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Keep up on farm news in *The Farmer's Report!*



USDA estimates farm production expenses could climb 4.1% this year. (Photo by Catrina Rawson)

## Economic slowdown to weigh on ag through '23

By **DANIEL GRANT**  
*FarmWeek*

The economic outlook for agriculture in the second half of 2023 appears quite similar to what farmers experienced the first six months of the year.

Inflationary pressure and slower economic growth will likely maintain pressure on farm margins, according to Nathan Kauffman, senior vice president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City and Omaha branch executive.

"I'd describe the economy as having slowed recently after some sharp gains in 2021 and 2022," Kauffman said during a webinar hosted by the National Pork Board. "It happened alongside a sharp increase in interest rates and ongoing inflationary pressure that's proven to be challenging."

After the U.S. gross domestic product increased 6% in 2021, it slowed to 2% in 2022 and is projected to grow by just 1% this year and 0.5% in 2024.

"It has pretty far-reaching impacts felt across a lot of segments of the economy, including ag," Kauffman said of the slowdown. "It's not to suggest a recession is imminent. But there's a certain amount of trepidation among businesses (moving forward)."

Farmers are feeling the effects from tightening margins due to a double whammy of lower commodity prices and higher production costs amid the economic slowdown.

Commodity prices have fallen from 2022 highs by 30% to 40% for hogs, milk and wheat; and by roughly 20% for corn and soybeans. USDA earlier this year projected U.S. net farm income could drop nearly 16% in 2023 compared to 2022.

Meanwhile, USDA estimates farm production expenses could climb 4.1% this

year to \$459.5 billion. Interest expenses and livestock/poultry purchases are expected to post the largest gains this year.

"The scale of increases for interest rates has a significant impact on producers that have a large amount of borrowing or leverage relative to their operations," Kauffman said. "It's been a significant adjustment for businesses."

The Federal Reserve raised the federal funds rate 10 consecutive times from the spring of 2022 until a pause last month to a range of 5% to 5.25%.

And with inflation still well above the Fed target rate of 2%, rates could remain high.

"The primary goal with interest rates is to reduce inflationary pressure," Kauffman said.

On the bright side, many farmers entered the economic slowdown in a fairly strong financial position. But some are quickly burning through equity.

"Even though (USDA) is expecting a slight pullback in farm income for 2023, it's still quite high in an historical context," Kauffman said.

"And, from 2021 to 2022, we saw some pretty dramatic increases in farm real estate values," he said. "This would suggest there's a lot of producers in strong positions because they have high levels of equity to draw on."

Farm loan delinquency rates recently remained at historical lows, with a dip near 1%, after steadily rising in the years heading into the COVID pandemic, he said.

(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](http://FarmWeekNow.com).)

## Illinois soybean farmers and Illinois county partner to increase longevity of rural road utilizing soy-based concrete enhancer

BLOOMINGTON – The Illinois Soybean Association recognizes that rural roads and bridges serve as the initial link in the agricultural supply chain. Without a system of well-maintained rural roads and bridges, the soybeans and grain Illinois farmers produce will not be efficiently delivered to elevators, processing facilities, and, ultimately, to domestic and international customers. Unfortunately, a sizable percentage of rural infrastructure is dilapidated while resources to replace or repair it is severely limited. While additional investment is needed, promoting longevity and making existing taxpayer dollars stretch further is also required.

In an effort to promote greater resilience of rural roads and bridges in an environmentally sustainable manner, while providing an increased marketing opportunity for soybean farmers, the Soy Transportation Coalition (STC) and Knox County, Illinois, recently partnered on a pilot project in which PoreShield, a soy-based concrete enhancer, was applied along the joints on a rural county road. The penetration of salt, water, and other materials into a road – particularly in areas with a freeze-thaw cycle – can result in significant damage and diminished longevity. The application of a concrete enhancer, like PoreShield, can provide a barrier to such penetration and significantly increase the useful life of the road or bridge.

“One of my priorities as a county engineer is to maximize the longevity of our roads and bridges without compromising safety,” said Duane Ratermann, Knox



County Engineer. “One of the effective ways to protect concrete from degradation is to treat the joints with a sealant in order to create more resistance to water and salt penetration. I was pleased to partner with soybean farmers in doing a demonstration project utilizing PoreShield. The product is designed to provide long-term protection of concrete, and because it is largely comprised of soybean oil, it is environmentally sustainable. I look forward to continuing to monitor the performance of PoreShield in the future.”

“If we don’t have a well-maintained system of rural roads and bridges, farmers will not be able to efficiently get their soybeans and grain to market,” said Tim Scates, soybean farmer from Carmi, Board Director for the Illinois Soybean Association, and the Soy Transportation Coalition. “By collaborating with Knox County on this project, we hope to increase the awareness of these soy-based sealants for our rural infrastructure. We think it is an approach that should be more widely implemented within Illinois.”

In November of 2022, Knox County applied Pore-

Shield on transverse joints on 2.25 miles of concrete pavement constructed eight years ago. Because PoreShield is 93 percent produced from bio-based products – mostly soybean oil – it is safe to apply and environmentally sustainable. The product is included in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s BioPreferred program.

“The use of PoreShield and other soy-based road sealants and enhancers accomplishes a number of goals,” said David Niekamp, soybean farmer from Coatsburg, Board Director for the Illinois Soybean Association, and the Soy Transportation Coalition. “It not only increases the life of our rural roads and bridges, but it also does so in an environmentally sustainable way while creating an additional market for soybean farmers. We hope to see this product more widely used in Illinois and throughout the country.”

To inquire further about the STC demonstration project, contact Mike Steenhoek, Executive Director of the Soy Transportation Coalition, at 515-727-0665 or [msteeenhoek@soytransportation.org](mailto:msteeenhoek@soytransportation.org).

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Established in 2007, the Soy Transportation Coalition is comprised of the Illinois Soybean Association, twelve other state soybean boards, the American Soybean Association, and the United Soybean Board. The goal of the organization is to position the soybean industry to benefit from a transportation system that delivers cost effective, reliable, and competitive service.

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## Soybean Assoc. launches updated interactive B20 Club webpage

BLOOMINGTON – The Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) recently launched an updated B20 Club webpage that features an interactive map of Illinois-based organizations that utilize 20% biodiesel and higher blends to fuel their fleets.

“The B20 Club of Illinois is proud to launch our updated website and recommit ourselves to our core mission of educating fleets and stakeholders on the immediate benefit of implementing lower-carbon and cleaner-burning fuels like B20. Doing so provides measurable benefits that provide a cleaner today and better tomorrow,” said Bailey Arnold, Director of Clean Air Initiatives at the American Lung Association and the Program Lead for the B20 Club.

“The American Lung Association’s Department of Clean Air Initiatives is proud to partner with the Illinois Soybean Association checkoff program to educate fleets and stakeholders on the immediate health and environmental benefits of using drop-in solutions like biodiesel through the award-winning B20 Club of Illinois,” said Arnold.

The B20 Club is a partnership between the Illinois Soybean Association checkoff program and the American Lung Association that recognizes a select group of organizations throughout Illinois with strong commitments to run their fleets on biodiesel blends of 20 percent or greater. Since 2014, B20 Club members have consumed more than 88.5 million gallons of B20 and higher biodiesel blends, contributing to cleaner air and more sustainable operations. In total, member fleets have provided an estimated \$13.2 million in health benefits and reduced CO2 and equivalent emissions equal to planting more than 2.5 million trees.

“B20 Club fleets continue to be on the forefront of pushing new technologies to reducing their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in hard to electrify sector vehicles,” said David Kubik, Public Policy Manager at ISA. “The fleet managers in the B20 Club are not only instrumental in reducing GHG emissions in their communities, but also, are instrumental in sharing their positive experiences using biodiesel blends with other fleets.”

To visit the B20 Club webpage, go to [www.ilsoy.org/b20-club/](http://www.ilsoy.org/b20-club/).

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## NCGA: U.S. could reclaim the role as top corn exporter

By DANIEL GRANT  
FarmWeek

Brazil is well on its way to unseating the U.S. as the top corn exporter this marketing year, which ends Aug. 31.

USDA estimates Brazil could account for 30.2% of world corn exports for the 2022-23 marketing year while U.S. exports are on pace to fall to a multi-year low of 1.65 billion bushels, which accounts for about 24.8% of the world market, according to USDA's latest world ag supply and demand estimates.

If realized, it would mark the first time Brazil has surpassed the U.S. in corn exports since the drought-riddled season of 2012.

However, much like the situation in 2012-13, the shift in the global corn market among the two top

competitors could be more of a temporary situation than the new norm.

Krista Swanson, lead economist at the National Corn Growers Association (NCGA), and Cary Sifferath, vice president of the U.S. Grains Council, discussed the market shift and outlook for U.S. corn exports during a recent webinar.

"U.S. exports have been hindered by droughts that have affected key areas of the Corn Belt," Swanson said. "But the U.S. has several relative advantages in the global corn market that can be harnessed to support our \$90 billion corn industry."

U.S. corn production totaled just 13.7 billion bushels for the 2022-23 marketing year, 9% lower than the previous year due to drought in key corn-grow-

ing regions. U.S. corn prices subsequently increased, which along with a strong value of the dollar made corn sales less competitive on the world market.

This year, however, USDA predicts domestic corn production could rebound to a record 15.32 billion bushels despite the early-season drought while a small drop in Brazil's corn production is forecast for the upcoming 2023-24 crop.

"While Brazil is positioned to surpass the U.S. in corn exports this year, the data do not indicate the trend leading to this development will necessarily continue," Swanson noted in her white paper analysis of the two markets.

USDA estimates U.S. corn exports could jump back to 2.1 billion bushels in 2023-24, well above 1.65 billion this year but still off

the pace of 2.47 billion bushels exported in 2021-22.

NCGA and USGC point to key corn production and infrastructure efficiencies in the U.S. compared to Brazil that put American farmers in the driver's seat to reclaim their role as the world's top corn exporter.

U.S. corn yields are about double that of those produced in Brazil and generally require fewer inputs. In 2020, farmers in Brazil used about 112% more fertilizer per hectare than U.S. farmers to provide the extra fertility needed to grow multiple crops a year, NCGA reported.

Meanwhile, in terms of shipping corn, Brazil is about 86% the size of the U.S. but has just 25% of the roadway miles compared to here. And, of those miles of roadway, only 12.4% are paved in Brazil compared to



U.S. corn production totaled just 13.7 billion bushels for the 2022-23 marketing year. This year, however, USDA predicts domestic corn production could rebound to a record 15.32 billion bushels despite the early-season drought (Photo by Catrina Rawson)

nearly 70% paved in the U.S.

"While the U.S. and Brazil have both increased productivity over time, global sustainability is an important consideration," Swanson noted in the report.

Meanwhile, USGC continues to develop markets for U.S. corn, ethanol and distillers' grains around the world, which should help support future exports, according to Sifferath.

"As we look to future markets, we see frontier markets in West Africa," while India and Bangladesh have growing feed, livestock and aquaculture

industries, Sifferath said. "We're also growing exports in mature markets (such as Canada and Japan) in the form of ethanol."

To keep expanding markets, NCGA has called on Congress to double funding in the farm bill for key trade programs, including the Market Access Program and the Foreign Market Development Program.

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## Red crown rot an emerging issue in Illinois

By DANIEL GRANT  
*FarmWeek*

Farmers have reported cases of yellowing soybeans in patches of fields in recent weeks.

And, while much of it could be tied to outbreaks of root rot, phytophthora, soybean cyst nematodes or recent findings of Septoria brown spot on lower leaves, a new issue has emerged that can also result in leaf discoloration.

Carl Bradley, University of Kentucky plant pathologist, said isolated cases of red crown rot continue to move from the Southern U.S. into parts of Illinois, southern Indiana and Missouri.

“This is not a new disease to soybeans, it’s just new to this area,” Bradley said at a University of Illinois agronomy field day at the Orr Agricultural Center near Baylis. “It was reported in Pike County for the first time (of anywhere in the state) in 2018. It has continued to spread.”

Red crown rot, which is caused by a soil-borne fungus, spread to an estimated 22 counties in Illinois last year, mostly in western and southwest Illinois. It causes chlorosis and necrosis of the leaves and a reddish coloration of the lower stem, often resembling sudden death syndrome or brown stem rot.

But the tell-tale sign of red crown rot is the appearance of little, spherical features on the soy plants.

“If you think you have this for the first time, it’s important to send plant samples to the University of Illinois lab,” Bradley told Illinois farmers at the field day. “It’s very important you know what you have in your field.”

Red crown rot can take



**Carl Bradley, University of Kentucky plant pathologist who previously worked at the University of Illinois, shows farmers pictures of symptoms of red crown rot in soybeans during the U of I agronomy field day at the Orr Agricultural Center in Pike County. The soy disease continues to spread in Illinois after it was first identified here in 2018. (Photo by Daniel Grant)**

down soybean plants and cause yield loss. But findings of the disease so far are generally limited to small portions of fields.

“We’ve got hot spots in fields,” Bradley said. “The good news is the fields affected are still yielding OK. The majority of fields are not affected. It’s a very patchy disease based on our observations in Kentucky.”

Seed treatments do pro-

vide some protection against red crown rot with at least one fungicide, Saltro, labeled for red crown rot in Illinois and surrounding states. So far, it appears the greatest risk for red crown rot is in later-planted and double-crop soybean fields, Bradley said.

### Corn rootworms popping up

Farmers should also keep an eye out for corn rootworms as adults of that

pest are emerging around the state, according to Nick Seiter, U of I Extension field crop entomologist.

“This is a good time to inspect fields to get a feel for the extent of your rootworm problem and how your traits/insecticides are performing,” he noted in an Illinois Soybean Association crop report.

In general, rootworms aren’t a major problem in areas with widespread crop rotations. Seiter noted he could hardly trap any rootworms in the Orr Ag Center research fields.

However, there are areas with continuous corn, particularly in northern Illinois, experiencing significant rootworm outbreaks.

“There’s a very high chance if you’re in a (crop) rotation, you won’t have a major rootworm issue the next few years,” Seiter told farmers at the field day. “What’s concerning is when we find it and screen the insects, we find more with resistance to below-ground traits. So, if you have corn on corn, you’ll need an insecticide.”

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## IDNR to accept bids for agricultural leases for 2024 through 2027

SPRINGFIELD—The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) will accept sealed bids this fall for about 40 agricultural lease contracts for crop years 2024 through 2027.

IDNR utilizes agricultural leases as a tool to support wildlife populations and recreational opportunities at sites owned or managed by the agency. The leases developed under this program will promote ecologically sound agricultural practices to improve soil health, minimize soil erosion, improve water quality, and reduce chemical impacts to benefit wildlife populations and their habitats.

IDNR sites with leases open for bid will be publicly announced on BidBuy, the State of Illinois’ eProcurement system. A non-mandatory vendor conference will be conducted for each open lease with details included in the public notice.

Currently, all bidders must register with BidBuy to be eligible to enter a contract with the state. To register, visit <https://www.bidbuy.illinois.gov/bs/>. When asked for an NIGP code, enter 944-00 (Farming and Ranching) and 944-48 (Hay Farming). Other codes are 944-34 (Corn Farming), 944-76 (Soybean Farming), 944-38 (Crop Farming NEC and Grain Farming NEC).

Once registered in BidBuy, prospective bidders will be notified by email when agricultural lease bid openings are posted. Prospective bidders will need to download and print the necessary forms from the BidBuy website, <https://www.bidbuy.illinois.gov>, prior to the vendor conference.

In accordance with state and federal law, Illinois does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation or any other protected category in employment, contracts or any other activity.

For more information, visit <https://bit.ly/IDNRleases> or use the contact information listed for each lease in BidBuy.

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## Illinois Soybean Association: New year. New projects. New impacts.

BLOOMINGTON—The Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) will kick off FY24 with an exciting lineup of checkoff-funded projects, each designed to ensure growth and profitability for Illinois soybean farmers.

Under the leadership of a newly elected Board of Directors, led by Chairman, Ron Kindred, ISA will drive efforts in the areas of government relations, market development, and soybean production to work toward a brighter future for the state's 43,000 soybean

farmers.

“With new leadership and projects in place for FY24, ISA will be entering a new chapter of innovation, education and relationship building,” says ISA CEO, John Lumpe. “Our volunteer farmer board is excited to elevate the opportunities on behalf of Illinois soybean farmers.”

The Government Relations Committee is being led by committee Chair, Steve Pitstick. In addition to continuing many of the current projects, the committee will have a few new ones.

One such project being carried out by the Government Relations Committee is a partnership with the Motion Agency out of Chicago to develop a unique, educational campaign targeted at Illinois state legislators and will highlight the role farmers play as stewards of the environment.

The committee will also be working to engage in deeper outreach and relationship building across the state of Illinois. This will allow farmers to have more input and make a greater impact when it comes to



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issues and policies that affect their farms.

For the Market Development Committee, Brian Atteberry will be serving as committee Chair. The Market Development staff is postured to triple in size and will be using their additional manpower to expand their outreach and grow more opportunities for Illinois soybean farmers in new markets, both international and domestic. A central focus for the team will be the development of a new Soy Innovation Center, and closer collaboration with Soy Excellence Centers across the globe.

The Soybean Production Committee will be led by committee Chair, Brady Holst. The committee and the Agronomy staff will be advancing projects in the areas of outreach, research, partnerships, and agronomic trials. One of the new projects includes demonstration fields that will be on display at the Farm Progress Show and in other locations throughout the state. The committee and team are looking forward to expanding their farmer outreach and education.

The ISA Communica-

tions team will continue to communicate the work being done with these projects through multiple channels. This includes publication of the monthly Illinois Field and Bean magazine, the Illinois 20 Under 40 program, the “We Are the 96%” Illinois Farm Families campaign, and a robust corporate partners program.

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## Hog farmers plan to trim the fat amid market losses

By DANIEL GRANT  
FarmWeek

USDA's quarterly hogs and pigs report released June 29 indicates farmers plan to trim the size of the herd as market losses continue to pile up.

U.S. farmers intend to have 2.94 million sows farrow from June through August followed by estimated farrowings of 2.95 million from September through November. If realized, farrowings would be down about 4% the next six months compared to last year.

"I think we'll see lower production numbers as we move into 2024," Tyler Cozzens, ag economist with the Livestock Marketing Information Center, said during a webinar hosted by the National Pork Board (NPB). "That's the signal we're seeing with the farrowing numbers."

Steve Meyer, lead economist with Partners for Production Agriculture, also looks for hog farmers to liquidate a portion of the herd.

He projects there could be only two months of profitability in the industry between now and the end of 2024 with breakeven costs in the mid-\$90s.

Lean hog prices as of June 29 averaged \$95 per hundredweight in July and \$92 in August but just \$79 in October and \$75 for December.

"This is looking to be one of the worst years we've ever had," Meyer said. "I think it will drive some large liquidation in the business."

Meyer believes implementation of California's Proposition 12, which regulates sales of pork, veal and eggs from livestock whose housing doesn't meet minimum space requirements,

will also force some farmers to cull sows.

"We believe there are about 50% enough compliant sows at present to meet demand (of Prop 12 in California)," the economist said.

"If that's the case, about 5% of U.S. (pork) production has to find another home," Meyer continued. "We think there will be a market impact the second half of the year due to production that can't get into California."

There is a caveat, however, about the expectations of lower pork output moving forward. While farmers plan to farrow fewer sows, their efficiency and production increased significantly in the past quarter to an average of 11.36 pigs saved per litter, up 3.3%.

Meyer and Cozzens believe the productivity boost is due in part to fewer disease issues in the herd and genetic potential improving about 1.5% each of the past three years.

"The big jump in productivity will be important to watch in future months," Meyer said. "We have to reduce the supply of hogs. But it will be a challenge with increased productivity."

Nationwide, the inventory of all hogs and pigs totaled 72.4 million head as of June 1, up 80,000 head from last year. The market hog inven-



tory (66.2 million head) was also up slightly from last year while the breeding inventory (6.15 million head) posted a slight decline.

In Illinois, the June 1 inventory of all hogs and pigs (5.4 million head) was up 3% from last year, the breeding inventory increased by 50,000 head to 670,000 and the market hog inventory (4.73 million) increased 2%.

Looking ahead, if farmers don't reduce hog and pork supplies, Meyer believes the only two options to get back to profitability would come from a sub-

stantial boost in demand or from a significant drop in production costs.

But, while U.S. pork exports are up about 10% so far this year, per capita

domestic pork demand has tailed off by nearly 15% as consumers find themselves with less money to spend in an inflationary environment compared to 2020-22.

"Demand isn't bad relative to history. It's just bad compared to the last two years," Meyer said.

David Newman, senior vice president of market growth at NPB, believes pork still has "great opportunities" for demand growth despite the recent pullback.

NPB is focused on promoting underutilized cuts, such as loins, and doubling down on boosting sales of ground pork and sausage the second half of the year. NPB is working with about 8,000 retail stores and 600 food service programs to promote pork.

"We know pork demand is challenging at the present time," Newman said. "But it isn't slowing down our growth strategy."

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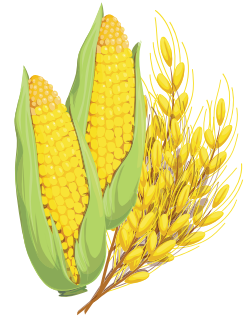
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