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THE FARMER'S REPORT

The Mendota Reporter

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Future of autonomous farming equipment taking shape

By DAN GRANT
FarmWeek

The use of driverless ag equipment might seem like something from a science fiction movie, but it's already gaining ground on farms today.

And some of that technology was on display to farmers from around the world at Commodity Classic in Orlando, Fla., as equipment manufacturers set their sights on improved ag efficiencies.

"We are committed to moving forward as an industry," said Matt Olson, precision ag manager for John Deere. "When you look at the future, we continue to evolve at an increasingly fast pace because of technology."

John Deere released its

first autonomous tractor for tillage operations last year — 8R tractors with a TruSet-enabled chisel plow, GPS guidance and advanced technologies.

The unit features six pairs of stereo cameras, which enable 360-degree obstacle detection and calculation of distance.

And it's just the first in what Deere envisions as an entire lineup of autonomous equipment.

"We are committed by 2030 to have a fully autonomous production system for row crops, from planting and spraying to harvest and tillage," Olson said.

And it could radically change how farmers manage their operations.

"We've gone from managing the whole farm, to

fields and more recently to zones," Olson said. "When you look at the technology we have now, we're able to manage at the plant level through sensors, machine learning and through automation."

Deere's new See and Spray Ultimate is one example. The new technology can reduce non-residual herbicide use by more than two-thirds by target spraying weeds.

See and Spray Ultimate uses 36 cameras on a 120-foot sprayer boom to scan more than 2,100 feet at once to apply herbicide only to weeds it detects. Its ExactApply nozzle control technology also helps reduce potential drift.

The latest See and Spray advancements are for model year 2023 John Deere 410R, 412R and 612R sprayers.

Deere also unveiled new ExactRate technology this year to precisely monitor and control applications of liquid fertilizer during planting. ExactRate is compatible with select models of John Deere planters with electric drive, including 1775NT, 1795, DB60, DB44 and DB66 units.

How do farmers prepare for automated technology?

Olson recommends they get comfortable with the JD Operations Center, gain expertise in how to work with a connected machine and



A John Deere 8 series tractor, featuring autonomy-enabling hardware, sits on display at the 2023 Commodity Classic in Orlando. (Photo by Daniel Grant for FarmWeek).

make sure their farms have high-fidelity boundaries.

Meanwhile, Case IH advanced its development of autonomous technology when it unveiled its TriDent 5550 sprayer with Raven Autonomy at last year's Farm Progress Show.

Farmers can run the applicator with Raven Autonomy from any mobile device.

"That's considered supervised autonomy," Kendal Quandahl, Case IH precision technology marketing manager from Waterloo, told FarmWeek at Commodity Classic. "You can have multiple machines in

one field controlled by one operator."

Case IH introduced the autonomous sprayer through market research with farmers, who identified field applications as one of their top labor pain points, Quandahl noted.

"One of the spotlights for us is the path to autonomy Case IH is working towards," she said. "One of the biggest things we have to help producers understand is it's not just a driverless machine, but rather a series of automated equipment."

Case IH also recognized past achievements in ag equipment design at

Commodity Classic as it continued its celebration of the 100-year anniversary of Farmall, an original brand of International Harvester.

"We're very excited about the past and innovations on farms from 1923 to today," said Joe Miller, Case IH tractor market segment lead. "We're kicking off the next 100 years of Farmall."

Case IH recently launched new Farmall 90 and 120 model tractors, geared toward specialty markets.

The company is also giving away a Farmall 75C tractor as part of the 100-year celebration. Visit the website, Farmall100.com, for more information about that or go to CaseIH.com to learn about all the latest innovations.

(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.)

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Oldest U.S. agricultural plots go digital: 130+ years of data now online

□ *Morrow Plots established farming basics still used today*

By LAURA QUINN
U of I Aces

URBANA—In 1876, when University of Illinois professor Manly Miles established the Morrow Plots, he couldn't have imagined the plots would become the oldest continuous agricultural experiment in the Western Hemisphere. Nor could he imagine, more than a century before the dawn of the internet, that the plots' data would be digitized and made available online to scientists, students, and educators around the world.

The new database, which includes crop hybrid, rotation, planting density, and yield, as well as fertilizer type and amount, came together thanks to the Morrow Plots Data Curation Working Group, an interdisciplinary team from the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES) and the University Library at U of I.

Data scientists and curators not only had to find the historical data, including in an ancient notebook held by the Department of Crop Sciences, they had to standardize it through time so that year-to-year comparisons could be made. For example, some data were missing for certain years and yield wasn't recorded at all until 1888. Thankfully, the working group was up for the challenge.

Sandi Caldron, assistant professor and University Library research data librarian, says, "The data were all in slightly different formats and needed a lot of finagling to get them to line up. My role was doing the coding required to clean up and combine those data sets and get it ready to publish. I also did a lot of the accompanying documentation that explains how we did it for folks who want to use the data or reproduce our work."

Josh Henry, associate director of information technology for ACES, initially kickstarted the project in 2018 as an example for faculty wanting to curate their own research data. As few faculty have such long and complex datasets, he knew if the working group could pull it off with the Morrow Plots data, anyone could do it.

"We learned a lot of lessons about how to deal with really messy data," Henry says. "We now feel confident explaining what challenges have to be met in order to take something that was perhaps less useful and turning it into something that will be valuable for the future."

Prior to the database's publication,

Andrew Margenot was fielding dozens of requests for the Morrow Plots data each year. Now he can direct those requests to the Illinois Data Bank.

"I've gotten requests from government and university researchers, both in the U.S. and abroad. They're mainly modelers trying to link weather patterns with yield and soil data; a lot of modelers salivate at the Morrow Plots data," says Margenot, assistant professor in crop sciences. "We also get requests from folks trying to understand how their long-term trials compare with ours."

Margenot says the data can also be used to understand how soil fertility is influenced by management practices of crop rotation and nutrient inputs, and how this relates to crop yields. After discovering a trove of historic soil samples from the Morrow Plots and other sites around Illinois, Margenot is eager to analyze long-term trends.

Caldron hopes the data can also be used for educational purposes.

"Students in every field need to learn how to work with data now," she says. "As instructors need to find datasets to work into their classes, I would love to see people using the Morrow Plots data. It's a longitudinal data set, and I think students in any field can get a grasp of the basics of planting, fertilization, and yield. And then, for U of I students, they learn a little bit more about their university history."

The Morrow Plots started as an experiment to test the effects of crop rotation on soil quality, but along the way, they helped establish a number of farming basics we take for granted today, including that crops require nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium; hybrid corn can boost yield, especially when planted at close spacing; and crop rotation can mean less need for fertilizers.

"The lesson of the Morrow Plots is clear: conserve the soil and maintain proper soil fertility to sustain food production for future generations," says Robert Dunker, ACES agronomist and field trials coordinator. "Results from the Morrow Plots have given insights on how crop production systems respond to rotation and soil fertility, shaping farming practices to this day. While the Morrow Plots have become a significant historical site, they remain a continuing opportunity for researchers and student education."



Demand for Illinois ag teachers is strong

By ZETA CROSS
The Center Square
contributor

SPRINGFIELD — Illinois needs career-changers to teach ag courses in high school.

The Land of Lincoln has always been an agricultural powerhouse. The state is working hard to ensure that its agricultural future is secure. The Illinois State Board of Education is looking for career-changers who want to teach agriculture classes in Illinois high schools and middle schools.

"There is an all-time high demand for agricultural teachers in Illinois schools," said Dean Dittmar, facilitating coordinator in Agricultural Education for the Illinois State Board of Education.

Enrollment in ag classes was up 12% last year, a good sign of demand. But there are not enough teachers.

"The problem is that there are not enough education majors in college who are training to specialize in teaching agriculture in middle school and high school," Dittmar told The Center Square.

ISBE wants to encourage people who are looking for a career change to think about becoming teachers.

"People who have

worked in agriculture may be burned out on their current job," Dittmar said.

As people get older, a job that is not as labor intensive as farm work may appeal to them.

"Teaching is much easier on the body than many agricultural jobs," Dittmar said.

The majority of Illinois ag teachers are Caucasian, Dittmar said. The board wants to diversify that.

"The board is looking to attract more Hispanic and Black and brown people to teaching," Dittmar said.

Pay for ag teachers is good, Dittmar said. A first-year ag teacher can make \$49,048 a year.

To get a provisional teaching license, (Educator License with Stipulations/Career and Tech Ed), candidates need 60 semester hours of college credits in any subject and 2,000 hours of documented paid work experience on a farm or working for an ag company, or working in an ag-related field. Working in a big box garden center would count, Dittmar said. So would working for any of Illinois' agricultural employers.

"The number one criteria is to like working with young people," Dittmar said.

Applicants who are accepted in the program re-

ceive teacher training in classroom management, lesson planning and other teaching skills in the summer before they begin teaching, Dittmar said. Experienced ag teacher mentors will guide them through their first two or three years of teaching.

Since the 1980s, Illinois has had a strong tradition of teaching agriculture subjects and skills in middle schools and high schools.

Depending on the school, students who want to learn about agriculture can start out with an introduction to the agriculture industry. They can move on to plant and animal science classes. For juniors and seniors, there are pathway programs in agricultural construction, agricultural biology, environmental science and animal science, Dittmar said. There are 374 secondary schools in Illinois that offer agricultural science classes. Last year 40,000 students enrolled in agriculture classes in Illinois public schools.

Students are looking for classes that can lead to jobs and careers, Dittmar said.

"Welding, the mechanics of small engines and agricultural construction have replaced classes that in the old days were known as 'shop,'" he said.

Illinois farmers donate hay to drought-stricken Texas ranchers

By **TAMMIE SLOUP**
FarmWeek

Loretta Hall said one word came to mind as she and husband, John, watched the semi loaded with 21 bales of hay approach their cattle ranch in northwest Texas.

“Hallelujah!”
The donated load traveled 900 miles from Fulton County, and just in the nick of time.

Located in the Texas Panhandle, the Halls’ 150-cow ranch hadn’t seen an inch of rain in 10 months. John said he tried to conserve as much hay as possible as demand is high in his drought-stricken area, as are prices.

“I just thought that we would try to ration what we had to the bitter end as long as we could,” he said. “And we were at the bitter end.”

Prepared but saddened at the thought of selling off some of their Braunvieh

herd to make ends meet, the Halls said God intervened with an anonymous donor.

Several weeks ago, a Fulton County Farm Bureau member with a surplus of hay approached Shelley Sweatman, Fulton County Farm Service Agency executive director. Knowing the devastating impact of wildfires and drought in other states, the farmer hoped Sweatman could coordinate a donation to a farm in need.

And the connections began.

Sweatman, through the cattle circuit, knew of Randy Allgood, a Texas cattleman and nationally known cattle judge. With Allgood’s involvement in cattle showing, he knew of the Halls, well known for being big sponsors and supporters of youth cattle programs.

The wheels were also turning in Illinois. In a quest to find transporta-

tion, Sweatman reached out to farmer Chris Schick in Clinton, who has employed truck driver Darrell White of Peoria for the past seven years. White said it was a no-brainer when his boss asked him to make the trip.

Fulton County Farm Bureau Manager Elaine Stone also solicited donations for fuel, raising \$1,400 in just an hour, thanks to the FCFB Board and individual directors, West Central FS, and Compeer/Macomb.

With the round bales loaded, White set out on the 14-hour drive on March 21, and delivered the hay the next day.

“They are just beautiful people,” White said of the Texas couple. The Halls invited White to spend the night at their house and made him dinner. “We talked and (John) told me some of the stories about

what he does for the kids with the show cows. It was a good visit.”

Allgood has known the couple for about 20 years, and said between their efforts working with youth and the challenges on their farm, they were the perfect choice to receive the hay.

“They’ve given so generously, even to the point that it’s a financial hardship on them,” he said, adding the Halls often transport kids to and from shows, haul their animals and pay for entry fees and lodging when the participants can’t afford it.

“John’s a big, rough, rugged cowboy that you would think would be real hard, but he’s got the kind of heart that when you start getting kids involved, he just melts,” Allgood said.

Faced with either fixing their home’s furnace this past winter or buying feed for the cattle, they chose to



Peoria truck driver Darrell White, left, and Texas cattleman John Hall unload 21 bales of hay that White delivered to the ranch in the Texas Panhandle on March 22. An anonymous Fulton County farmer donated his surplus hay, and with the help of a handful of people, the donation arrived at the drought-stricken ranch. (Photo courtesy of Loretta Hall)

feed their animals, Allgood

added.
John, 63, and Loretta, 74, said the donation will buy them some valuable time, especially if they receive rain within the next month.

“There’s just not any words to tell (the donor) how grateful we are,” Loretta said. “That he would do that for somebody he didn’t know. How do you say thank you for somebody that’s just given you a new lease on your breeding program that you’re not going to have to sell, that you’ve been working on for 30 years?”

Sweatman and Stone said the donor insisted on staying anonymous. Most of the players involved with getting the donation to Texas either downplayed their role or credited someone else for

being the “hero.”
Sweatman said she was just the coordinator, “getting good people in touch with good people.”

Since they were told of the donation, the Halls have been able to breathe a little easier.

“The difference in John’s demeanor since Randy told us this hay was coming has been like night and day because he has been stressing about how we were gonna get through the rest of the year,” Loretta said. “He’s been a little easier to live with since then.”

(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.)

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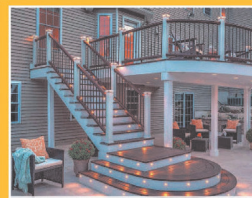
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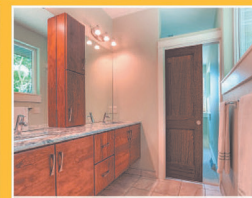
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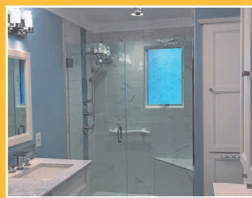
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Corn rootworms are making a comeback, especially in Northern Illinois

By DANIEL GRANT
FarmWeek

Farmers should pay close attention to potential rootworm issues this season, especially in northern Illinois.

After a drop in populations following the release of Bt corn, which contains a protein initially toxic to the pest, a growing number of corn rootworms developed resistance to the trait.

And populations of both western and northern corn rootworms have been growing in some portions of the state as a result.

“Populations of both species have resistance to all available Bt traits in some areas,” Nick Seiter, research assistant professor at the University of Illinois Department of Crop Sciences, said during a recent webinar.

Corn rootworms remain the most economically damaging insect pest of corn in Illinois. And, while much of the crop damage comes from the western species, which adapted to crop rotation by laying eggs in soybeans, northern corn rootworm populations are also a growing menace.

“Those populations where we’re seeing (corn) damage is not just western

corn rootworm, but we’re also seeing a pretty healthy dose of northern corn rootworms,” Seiter said. “In most problem fields, we see a mix of those two populations. That’s very different from what we were seeing five, 10 or even 15 years ago.”

A portion of the rootworm population built up resistance to four single Bt toxins over the years, three of which (Cry3Bb1, mCry3A and eCry3.1AB) share the same mode of action. The other Bt toxin is Cry34/35Ab1.

“One of the things that happened is we really have two modes of action,” Seiter said. “Our ability to rotate modes of action has really gone away.”

Joe Spencer, principal research scientist at the Illinois Natural History Survey, said the development of Bt resistance in rootworms was inevitable. The first evidence of field-evolved resistance was documented in 2009.

“Corn rootworm beetles are well known as a species that has become resistant to about everything we’ve thrown at them,” Spencer said. “Bt resistance is increasing – it’s inevitable. But, we can slow it down.”

New trait packages (SmartStax PRO from Bayer and Vorceed Enlist from Corteva), which contain three modes of action, have been unveiled while Bayer’s VT4PRO with RNAi technology is expected by 2024.

“We will have new tools available to us (to help control rootworms),” Seiter said. “It’s important to remember stewardship of these traits is critical.”

Crop rotation remains one of the best tactics to combat high rootworm pressure, Spencer noted. He also advises farmers to closely monitor their fields and make sure they put the right hybrids on the right fields to limit unnecessary selection pressure.

Some of the highest rootworm pressure in the state was concentrated in areas north of Interstate 80 in recent years.

“We saw a little step back of (rootworm) pressure in 2022, but overall it’s on an upward trend,” Seiter said.

“The situation with corn rootworms (geographically) is really interesting and it depends quite a bit where you are in the state,” he continued. “Here in east central Illinois, we have

quite low populations compared to where we’ve been historically.

“But, if you go north of I-80 into country where there’s a lot of corn after corn, it’s a very different story, particularly in areas like DeKalb, Kane, Stephenson, Ogle and Lee counties,” he added. “We’ve seen an increase in corn rootworm problems there the last few years.”



Populations of the western corn rootworm, left, and northern corn rootworm, right, have been on the rise in some portions of the state, particularly north of Interstate 80 in continuous corn. (Photos by Joe Spencer, Illinois Natural History Survey)

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IDNR accepting applications for Natural Areas Stewardship grants

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) will accept applications through June 16, 2023, for Illinois Natural Areas Stewardship grants.

The goal of this grant program is to increase the delivery of much needed stewardship activities to natural areas protected within the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission (INPC) system. Stewardship needs throughout the state have continued to outpace the ability to deliver these services by individuals, volunteers, organizations, and government agencies. The program is designed to fund projects that immedi-

ately address this deficiency and begin to expand on the stewardship capacity of Conservation Land Trusts through grants that will expand their staff and equipment for these activities.

Stewardship activities funded by this grant program must be included in the management schedules approved by the INPC and are limited to a maximum of \$100,000 per proposal. Eligible costs may include contractual services, staff time related to the project, equipment, and materials necessary to complete stewardship projects such as tools, safety items, herbicide, construction materials, and indirect costs. Benefit

costs are not eligible. Matching funds are required on all projects. The minimum match requirements allowed by administrative rule are 5% or \$1,000, whichever is less, to ensure that all land trusts will have access to the program.

Eligible applicants are Conservation Land Trusts exempt from taxation under Section 501(c)(3) of the federal Internal Revenue Code and whose originating documents include in its purposes the restoration and stewardship of land for conservation purposes.

Potential applicants for this program can find more information online at <https://dnr.illinois.gov/>

grants/stewardshipgrants.html. Questions can be directed to Susan.Duke@Illinois.gov.

Funding for this grant program is derived from a portion of the Illinois Natural Areas Acquisition Fund and must be used by the IDNR for the stewardship of natural areas, including habitats for endangered and threatened species (Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development Act, 525 ILCS 35/14).

To view the Notice of Funding Opportunity for IDNR programs or to browse all State of Illinois grant opportunities, see <https://gata.illinois.gov/grants/cfsa.html>.

Soybean Assoc. announces '23 Achievement Awards Program

BLOOMINGTON – The Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) is excited to announce the return of its annual ISA Achievement Awards Program, designed to honor individuals who have impacted the Illinois soybean industry.

The five award categories include:

- The Illinois Soybean Association Chairman's Award recognizes an individual who has gone above and beyond to serve the state's soybean interests. It is the highest award given by the ISA Association, and is presented in appreciation of one's dedication, leadership, and years of service to the soybean industry.

- The Illinois Soybean Association's Legislator of the Year Award recognizes an Illinois lawmaker who is actively making a difference for soybean farmers by advocating for policy and regulatory issues important to our industry. The award is presented in recognition of a proven track record of support and for championing farm policy.

- The Illinois Soybean Association Excellence in Media Award recognizes a member of the media who promotes Illinois soybeans and Illinois agriculture through their coverage in print, broadcast, social and beyond.

- The Friend of Illinois Soybean Farmers Award recognizes a friend to the organization in any capacity and is presented in appreciation of one's efforts in championing on behalf of Illinois soybean farmers.

- The Illinois Soybean Association Farm Family of the Year Award recognizes an Illinois farm family who is actively engaged in ISA's membership program, along with showing commitment to ISA programming and with demonstrated impact in our industry and in their communities.

"Recognition in our industry can be hard to come by," says ISA Chairman Steve Pitstick. "I'm proud to be a part of an organization that honors the hard-working individuals who are leading agriculture into a new era through leadership, excellence, commitment and service."

To apply or make a nomination before July 7 and view past winners please visit www.ilsoy.org/achievement-awards/. Winners will be announced in the fall at the ISA Achievement Awards Banquet.

(The Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) checkoff 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.)



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2023 corn acres taking a backseat to soybean expansion

BLOOMINGTON—The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently reported on farmers' planting intentions for the 2023 growing season. While corn acres are expected to decrease by 1.1%, soybean acres are expected to increase 2.5% from last year with 89.6 million acres expected to be planted.

"With this increase in soybean acres being planted comes an expected increase in harvested acres this fall, and the 2023 growing season could be record setting for soybean producers nationwide," said Ron Kindred, Vice-Chairman of the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA). "Soybeans are a hearty crop and can withstand drier conditions. So, when we have these unfavorable conditions throughout the Midwest, opting to plant more soybeans is a safe choice to ensure a farm remains profitable."

According to a survey conducted by Farm Futures, many farmers are planning to plant more drought-resistant crops this spring due to depleted soil moisture levels and steep input costs, as this presents a substantial challenge for farmers this growing season.

"Talking with Illinois farmers this spring, they're staying on track to keep their rotations in place with corn and soybean acres. It'll be interesting to see how acres divide at the end of the planting season. To mitigate risk across the operation, it's a proactive approach to include diversity," said Abigail Peterson, ISA Director of Agronomy.

"Looking at practice changes to build resiliency to adverse weather like reduced tillage and cover crops can build better soil structure to withstand droughts or impacts from intense rainfall events," continues Peterson. "To make sure nutrients are reaching their full potential, planting applications and in-season applications are in high-demand as they potentially steer farmers away from unnecessary loss."

For more information on the Farm Futures Survey and forecast, visit www.farmprogress.com.

(The Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) checkoff 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.)

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