheat this summer, up a whopping 48% compared to the previous year, with a record yield of 84 bushels per acre.

It made Illinois the No. 6 wheat-producing state in the nation for the year, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service Illinois field office.

So what will farmers do this fall for an encore?

Seed industry representatives who attended the Illinois Wheat Association's (IWA) Summer Forum in Sparta (Randolph County) on Aug. 23 foresee another big year ahead for the cereal crop.

"The outlook for wheat is incredible," said Landon Eade, DynaGro Seed manager for southern Illinois. "The last two years growers had with wheat have been exceptional, and with double-crop beans it's been a win-win. They're looking to build off that."

Illinois farmers planted 860,000 acres of wheat last fall compared to 650,000 the previous year. They harvested 780,000 of those acres this summer, up 39% from 2022.

"I think we'll probably be a tick up on wheat acres (this fall, weather permitting). The world needs it," Eade said. "Worst case, I see acres remaining flat."

Matt Wehmeyer, president of AgriMAXX Wheat Seed and IWA board member in Mascoutah, also looks for farmers to at least maintain the spike in wheat plantings this fall, if there's a good window for fieldwork.

"A lot of farmers increased acres last year and had tremendous success," he said. "They'll look to repeat that. A lot are saying they're looking to do similar acres this year."

Eli Gravert, station manager for Grow Pro Genetics in Hamel, said his company continues to expand its wheat product line in Illinois.

"We've got a strong portfolio now, and it will only get better," he said as varieties are typically selected for yield, test weight and disease tolerance.

Gravert's main concern for the year ahead is a reduction in wheat and other commodity prices.

"It was a great year to be growing wheat. The weather really showed how resilient wheat is," he said of the past season. "Price increases were a big reason for the acreage increase (last fall). Now that it's leveled off,

it's hard to say how much (wheat) farmers will plant (this fall)."

Regardless of the acreage total, Wehmeyer is confident farmers will be able keep pushing yields to new levels. AgriMAXX has 23 elite, locally adopted varieties it markets in 26 states, according to the company's website. And one of its varieties recently reached 165.3 bushels per acre.

"The new genetics are tremendous," Wehmeyer said. "They bring a new level of yield potential we haven't seen the last four

to five years.

"When I look at all the growers in our 150-, 125- and 100-bushel clubs (for field averages), it's all new varieties."

Another key change in wheat varieties in recent years is a focus on earlier maturity.

"The early varieties on wheat are performing well," said Ryan Hasty, western area agronomy manager for South Central FS. "They come off early and the double-crop (beans) go in way earlier than they did 10 years ago."

And double-crop bean production has responded as a result, although weather challenges could take a bite out of yields this year.

"Twenty years ago, a lot of double-crop yields were around 25 to 30 (bushels per acre)," Hasty said. "Now, it's not uncommon to get 50 bushels and some even in the 60s."

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