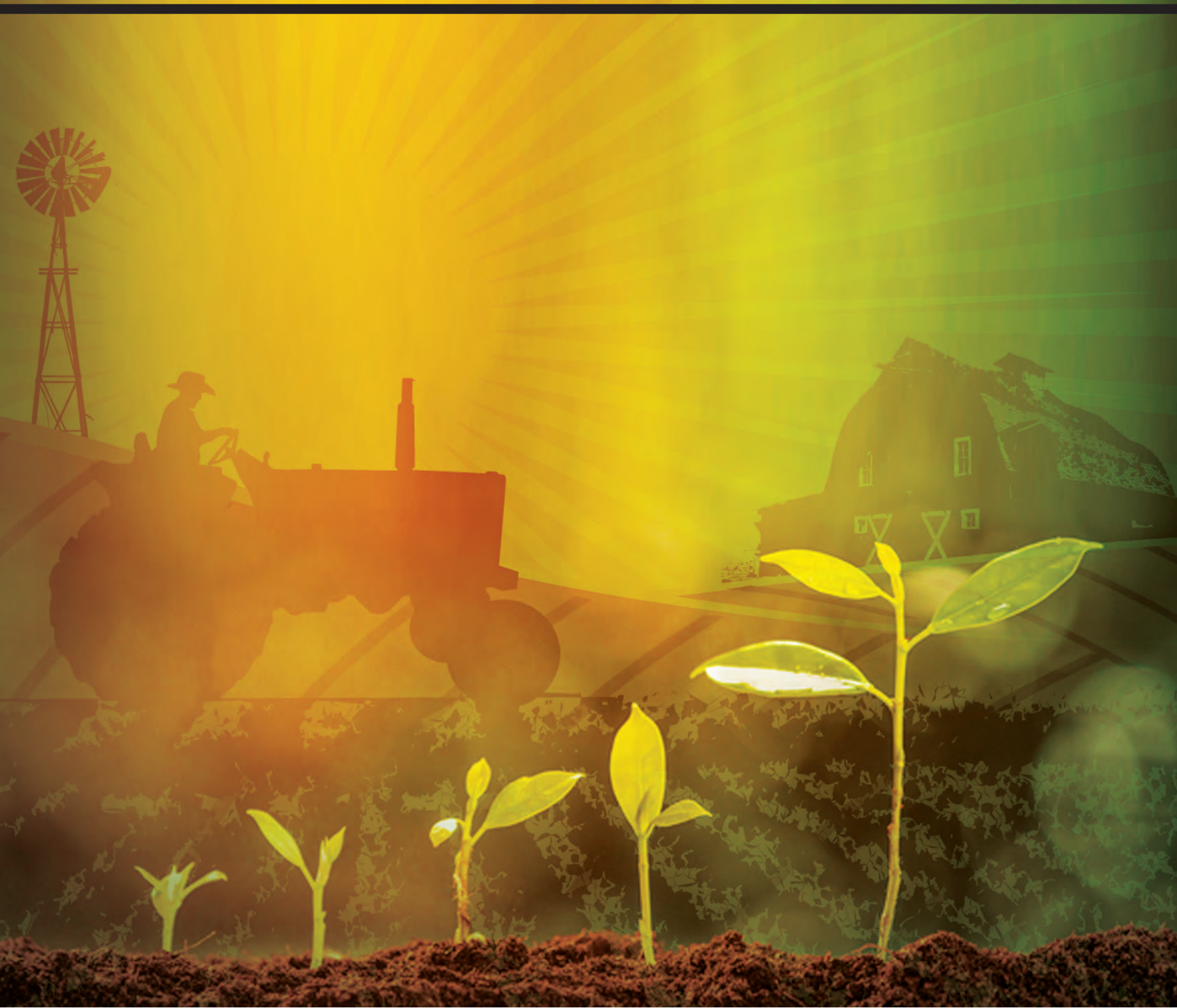


THE FARMER'S REPORT

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Wednesday, April 26, 2023



Barkley: 'Sky is the limit' for women in agriculture

By ALI PRESTON
FarmWeek

Farming wasn't Traci Barkley's first choice for a career.

After earning a bachelor's degree in ethology, ecology and evolution and a master's degree in natural resources and environmental sciences from the University of Illinois, she spent two years as an

AmeriCorps volunteer. She trained citizen scientists to collect data on the state's threatened streams, forests, wetlands and prairies for rapid assessment of environmental health by state scientists.

Barkley built her career as a freshwater ecologist, bridging science and policy for organizations like Prairie Rivers Network and

the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency. It was work she was passionate about. But after 20 years, she started to "get a little itchy."

It was around the same time that Barkley heard of a 4-acre community farm started by the ministry of St. Matthew Lutheran Church in Urbana. Sola Gratia was in its second year and had a mission to feed the com-



Traci Barkley grew up watching her grandparents garden. She had the opportunity to bring her grandma to visit Sola Gratia Farm. (Photo courtesy of Traci Barkley)

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munity, which aligned with Barkley's values.

"I believe strongly in the mission and wanted to be a part of it," she told FarmWeek. Barkley approached the board of directors and said she "saw an opportunity to do more." She was hired as one of two staff members after that encounter.

"I completely switched careers and never looked back," she said.

That was nearly nine years ago for Barkley, who serves as the director of Sola Gratia. And it turned out the switch from clean water to clean food was an easy one for her.

The Iowa native grew up on her family's farm where she watched her great-grandparents, grandparents and parents live off the land. "I learned a lot from my grandparents and my parents of just what that means to provide for yourself and then share with others," she said.

Barkley also witnessed her grandmothers being a critical part of the farm. It's a vision that inspired her throughout her career.

"Working in ecology and fisheries and now agriculture, I've always worked

in a male-dominated environment. And I think representation is really, really important," she said. "Even though the farmer has almost always identified as the man in the family, I look back to my grandmas and they were farmers. I think often women don't get the recognition or acknowledgments as farmers."

It's been a full-circle moment to watch the face of agriculture change and more women like herself step into leadership roles. For women pursuing a career in the ag industry, Barkley says the "sky is the limit."

"The field of agriculture is a lot broader than what people think. When people think of farming, they think of huge combines and massive monocrop operations, but there are so many opportunities, whether it's in the greenhouse industry or the specialty crop industry, or you know, biotechnology or flower farming, there's a lot of possibility in the field of ag right now," she said.

Coming to work every day and knowing she's helping make a difference means "everything" to Barkley. And she says focusing closer to home, "closer in

our community," keeps her grounded. It's what reminds her the career switch was more than worth it.

"We had a volunteer orientation, and we had 30-plus people in the room and one of the folks that was coming to volunteer came because she has been served by us," she said. "It's moving to meet someone who has benefited from our hard work and then comes back to contribute at the same time."

That's the beauty of Sola Gratia, according to Barkley. She sees the same beauty in her personal life.

"I have two children and I'm hoping to raise kind people who contribute to make the world a better place."

(Editor's note: This story is part of the Cultivating Our Communities campaign, a collaboration by Lt. Gov. Juliana Stratton, Illinois Farm Bureau and the Illinois Specialty Growers Association to showcase Illinois' diverse farmers.)

(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.)

Food, nutrition benefits safety net for 1.7 million Illinoisans

By KAY SHIPMAN
FarmWeek

More than 1.7 million low-income Illinoisans depend on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), based on the most recent data from the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). As of March 1, the federal government reduced those benefits to pre-pandemic levels.

In Illinois, SNAP participants saw their benefits reduced anywhere from \$95 to \$250 per person per month, according to the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS). IDHS stated the reduction impacted 2 million people and 1 million families.

USDA data covers fiscal year 2020 from September 2019 through February 2020. That fiscal year, 1.71 million people in 877,028 families received SNAP benefits across Illinois. The per-person benefit averaged \$116 per month in the state.

Nationwide, more than 41 million Americans receive food-buying benefits through SNAP. The program provided on average about \$260 per month to individuals and \$490 per month to families, according to USDA FNS data.

Nearly half of the Illinois SNAP participants – 747,958 – are younger than 18 years old. Another 238,006 are elderly, while 145,491 SNAP recipients were disabled and younger than 60.

Of SNAP participating families in Illinois, 79% had income levels at or below poverty. A total of 33% of Illinois SNAP families received incomes from wages or work.

Since April 2020, all Illinois SNAP families received both the regular monthly benefit and the emergency SNAP allotment that ended March 1.

Each SNAP family's benefits are determined by factors including household size, income and deductions. The benefit decreases varied, depending on each household's size and financial circumstances.

"We understand and recognize that many Illinois residents have counted on these additional emergency food benefits," IDHS Secretary Grace Hou said in a statement. Hou said her agency was working with food pantries to help them meet clients' needs as they adjust to reduced benefits because of federal policy change.

On average, 9.4% of Illinois families lacked access to sufficient food between 2019 and 2021.

Reductions in SNAP benefits will also make an economic impact.

Each month in Illinois, an average of \$199 million in SNAP benefits were issued in fiscal year 2020. About 9,257 retailers across the state accept SNAP benefits.

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Run-up in food, farmland prices could ease

By DANIEL GRANT
FarmWeek

Buyers of everything from food to farmland could see a return to more normal rates of inflation later this year and into 2024.

The Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute (FAPRI) at the University of Missouri predicted the economic shift recently in its annual U.S. Baseline Outlook report.

"Net farm income is likely to fall back from the record levels of 2022 and consumer food price inflation is also likely to slow in 2023," said Pat Westhoff, FAPRI director.

Food price increases have slowed in recent months, to 0.4% between January and February, and are projected to rise 4.4% through 2023, according to FAPRI. However, food prices were still up 9.5% in February compared to last year.

Next year, food price inflation could ease to a more normal range around 2%, according to the report.

If realized, a slowdown of food price inflation would be welcome news for consumers who endured a 9.9% hike last year, the highest since 1979.

"Consumer food price inflation jumped to 9.9% (in 2022) as farm commodity prices rose, labor and other costs increased, supply

chain problems continued and consumer demand was strong," the FAPRI report noted.

This year, FAPRI looks for a reduction in crop and livestock prices and a smaller increase in production expenses. Lower prices for some inputs could result in a reduction of production costs by 2024 and 2025.

"What goes up, generally comes back down in the agricultural markets," Westhoff said. "Projected prices for most crops, poultry and dairy products all retreat in 2023 from recent peaks, and so do some production expenses."

FAPRI's baseline estimates suggest crop prices could fall from averages in 2022-23 of \$6.69 per bushel for corn, \$14.23 for soybeans and \$9.08 for wheat to \$5.32, \$12.17 and \$7.39 in 2023-24 and down to \$4.84, \$11.82 and \$6.60, respectively, by 2024-25.

Of course, the price estimates are based on expectations of increased ag output.

"If weather conditions allow crop yields to return to trend-line levels in 2023, prices for corn, soybeans, wheat, cotton and many other crops are likely to fall," FAPRI noted.

Over the next 10 years, average nominal crop prices could be much lower than they have been in 2022-23,

"What goes up, generally comes back down in the agricultural markets. Projected prices for most crops, poultry and dairy products all retreat in 2023 from recent peaks, and so do some production expenses."

—Pat Westhoff, FAPRI Director

but remain above the average of 2017-18 and 2021-22, according to the report.

The expected drop in farm income and rise in interest rates could significantly cool the farmland market, which saw Class A land values increase a whopping 45% from 2021 to 2022 statewide, according to the Illinois Society of Professional Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers.

After a ninth-straight increase last month, the benchmark federal funds rate is up to a range of 4.75% to 5%, which pushed borrowing costs to the highest

level since 2007.

"Farm asset values have increased with land prices in recent years, and another increase is projected for 2023," FAPRI stated. "Given assumptions of the outlook, lower farm income and high interest rates restrict further increases in farm real estate values in subsequent years."

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Illinois artist draws inspiration from family farm

By **KAY SHIPMAN**
FarmWeek

Jeanne Helm recreates the cattle, forest and creek she loves in soothing shades of blues and greens. They personalize the home her great-grandfather built on the centennial farm along Kirby Road that is named for her ancestors.

The beauty of farming, conservation and history meld in her watercolor paintings and reflect the care

Jeanne and her husband, Ron, give their “conservatory” farm near Oreana. In one of her paintings, Ron walks home from cutting out invasive honeysuckle to create a wooded pasture for their cows.

Although she’s a farmer, the Macon County Farm Bureau member views rural landscapes through an artist’s eyes.

“Trees in the forest are very different from the trees

around the house. They (forest trees) all fit together like children in a row,” she says, using her hands to imitate compact, straight tree trunks.

Since retiring from teaching early childhood education at Richland Community College in 2020, Jeanne devotes more time to painting scenes of the farm and forest. Helm’s son, David, would like his mother to paint more dogs, she adds,

looking over a watercolor of a family border collie in the snow.

Jeanne does take commissions to paint clients’ dogs and homes, but for her own enjoyment, she favors painting the family’s Hereford cows, streams meandering among stately trees, and an occasional antique auto as seen in sepia tinted family photos. Along with clearing invasive plants, Ron, a retired geography teacher, cares for a cow-calf herd of 17 Herefords, 13 Angus and an Angus bull and 196 acres, including 20 acres of pasture. Ron’s focus is protecting the farm’s natural resources by participating in water quality and conservation programs. Jeanne calls her studio the Conservatory Art Gallery — a play on words.

Water figures prominently in her art.

Jeanne prefers painting with watercolors and demonstrates how the paint can flow across the paper. “I can pick the painting up, and the color moves,” she says, slightly tipping a wet painting. She finds watercolors easier to use compared to oils and acrylics because watercolor paint doesn’t dry as quickly and can be reworked by adding more water.

But water — more specifically flowing water — also bedevils Jeanne.

“The rocks and the ripples, it’s hard to make it look natural. You have to let the paintbrush act like water when you paint. I’m almost there,” she says.

“My goal is to paint deer in the forest. I go online and look at deer (images) but they’re not the deer in our forest,” Jeanne says, adding that she isn’t quick enough to photograph deer moving through their trees. She prefers photographs as references for works of art.

Neither Jeanne nor Ron have entirely stopped teaching.

She tutors reading online to six children who live around the country. A couple of her students call Ron, “the farmer,” she adds. The couple even devoted one tutoring session to lessons about their Macon County farm for two urban-dwelling Michigan brothers.

Jeanne also shares her artist skills by providing art lessons for some church members and neighbors. “They’ve always got to come to Jeannie’s,” Ron adds.

One of her favorite subjects, the forest has transformed in the artist’s eyes and become a treasured family spot. Ron even built a picnic table from Osage orange that came from a hedgerow. “When



Artist Jeanne Helm demonstrates how watercolor paint moves across paper while working on a picture of a family Hereford in her “conservatory” farm studio. The Macon County farmer prefers using watercolor because the “color moves.” (Photo by Illinois Farm Bureau photographer Catrina Rawson)

we bought the forest land, she was mad,” Ron says, smiling as he looks over at his wife. “I thought it was a waste of money,” Jeanne adds and nods.

Pausing, Jeanne muses about what draws her back again and again to illustrate the creeks that flow through her paintings.

“There’s life there,” Ron says with a smile.

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USDA projects big bump for corn plantings

By TIMOTHY EGGERT
FarmWeek

Look out, corn acres are on a comeback.

USDA's prospective plantings report released April 14 estimates corn acres this spring could total 91.99 million acres, up 3.42 million acres or 4% from last year. Soybean acres could total 87.51 million acres, a slight increase from 87.5 million acres in 2022.

Estimated wheat plantings soared 9% to 49.85 million acres, the largest potential acreage since 2015.

The total 318.1 million acres of principal crops expected to be planted nationwide this season represents a 1.9%, or 5.9 million-acre increase from 2022 and the largest total since 2018.

While the corn bump forecast by USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) wasn't necessarily a surprise, it did go slightly beyond previous trade estimates, said Joe Camp of CommStock Investments.

"Everybody coming into the report seemed bearish about expecting extra corn acres," Camp told the RFD Radio Network. "Well, they got even more than that."

The estimates were a bit more optimistic than levels USDA projected in February at its 99th Annual Ag Outlook Forum, when U.S. corn plantings were estimated at 91 million acres, beans at 87.5 million acres and wheat at 49.5 million acres.

NASS calculated its first planting report of 2023 acreage estimates based on surveys of 72,885 farmers, including 2,594 surveys distributed to farmers in Illinois, during the first two weeks of March.

Corn acreage estimates increased or were un-

changed in 40 of the 48 reporting states. In Illinois, corn plantings were pegged at 11 million acres, up 1.9%, from last year and in-line with a trend in other Corn Belt states.

Corn plantings in Indiana are estimated at 5.5 million acres (up 4.8%), in Iowa at 13.1 million acres (up 1.6%) and Minnesota at 8.4 million acres (up 4.4%). North Dakota's corn plantings are expected to rebound 27.1% to 3.8 million acres.

Soybean acreage estimates, however, increased or were unchanged in 15 of the 29 reporting states.

And while Illinois' projected bean plantings were unchanged from the 10.8 million acres planted in 2022, the 2023 levels, if realized, would represent a second record year for the state.

Soybean plantings are also expected to climb 6.5% to a record 2.3 million acres in Wisconsin and 1.3% to 7.6 million acres in Minnesota, while Indiana's bean plantings are estimated to fall 4.3% to 5.6 million acres.

Largely underpinning the corn acreage shift for 2023, Camp said, is an assumption that "we'll have prevented plant acres come back this year," compared to 2022, when about 6.4 million acres were affected due to spring weather challenges.

"That's already put to the test," Camp said, noting that after farmers were surveyed for the report there were early delays for the southern U.S. crop with wet, soggy conditions and heavy storms rolling through the region.

"We know going forward we're going to be extra sensitive to potentially drawn-out winter in the Northern Plains and the Upper Midwest," Camp said. "We've got to account for that for now but know that it also can change drastically from here."

The outlook for extended winter conditions could already be having an impact on spring wheat plantings, which are mostly concentrated in the Northern Plains, and that the report estimated to dip 2.4% to 10.57 million acres.

"It's kind of an interesting story because if these (spring wheat) planting intentions are realized, then we're looking at the lowest planted acreage of that crop since 1972," NASS Crops Branch Chief Lance Honig said during a webinar on Twitter, noting estimates for that crop have dropped the past five seasons.

Estimates for total winter wheat acres, however, rose to 37.5 million acres, up 12.7% from 2022, and durum increased 9.1% to 1.78 million acres.



USDA's prospective plantings report released estimates that corn acres this spring could total 91.99 million acres, up 3.42 million acres or 4% from last year, and soybean acres could total 87.51 million acres, a slight increase from 87.5 million acres in 2022. (Photo by Illinois Farm Bureau photographer Catrina Rawson)

Wheat plantings in Illinois were projected at 880,000 acres, a 35.4% increase from 2022 and the most since farmers here planted 1.2 million acres in 2008.

Total cotton plantings, meanwhile, are estimated to fall a staggering 18.2% this season to 11.3 million acres. On sorghum, the report projected farmers intend to

plant 5.98 million acres, a 6% drop from 2022.

USDA also released its March 1 quarterly grain stocks report, with corn stocks counted in all positions at 7.4 billion bushels; soybeans at 1.69 billion bushels and wheat at 946 million bushels.

In Illinois, total stored corn was at 1.34 billion

bushels (up 6% from last year); soybeans at 270 million bushels (down 20%) and wheat at 19.4 million bushels (down 15%).

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Farmers talk stressors, coping methods

By TAMMIE SLOUP
FarmWeek

Take a day or two off from work. Go for a walk.

Such advice for those struggling with stress or anxiety can be helpful, but for farmers, the suggestions are almost laughable.

“There’s no sick days, no health days, the work is still there. It doesn’t go away. And if you take a day off, it just compounds the next day,” said Matt Hulsizer, a Knox County farmer.

Hulsizer, along with his wife, Liz, joined Kankakee County Farm Bureau President Greg St. Aubin and Bonnie Landwehr, a licensed clinical social worker and behavioral health program supervisor with SIU Medicine, during a panel discussion on mental health stress in the ag community. It was part of the Farm Family Resource Initiative’s Rural Mental Health Summit at the Memorial Learning Center in Springfield. The audience of mostly health care professionals heard about ways to better respond to and treat farmers’ mental well-being.

Hulsizer lost his father to suicide in 2013, shortly after he and Liz were married. St. Aubin struggled for years until he was diagnosed as bipolar. Landwehr farms with her husband in Macoupin County and has counseled farmers and oversees a free virtual suicide bereavement support group for those in the ag community.

The farmers opened up about their personal experiences and shared coping methods.

The Hulsizers and St. Aubin agreed telehealth has been a saving grace but acknowledged the broadband deserts throughout the state.

“I’m still a work in progress,” Matt Hulsizer admit-

ted. “I do talk to a therapist through telehealth, and she doesn’t have really any ag background, which makes it difficult sometimes, but she’s a quick learner.”

Telehealth has broken the barrier for him, Liz Hulsizer said, adding otherwise, he’d have to drive an hour for an in-office visit. With telehealth, he can talk to a therapist while he’s driving the tractor.

St. Aubin also said telehealth has been a game-changer. Even in more populated areas, it can take weeks to get an office appointment.

Being honest with yourself and others around you also is key, the farmers said.

“Now that I’ve gone through this, I’m here because I’m an advocate for mental health and I’m not afraid of letting everyone know this is what I am; this is what I’m capable of,” St. Aubin said.

“If I had a broken arm you’d be able to understand what I could or couldn’t do and everyone would be very accommodating. I have to make sure that everyone understands around me that sometimes the stress of the day gets to me and I have to take care of myself. I’m not bowing out or trying to get out of any sort of responsibility, but I’ve got to do my therapy. I’ve got to make sure that I can take care of myself because in the long run I’ve got to be healthy for a long time.”

St. Aubin said although it might be met with skepticism, he suggests farmers can work better together. Several farmers, including himself, share responsibilities in their operations.

“Farmers’ businesses are on display for everybody to see. That’s why farmers are so to themselves, and



The Farm Family Resource Initiative’s Rural Mental Health Summit brought farmers and health professionals together in Springfield for a conversation about agricultural mental health. Panelists included, left to right, Bonnie Landwehr, licensed clinical social worker and behavioral health program supervisor with SIU Medicine; Knox County farmers Liz and Matt Hulsizer; and Kankakee County Farm Bureau President Greg St. Aubin. (Photo by Tammie Sloup for FarmWeek)

everybody has this idea of ‘I constantly have to do all this myself because I’m constantly being watched by my competitor,’” St. Aubin said, adding he advocates for farmers working together to help with stress.

“Most farmers are not willing to do that. But again, that’s what part of my therapy was. I can take a day off. I don’t have to worry about things I’m not that good at. There is that option that farmers can work together more often than they do and still not lose out but maintain where you make things better.”

Medication also has helped the farmers deal with day-to-day stressors. Just give the medication time to work, they stressed.

Spending quality time with spouses also has helped, the farmers said.

Landwehr added farming couples should set expectations ahead of seasons and identify potential setbacks.

“And for couples, I really push the difference between a business meeting and a date,” she said.

Reaching out to a farmer suspected of having mental health struggles also can be challenging. But the right approach can be lifesaving.

Liz Hulsizer suggested “leveling down” the conversation, meaning start off the dialogue by saying something like “I’m having a terrible day, how’s yours?” While approaching someone about their mental state can prompt them to pull away, saying something is better than staying silent, she added.

“I would rather lose them as a friend than lose them as a person,” she 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.)

New Wetland Easement pay rates announced for 2023

CHAMPAIGN – USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Illinois announced new easement values used with the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). The Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE) portion of ACEP helps private landowners restore and protect critical wetlands. New Illinois Geographic Area Rate Caps for 2023 are now in place and they are slightly higher than previous rates. Sign-ups for WRE can be submitted and accepted at any time.

“We’re announcing the new rates for ACEP-WRE,” said Paula Hingson, Assistant State Conservationist for Easements. “GARC rates and land values are established based on an Areawide Market Analysis. Land values rose slightly in Illinois so we will use these new rates to estimate easement values for ACEP applicants in fiscal year 2023.”

For more than three decades, NRCS has worked with landowners in Illinois to protect their wetlands. Conservation easements are important tools landowners can use to improve soil health, water and air quality and enhance wildlife habitat for migrating waterfowl.

The first application cut-off for 2023 occurred in December of 2022, but NRCS accepts ACEP applications

year-round. Individuals interested in ACEP-WRE should talk to staff at their local NRCS office.

Through ACEP Wetland Reserve Easements, NRCS helps landowners restore, enhance, and protect wetland ecosystems. NRCS and landowners work together to develop a plan for restoration work and long-term maintenance of the easement. With 75% of Illinois lands being in private ownership, this program is ideal for landowners who fight annual flooding or those interested in promoting wetland wildlife habitat.

Wetland conservation easements are permanent, or they can be established for 30 years. Eligible lands include:

- Farmed or converted wetlands that can successfully be restored;
- Croplands or grasslands subject to flooding; and
- Riparian areas that link protected wetland areas.

NRCS will use new 2023 Geographic Area Rate Caps for new Wetland Reserve Easement contracts. Rates vary by location across the state to distinguish cropland from non-cropland. Rates range from \$3,150 to \$7,560 per acre. To determine rates by Illinois county, visit the Illinois NRCS website at: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-by-state/illinois>

Illinois wheat conditions 'slipped a bit' following storms

By DANIEL GRANT
FarmWeek

The active weather so far this year created two key challenges for wheat growers and their winter crop in Illinois.

Muddy field conditions hindered applications of spring fertilizer and herbicides in many areas while a lack of sunlight potentially slowed crop growth.

A handful of fields were also battered by recent hailstorms, particularly in the northern half of the state, although that situation did not appear to be widespread as of April 6.

"I think the wheat crop has slipped a little bit," Mark Krausz, Clinton County farmer and president of the Illinois Wheat Association (IWA), told *FarmWeek*. "I think it still has potential to be a really good crop. But it could have been excellent."

About half the Illinois wheat crop (56%) was ranked good to excellent as of April 3, up slightly from the same time last year, with 35% fair and 9% in poor to very poor condition, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) Illinois field office.

"We've got pretty good tillers and stands, but the crop is not getting any warmth and sunlight. Those are two things really hold-

ing back the wheat crop," Krausz said Thursday after his farm received another inch of rain. "We should have a stretch (of better weather) coming up."

Once field conditions improve, farmers must decide what to do agronomically with each field. The IWA president noted some fields have ruts from spring fertilizer applications.

"Our situation here in southern Illinois is we're all barely getting by getting fertilizer on," Krausz said. "I'd say two-thirds to three-quarters of the second shot of nitrogen is on. It's been a real struggle.

"And I don't think hardily anybody has Harmony or other herbicides on," he noted. "Weeds are growing through the wheat" in some fields.

Elsewhere, drought remains an issue in key wheat-producing areas west of the Mississippi River. About 48% of the crops are in areas experiencing drought, according to USDA. Meanwhile, planting of spring wheat probably seems like a distant wish for farmers to the north after another blizzard blanketed the Dakotas the first week of April.

Overall, just 28% of the U.S. wheat crop was rated good to excellent as of April 3, which is the second lowest to begin the spring

rankings since the NASS data series started in 1986, according to Rich Nelson of Allendale Inc. in McHenry.

IWA will host its annual Southern Illinois Wheat Tour to assess the crop late next month. Look for details of that event in an upcoming issue of *FarmWeek* or on the IWA website, illinoiswheat.org.

(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.)



Growing wheat in Illinois this winter came with challenges, but this field in Mason County is looking good. (Photo by Illinois Farm Bureau photographer Catrina Rawson)



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April 30 - May 7, 2023

“THE LIVING SOIL”

While most of us seldom come in daily contact with soil, we all depend on soil for our daily survival, according to organizers of the Soil and Water Stewardship Week observance. In generation after generation, it is important to bring full attention back to the central theme - the living soil sustains all life on earth. Without the soil, nothing lives. Conservation districts work to protect healthy soils that in turn support a healthy environment, and healthy environments support healthy life.

We eat the food, drink water, breathe the air, and enjoy the views, but only a few of us walk the fields and forests on a regular basis and understand what those lands need from us in order to sustain the living soil. However, the local district has suggested three things each of us can do in our own backyards to be better stewards of our soil resources:

1. Protect the soil from wind or water erosion by keeping healthy plants growing on the surface.
2. Restore & maintain organic matter in the soil, such as grass clippings or tree leaves (compost).
3. Protect soil life by using the least amounts and least toxic materials to control pest problems.



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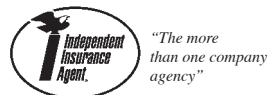
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