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Buying land through online auctions: Trend or here to stay?

Is buying land through online auctions a trend or is it here to stay?

The answer is both. What started as a response to COVID-driven restrictions and lockdowns has become a necessary part of land business and farming. While buyers are more accustomed to it than sellers, it's unlikely online farmland auctions in some form are going away.

"In the beginning, we saw an online format that was click-to-bid with a soft close. When there were no bidders in the last five minutes, it would close," says Tucker Wood, a Paris-based auctioneer who does business in four states and is one of only 60 accredited land consultants in Illinois. "Now, by far we see live online virtual format with me in front of the camera selling just like a live auction with maybe one other person on the phone in my office."

Online Land Auctions vs. Live Land Auctions

Online auctions take about the same time as a live auction, yet offer benefits the live format can't. For institutional investors — buyers who are not farming their own land — they no

longer have the commitment of having someone on site to bid.

What used to be a two-day commitment for auctions that were states away now comes down to hours at a desk in a closed-door office. In fact, Wood says, buyers can even participate in more than one at a time. "Two guys in two offices have handled four auctions at the same time," he says. "Buyers love that aspect of the virtual auctions."

While auctioneers also appreciate the efficiency and convenience of virtual land auctions, they do see drawbacks that they're learning to work around. Like everyone in the post-COVID area, they're changing the way they do business in response.

"The flip side of virtual auctions is from the auctioneer's standpoint, we're losing that human contact that could lead to our next customer," he says. In other words, often more business for the auctioneer comes from someone attending an auction liking their style and coming back to them when ready to sell land. Or a quick post-auction



conversation on site could be an immediate conversion with a commitment to sell land in the near future. That has meant flexing how and when they market and advertise.

But with that drawback has come a positive change as well. Pre-COVID, the typical land auction season ran November to March.

Now, Wood says, they're seeing land auctions the entire year, and he credits that to the online format. "A guy can be spraying in July, planting in May, harvesting in September, and be bidding virtually from his phone," he explains.

In addition, online auctions have the benefit of separation. "It takes some of the emotion out, so two neighbors who bid on the same thing can still go have coffee the next morning, because they don't know the other was bidding," Wood says.

As online auction methods and platforms evolve, they will continue to require some onboarding and a learning curve for buyers. The buyer demographic right now is probably 55 to 70 and maybe even a little higher, with anomalies on both sides. "The generation that does buy is not the most tech savvy, so that has been our biggest grumble," Wood

says. "But at the end of the day, I've never had someone say, 'I didn't buy because it was online.'"

Common Online Land Auction Formats

The online auction format varies from area to area, and some areas have slowly drifted back to primarily live auctions. But for most, online plays into the mix in some way. The most popular is BidWrangler, a platform that bills itself as beginning "when an auctioneer needed to solve a problem." While most farmers wouldn't recognize the name, because every brokerage company has branded their online platforms with their own names and logos, the platform has exploded.

Online land auctions have become fairly seamless, says Wood. A message function allows discussion or requests for breaks. Every auction has a backup phone number if the internet goes

down. The auctioneer and buyers see the same bid screen, and a person on the back end is assigned to manage those bids and make sure they all go through. It's fast-paced, tech-savvy and profitable for all.

Wood's best advice for both buyers and sellers who are searching for an online auction partner is to educate yourself up front. "Don't be afraid to call the company and ask questions, and do it in plenty of time before the auction," he says. "You don't want to wait until the day before the sale. Do it in enough time for you to be comfortable with the system so they can help you."

Whether it's in person with an online option or virtual with a live auctioneer, it's the new way of land auctions. "The online format is never going away," Wood says. "I see it only being bigger and more usable, especially given our buyer base."

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ISA announces FY23 Checkoff-Funded Projects

□ Focused on growing soybean uses, markets, accessibility & demand

BLOOMINGTON—The Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) announced its list of FY23 checkoff-funded projects. The projects place Illinois soybean farmers' profitability as a top priority by growing opportunities for soybean uses, markets, accessibility, and demand.

"Not only are we getting back to our roots in 2023, but we are also spreading our wings," said ISA Chairman Steve Pitstick.

"As an association, we need to ensure we stay connected to the needs of Illinois farmers. Our lineup of funded projects in market development, government relations and agronomic utilization will help increase the value, awareness, and opportunities for Illinois soybeans."

Market Development

The ISA checkoff program will continue to work hard for Illinois farmers to expand existing markets and grow new markets in 2023.

"We have a compelling story to tell about the quality of soybeans we produce in Illinois," said ISA Director of Market Development Todd Main. "We hope to host buyers from across the globe here in Illinois to better illustrate soybeans' value and bolster our members' profit margins."

Repairing rural bridges and modernizing locks and dams on inland waterways also are examples of the way ISA is continuing efforts to strengthen the transportation network that remains the competitive advantage for Illinois farmers in the global marketplace.



"Illinois is set to receive more than \$1 billion in federal funding to build out rural broadband services and ISA is working to ensure rural communities are prepared with plans to secure their share of that funding," Main said. "We have launched a new collaboration with the United Soybean Board (USB) and the Benton Institute to support developing innovative plans bringing broadband service to rural communities."

ISA also is exploring greater collaboration and expansion opportunities for domestic and global market expansion by re-engaging with leadership of the poultry, beef, pork, and aquaculture associations.

"One area we believe has significant growth potential and multiple benefits is the food space concentrated in the Chicago area," said Market Development Committee Chairman, Scott Gaffner. "The concentration of market-leading food companies in our state is an opportunity to not only expand the use of soy as an input but also to combat the unfounded narrative that

soy may have some negative health characteristics. We are in the process of developing an informational portal featuring Illinois companies utilizing soy in new and interesting ways."

Agronomy and Utilization

The ISA Agronomy Team has set goals to support all in-field agronomic needs, advance soybean management systems to protect and improve soil productivity and water quality, continue to sustainably improve the quality and yield of high performing soybean systems, support soybean farmers' production by evaluating economics and ROI, and to promote, research, and drive soybean production education.

"ISA will continue to publish crop progress and condition reports from the 2023 Soy Envoys, and hold field days meant to keep farmers up-to-date with in-field agronomic information throughout the 2023 growing season," said Utilization Committee Chairman Brady Holst. "We also will showcase Illinois soybeans at the 2023 Farm Progress Show."

"ISA Agronomy is especially looking forward to what's in store with the Precision Conservation Management program," said ISA Agronomy Director, Abigail Peterson. "We plan to release guidebooks for carbon and best management practices while also continuing our research."

Government Relations

Under the direction of Government Relations Committee Chairman, Brad Daugherty, and ISA Director of Government Relations & Strategy, Andrew Larson, the FY23 Government Relations Committee has set its sights on a number of forward-facing goals, which include becoming stronger advocates for Illinois farmers in Springfield and Washington; fostering strong relationships with Illinois elected officials; developing robust federal policy for the American Soybean Association; expanding the Illinois Soybean Growers Political Action Committee and the role it plays in advocating for Illinois soybean farmers; promoting the Voice for Soy advocacy network to be a robust grassroots

tools connecting farmers with key decision makers; and working with ISA leadership to develop key legislative priorities.

"The ISA Government Relations Committee will leverage a number of upcoming opportunities for the benefit of Illinois soybean farmers, which include ISA board fly-ins to Washington D.C. and advocating training and recruitment drives," says Larson. "We were also excited to host an Illinois Soybean Growers lobby day in Springfield and to continue policy development ahead of ASA's policy sessions as part of the Commodity Classic."

Some of the key projects on which the Government Relations Committee will focus include expanding non-checkoff work with Michael Torrey & Associates in Washington D.C. to engage more fully on behalf of IL soybean farmers; continuing support for the Midwest Soybean Collaborative; and support for Clean Fuels Alliance America's state policy and regulatory team working at the state level to advance biofuels.

Communications

Under the direction of ISA Communications Director, Rachel Peabody, ISA will continue to communi-

cate the work of checkoff funded projects through multiple communications channels, including 12 issues of Illinois Field & Bean, ISA's in-house publication going to more than 40,000 farmer mailboxes each issue.

According to Peabody, ISA also allocated \$100,000 to Illinois Ag in the Classroom to fund teacher training and professional development, educational materials, teacher grants, county agricultural literacy coalition grants and more.

The ISA Board of Directors approved funding to join other farmer-led organizations involved in the Illinois Farm Families coalition in a year-long campaign celebrating Illinois family farmers and the contributions they make to their communities. The campaign will kick off in spring 2023 with an advertising campaign and will continue with community activations which highlight that 96% of Illinois farms are family-owned and operated. Collaborating partners include the Illinois Beef Association, Illinois Corn Marketing Board, Illinois Farm Bureau, Illinois Pork Producers Association, Illinois Soybean Association, and Midwest Dairy.

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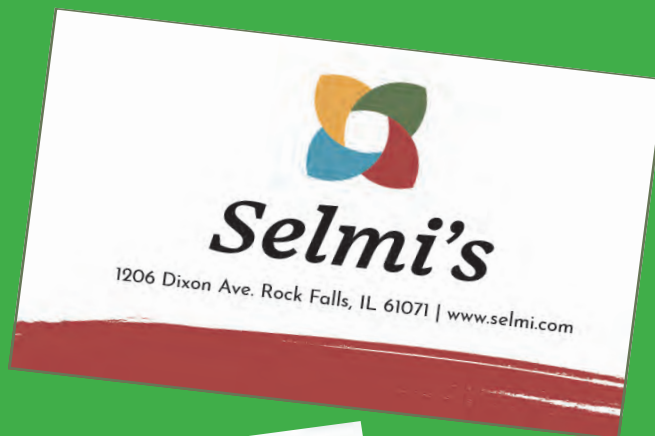
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Illinois gubernatorial candidates stake their agricultural positions

By KAY SHIPMAN
FarmWeek

LEXINGTON – Illinois candidates for governor pledged support for farmers and agriculture but offered different views on the state's fiscal outlook recently on a McLean County farm.

In separate appearances, Republican candidate Sen. Darren Bailey and Democratic candidate Gov. JB Pritzker shared their platforms with the Illinois Agricultural Legislative Roundtable and answered questions from the audience. Illinois Farm Bureau President Richard Guebert Jr. served as moderator during the event at Schuler Farms near Lexington.



Pritzker

As for Illinois' finances, Pritzker touted steps taken during his administration.

"My job coming in was paying off the bill backlog and making sure we're reducing the structural deficit in the state and then go to work paying off the rest of the debt in the state," Pritzker said. "We now have literally eliminated the bill backlog in the state."

An additional \$500 million was added to this fiscal year's state pension payment and the state has received six credit upgrades, the governor added.

Bailey focused on the state employee pension debt.

"We can deal with this, but we have to start working on it," the senator said, adding Illinois also has large debt in its unemployment fund. If elected governor, Bailey said he would appoint new agency directors "who are business minded and develop their own budgets, zero-based budgets."

Considering the current state budget, "there is massive amounts of waste. We will have to use that waste to pay down the pension debt," Bailey said.

The candidates also squared off on their energy plans. Outside the hosts' machine shed, wind turbines sprouted in surrounding fields.

Bailey shared concerns about "sky-rocketing energy costs" and said several counties in his legislative district recently experienced three-hour brownouts. He criticized Pritzker's climate policies, adding the energy

bill "leads to a lot of problems" and the state "needs to continue to ease into" solar and wind energy.

The governor blamed high electricity prices on MISO (Midcontinent Independent System Operator) the independent, nonprofit organization that manages generation and transmission of high-voltage electricity in parts of Illinois and 14 other states.

"MISO has fallen down on the job," Pritzker said. "That's why Illinois had to pick up the pace in solar and wind and make sure that we're producing more energy, not less. That is what the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act does. It helps us produce more energy."



Bailey

But state targets for electric vehicles "does not mean the end of biofuels," Pritzker said. "It's part of a longer trend that will keep biofuels growing in Illinois for the next decade and more." The governor said he backs year-round sales of biofuels, E10 and E15 and has written the federal government supporting year-round sales.

Although Bailey and Pritzker disagreed on several points, both candidates took similar positions on perennial Illinois ag-related questions about the future of the Livestock Management Facility Act and the state sales tax incentive on fertilizer, seed, pesticides and machinery-related expenses. They favor no changes for statewide livestock siting regulations or on the 6.25% sales tax incentive.

Surrounded by cornfields, each candidate reached out to the farmer audience.

"We need the grit of a farmer in the governor's office," Bailey said. "Together we can restore Illinois. We can fix these problems, but we must work together."

"I'm not going to pretend to be a farmer," Pritzker said. "But before I was a governor, I was a businessman and I'm familiar with the ins and outs of running a business. I'm proud to be your advocate."

(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.)



Bundling Illinois' bridges builds Illinois' success

BLOOMINGTON – The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) announced its endorsement of Illinois Soybean Association's (ISA) bridge bundling initiative with the release of its Multi-Year Program (MYP).

The program includes a new initiative to bundle the replacement of small, deficient highway bridges and culverts, which will provide Illinois farmers and residents alike with a roadmap to improve Illinois' neglected bridge and transportation system within a proposed six-year program.

"The ISA is encouraged to hear IDOT is starting to utilize bridge bundling across the state," said Todd Main, Director of Market Development, ISA. "Making state funds available in addition federal funding as part of the Federal Infrastructure Bill will help rural communities 'Bundle Up Their Bridges' and keep Illinois farmers moving as harvest approaches."

According to IDOT, this initiative is designed to allow IDOT to deliver more bridge projects in less time, save money and leverage increased revenues from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. There are 14 bundles statewide, which include nearly 60 structures programmed in the MYP.

"One of the foundations of Illinois farmers' transportation network is rural bridges, which allows farmers access from the field to their destination point for delivery," Main said. "The bridges of Illinois are showing signs of stress to deferred maintenance and poor condition. The Illinois repair backlog includes 2,273 bridges identified as structurally deficient and an additional 1,191 bridges with posted restrictions on size and weight of vehicles that can use them. The estimated cost to repair these bridges is \$4.8 billion, a number that is climbing by the day."

ISA has been engaged in public outreach and educational for county road commissioners, engineers and local decision makers on the merits of bridge bundling by using success stories from Illinois counties and neighboring states, issuing a single contract for the replacement, rehabilitation, or repair of multiple bridges to reduce costs and speaking with elected officials about how a successful bridge bundling program can be implemented at the county and township level.

To learn more, <https://www.ilsoy.org/bridge-bundling>.

USDA begins accepting applications for \$100 million in Biofuel Infrastructure Grants

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that USDA is accepting applications for \$100 million in grants to increase the sale and use of biofuels derived from U.S. agricultural products.

USDA is making the funding available through the Higher Blends Infrastructure Incentive Program (HBIIP). This program seeks to market higher blends of ethanol and biodiesel by sharing the costs to build and retrofit biofuel-related infrastructure such as pumps, dispensers and storage tanks.

"The Biden-Harris Administration recognizes that rural America is the key to reducing our reliance on fossil fuels and giving Americans cleaner, more affordable options at the pump," Vilsack said. "Biofuels are homegrown fuels. Expanding the availability of higher-blend fuels is a win for American farmers, the rural economy and hard-working Americans who pay the price here at home when we depend on volatile fuel sources overseas."

This additional funding follows an April investment of \$5.6 million through HBIIP that is expected to increase the availability of biofuels by 59.5 million gallons per year in California, Delaware, Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey, New York and South Dakota.

In June, USDA also announced that it had provided \$700 million in relief funding to more than 100 biofuel producers in 25 states who experienced market losses due to the pandemic.

These investments reflect the goals of President

Biden's Inflation Reduction Act, which addresses immediate economic needs and includes the largest ever federal investment in clean energy for the future. The law includes another \$500 million aimed at increasing the sale and use of agricultural commodity-based fuels. This funding will allow USDA to provide additional grants for infrastructure improvements related to blending, storing, supplying and distributing biofuels.

Gas prices continue to fall, at the fastest pace in over a decade. Biofuels are an important part of the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to lowering gas prices for the

American people.

Background

Under HBIIP, USDA provides grants to transportation fueling and distribution facilities. These grants lower the out-of-pocket costs for businesses to install and upgrade infrastructure and related equipment.

The \$100 million available now will support a variety of fueling operations, including filling stations, convenience stores and larger retail stores that also sell fuel. The funds will also support fleet facilities including rail and marine, and fuel distribution facilities, such as fuel terminal operations, midstream operations, distribution facilities as well as home heating oil

distribution centers.

The grants will cover up to 50% of total eligible project costs – but not more than \$5 million – to help owners of transportation fueling and fuel distribution facilities convert to higher blends of ethanol and biodiesel. These higher-blend fuels must be greater than 10% for ethanol and greater than 5% for biodiesel.

Applications must be submitted by 4:30 p.m. ET Nov. 21, 2022. Visit the HBIIP webpage to learn more, sign up for webinars and apply.

Additional information also is available on Grants.gov or page 51641 of the Aug. 23, 2022, Federal Register.

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FDA releases FY 2020 Pesticide Residue Monitoring Report

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has made available its annual Pesticide Residue Monitoring Program Report for Fiscal Year 2020 (FY 2020), summarizing findings from the program's monitoring of human and animal foods in FY 2020.

From Oct. 1, 2019, through Sept. 30, 2020, the FDA tested for approximately 750 different pesticides and selected industrial compounds on 2,078 human food samples (316 domestic and 1,762 import samples) in its regulatory monitoring program. Agency staff collected domestic human food samples from 35 states and imported human food samples from 79 countries/economies. The findings show that the levels of pesticide residues measured by the FDA in the U.S. food supply are generally in compliance with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) pesticide tolerances.

Growers often use pesticides to protect their crops from insects, weeds, fungi, and other pests. Through this program, the agency ensures that FDA-regulated foods within U.S. commerce comply with the pesticide tolerances, or maximum residue levels, set by EPA to protect public health. The EPA establishes pesticide tolerances on the amount of a pesticide residue a food can contain, and the FDA is responsible for enforcing those tolerances for domestic foods shipped in interstate commerce and foods imported into the United States.

Overall Findings

In FY 2020, the FDA found that 96.8% of domestic and 88.4% of import human foods were compliant with federal standards, that is, the pesticide tolerances



set by EPA. No pesticide residues were found in 40.8% of the domestic samples and 48.4% of the import samples. In the human food commodity groups, the violation rate in each group was higher for import samples. The higher violation rate affirms the validity of the sampling design in targeting import commodities more likely to contain violative pesticide residues.

The FDA also analyzed 102 animal food samples (40 domestic and 62 import samples) for pesticides. The agency found that 100% of domestic and 96.8% of import animal food samples were compliant with federal standards. No pesticide residues were found in 30.0% of the domestic and 48.4% of the import animal food samples.

The results from FY 2020 were similar to those from past years. However, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the FDA's sample collection and analysis for the FY 2020 report in the following ways:

- Approximately 50% fewer human food samples

and 70% fewer animal food samples were collected in FY 2020 compared with FY 2019.

- More import samples were collected in FY 2020 relative to domestic samples than in previous years.

- Domestic samples were not collected for the "Domestically Produced Animal Derived Foods" assignment (EU audit assignment).

- Despite this impact, the results from samples collected and analyzed in FY 2020 demonstrated a rate of compliance similar to what has been shown in previous years.

Enforcement Strategy

The FDA employs a three-fold strategy to enforce the EPA's pesticide tolerances in human and animal foods that includes continuous monitoring of domestic and import commodities for residues, conducting sampling surveys for specific commodities or pesticides, and analyzing collected samples for pesticides. In its regulatory pesticide residue monitoring program, the FDA selectively monitors a broad

range of domestic and import commodities for residues of approximately 750 different pesticides and selected industrial compounds. The number of compounds (pesticides and industrial chemicals) in the analytical scope decreased slightly compared to FY 2019, as some pesticides and industrial chemicals that are obsolete or detected rarely were removed from the scope as part of FDA's continuing modernization process.

The FDA may also carry out focused sampling surveys for specific commodities or selected pesticides of special interest. In addition, FDA monitors the levels of pesticide chemical residues in foods prepared for consumption in its Total Diet Study (TDS), an ongoing program that monitors contaminants and nutrients in the average U.S. diet.

Since 1987, the FDA has prepared annual pesticide reports to summarize the results of the agency's pesticide residue monitoring program. They can be accessed on the FDA website.

ISA to construct new building; will relocate office in Bloomington

□ Goal is "to get back to our roots"

BLOOMINGTON – In 2020, the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) set out to reposition the organization with one goal: "to get back to our roots." As an association, ISA has developed a strategic direction that puts Illinois soybean farmers at the center of its work, programs, and messaging, all in the service of staying connected to the growers who pay into the checkoff and membership programs.

This approach has inspired ISA to transition to a high-quality, high-touch service model, which has led the organization to grow its team, ensuring tremendous cost-efficiencies as well as enhanced farmer service.

A growing staff requires additional space, which is why ISA will relocate this fall to a new building located at 1108 Trinity Lane, Bloomington.

"We've learned that by growing our staff, and moving talent and professional expertise in-house, we are better able to serve Illinois farmers with efficiency and cost-effectiveness," says ISA Chairman Steve Pitstick. "Through this physical expansion, Illinois soybean farmers are investing in the volunteer farmer leaders and staff who are working for them day in and day out. This opportunity will better enable ISA to support growing opportunities for the soy industry, and work collaboratively with other Illinois agriculture organizations."

ISA's Chicago office is also undergoing a move from its original location in the city to a more user-friendly location in Lombard, in order to better serve the Chicago legislative districts and urban partners as part of the new strategic direction.

"The Lombard Office was a strategic choice, selected for its improved accessibility for Chicagoland legislators," says ISA Government Relations Chair Brad Daugherty. "It's the perfect locale to host meetings and guests to further ISA's policy efforts."

The new locations are strategic strides toward the future of ISA, and an investment in your team that furthers checkoff and membership priorities. The locations will enable ISA to foster collaborative partnerships, to grow its team of highly skilled professionals, and to cultivate opportunities that yield more potential for Illinois farmers.

For more information about ISA and its relocations, send an email at ilsoy@ilsoy.org.



Smarter land use planning is urgently needed to safeguard Midwest land that grows our food

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Smart growth and investment in Midwest downtowns and main streets must occur now to secure the land that grows our food, according to American Farmland Trust's new report *Farms Under Threat 2040: Choosing an Abundant Future* and the accompanying web mapping tool.

AFT's *Farms Under Threat* research has shown that by 2040, as many as 3,165,000 acres – nearly 5,000 square miles of farmland may be lost to urban and low-density conversion across the Midwest (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin). Six Midwest states (IL, IA, OH, IN, WI, and MN) make the top 10 list of states when assessing acres of farmland converted to urban development by 2040. This loss will disproportionately impact smaller farms that often serve local markets with fresh produce, eggs, dairy and meat. Small and peri-urban farms also tend to incubate new farmers and are instrumental in navigating supply chain disruptions currently experienced at grocery stores across the nation.

By 2040, agriculture in the Midwest will also be significantly constrained by water due to impacts of climate change. As temperatures continue to rise in the Midwest, precipitation is

expected to become more intense in late winter and early spring, followed by drier summer months. The Midwest is also experiencing a market surge to meet renewable energy goals. These climatic factors will lead to increased flooding, compromised drinking water, reduced air quality and greater pressures on agricultural land.

Of the seven Midwest states, Ohio farmland will be most impacted, followed by Wisconsin, and then Michigan. In Illinois, consider the following assessments:

- If recent trends continue, 363,375 acres of Illinois's farmland will be paved over, fragmented, or converted to uses that jeopardize agriculture by 2040. That represents an area nearly 2.5 times larger than the City of Chicago and equates to the loss of more than 1,500 farms and 3,400 farm jobs.

- Will, Kane, and Kendall counties will be the hardest hit, with Will County ranking second of all counties in the nation for loss of cropland due to urban development.

- In the worst-case scenario of Runaway Sprawl, Illinois could lose as much as 448,371 acres of farmland. As the nation's leader in the production of soybeans, corn and swine, this loss would be far-reaching.

- By encouraging smart

development, investing in farmland easements, and supporting the next generation of farmers, Illinoisans can save 211,400 acres of farmland. That's equivalent to saving 1,900 agricultural jobs and \$123 million in farm output.

- Protecting Illinois's farmland from poorly planned development and residential sprawl is of both local and national importance given that 81 percent of farmland conversion will occur on some of the most productive and versatile land in the country.

"The tools exist to save our region's farmland: by

embracing smart growth, protecting agricultural lands, and supporting the next generation of farmers, we can save 1.8 million acres of farmland in the Midwest," said Kristopher Reynolds, AFT Midwest Regional Director. "Communities need to double down on protecting the land we have left, whether that's through permanent farmland easements, land-use planning for smart growth, or property tax relief. This is an important opportunity to invest in urban density and limit the continued expansion of urban growth boundaries."



In the worst-case scenario of Runaway Sprawl, Illinois could lose as much as 448,371 acres of farmland.



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Ag groups: Hands off crop insurance in 2023 farm bill

By TIMOTHY EGGERT
FarmWeek

Don't fix what isn't broken. That's the approach federal lawmakers should take when they write the crop insurance title of the 2023 farm bill, according to representatives from national ag groups.

"The really important thing to our members is to make sure that crop insurance survives the way it is," American Farm Bureau Federation Vice President Scott VanderWal said. "Maybe we can improve it some, but the bumper sticker message on crop insurance is 'Do no harm.'"

VanderWal, who joined a recent panel discussion at the 2022 Minnesota Farmfest, emphasized crop insurance is "so incredibly important" for farmers because "you don't buy insurance for good times, you buy it for the bad times."

Tom Haag, first vice president of the National Corn Growers Association, agreed, calling crop insurance "our best safety net" that "works" and shouldn't "be messed with."

The discussion around Title 11 comes as policymakers consider whether to expand programs, tighten their scope and eligibility or codify a permanent disaster program stemming from a series of ad-hoc programs implemented by USDA since the 2018 legislation.

Many ag groups, including Illinois Farm Bureau

and AFBF, are opposed to the latter policy idea.

AFBF is also "very opposed" to proposals to tie crop insurance rates and premium discounts to conservation and climate-smart ag practices, which VanderWal said could "damage or mitigate the tendency of people to use it."

"The more people that use crop insurance, the better off it is because you've got more skin in the game," VanderWal said.

Some ag insurance experts shared that same view at a House Ag Committee hearing in July, explaining that setting those requirements to enroll in insurance and other risk management programs would lead to less participation and ultimately higher rates.

Voices from the livestock industry on the panel said current ad-hoc relief programs tied to disruptions from COVID-19, like the Spot Market Hog Pandemic Program (SMHPP) need severe adjustments.

"We just had the (SMHPP) payments released in August that are two years old," said National Pork Producers Council President Terry Wolters. "If you were in trouble financially two years ago, that program doesn't even come close to stepping up and helping you."

(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.)



Crop insurance is so incredibly important for farmers because you don't buy insurance for good times, you buy it for the bad times.



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