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Illinois and United States biofuel jobs grew in 2021

By **TIMOTHY EGGERT**
FarmWeek

Illinois' biofuel industry added 307 jobs in 2021, a 4.6% increase from the previous year, according to recently released federal data.

The 2022 United States Energy and Employment Report (USEER), compiled by the U.S. Department of

Energy (DOE), found similar growth in the biofuels industry at the national level, which in 2021 added 4,332 jobs.

And that national growth is expected to continue through 2022, with jobs related to renewable diesel fuels anticipated to increase by 6.6%, biodiesel by 5.5% and corn ethanol by 4.5%,

the report said.

"Amidst the unique challenges of a nation coming out of a global pandemic, America's energy sector stands out with considerable job growth across nearly all industries," Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said in a statement.

"DOE's USEER report shows that jobs critical to

our clean energy transition are on the rise and poised for continued expansion thanks to the historic investments from the president's bipartisan infrastructure law," Granholm said.

Illinois' boost in total biofuel jobs over the past year — from 6,712 in 2020 to 7,019 in 2021 — mostly stemmed from a rise in employment (130 jobs added) related to "other biofuels," which DOE classifies as "other fuel derived directly from living matter."

Illinois-based positions in corn ethanol (100 jobs added); other ethanol, which includes biodiesel, (41 jobs added); and woody biomass (36 jobs added) also increased from 2020 levels.

And within the state's overall fuels sector, the agriculture and forestry industry accounted for 3,177 jobs in 2021, a 12% decrease from 2020, the report said.

The increased 2021 employment figures across the state's biofuel industry, however, largely reflect an ongoing recovery from disruptions and shutdowns

caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and supply chain issues.

They also serve as a precursor to facilities expanding their production capacity via millions in federal spending, the implementation of year-round E15 and a 20.63-billion-gallon blending mandate for 2022 under the Renewable Fuel Standard.

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, Illinois in 2021 had the third-largest annual ethanol production capacity (1.8 billion gallons) and the fourth-largest annual biodiesel fuel production capacity (168 million gallons) in the country.

Illinois, US biofuel jobs grew in 2021

The boost in national-level biofuel jobs over the past year — from 103,254 in 2020 to 107,586 in 2021 — was buoyed by a 1,456-job increase in woody biomass production.

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was buoyed by a 1,456-job increase in woody biomass production.

Positions in corn ethanol (1,086 jobs added); other biofuels (910 jobs added) and other ethanol (880 jobs added) further saw growth nationally.

The largest number of corn ethanol fuel jobs (15,818) were in the ag industry, up from 15,419 workers in 2020 and 15,589 workers in 2019, the report said. But despite that growth, overall corn ethanol jobs still haven't returned to 2019 levels.

"Corn ethanol employed 34,592 workers in 2021, up 1,086 from the 33,506 employed in 2020 (3.2%)," the report said. "It did, however, employ 34,866 workers in 2019, putting the technology's employment level 275 jobs short of its pre-COVID recession level."

(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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New law incentivizes increasing blends of biodiesel

BLOOMINGTON — Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker signed into law a bill that incentivizes increasing blends of biodiesel. The bill, sponsored by Senator Patrick Joyce (D-Essex) and Representative Eva Dina Delgado (D-Chicago), extends the current B10 sales tax exemption until 2023 and then increases the biodiesel blend level subject to the tax exemption to B13 in 2024, B15 in 2025 and B19 in 2026. This major initiative further establishes Illinois' commitment to reducing carbon emissions and incentivizing the use

of domestically produced, renewable fuel.

"This hard-won victory is the result of Illinois Soybean Growers (ISG) unrelenting collaboration with the bill sponsors Senator Patrick Joyce and Representative Eva Dina Delgado, numerous partners across agriculture, biofuels producers, transportation stakeholders and clean air advocates who are all working to present a viable and immediate solution to combat carbon emissions in the transportation sector," said ISA Chairman, Steve Pitstick. "This legislation

will not only significantly enhance the environmental benefits of biodiesel, but also lead to strengthened demand for this Illinois-grown, renewable fuel by about 125 million gallons."

Continued Pitstick, "This law further establishes Illinois as a leader in biofuel policy, which will improve air quality for millions of Illinoisans and fuel the Illinois economy. At ISA, we are incredibly proud of our entire team's outreach, the engagement of our board, and the efforts of legislators in relentless pursuit of this positive legislation for agriculture."

Analyst: Market volatility 'not going anywhere'

By DANIEL GRANT
FarmWeek

Those who yearn for the "good old days" when daily commodity price shifts were measured in pennies and nickels rather than quarters and even dollars of today should probably just put those memories out to pasture.

Farmers have witnessed more wild swings and gyrations in the markets in recent years than attendees of an Elvis Presley concert back in the day. And that market trend will likely remain in place and could possibly leave some "All Shook Up" in the future if they don't plan accordingly.

"Volatility is not going anywhere, especially with everything going on geopolitically," Taylor Pope, commodity analyst with Pope Commodities, told farmers at the Illinois summer wheat forum in Okawville. "We've had \$1 (daily) moves in soybeans the last several days (leading up to USDA's August crop report Aug. 12)."

So, what should farmers do about crop marketing in the midst of such turbulent times?

"Be ready to take advantage of market highs and use available tools out there (to manage risk)," said Pope, who noted farmers should focus on protecting profitability and not necessarily swing for the fences on every market move.

"The crazy pullback we've had (in commodity markets much of the summer) is not just in the grain markets, it's kind of a macro-level sell-off.

"When (fund managers) liquidate long contracts, we can see bigger pullbacks than we even thought was

possible," said Pope, who noted fund positions cut off close to 100,000 soybean contracts in recent months.

A big fear in the markets and risk for farmers on the cost side remains staggering inflation levels.

Before the pandemic, inflation was just shy of 2% but recently jumped to a 40-year high of 9.1% in June. Meanwhile, food prices increased 10.4% while gasoline prices gushed 59% higher the past 12 months. The inflation rate recently eased slightly to 8.5% in July, which spurred the S&P 500 to climb to its highest level in three months.

"Inflation – it's nothing new and it's really escalated the last several years," Pope said. "The inflation story has peeled off (in light of the July slowdown), but it's hardly going away."

On the plus side, inflationary pressure and strong demand should keep some support under commodity markets. But uncertainty of both supply and demand remains tremendous prior to harvest.

"Demand may be the biggest variable out there," Pope said. "And, obviously, there's still some supply issues lingering."

Global supplies are tightest of the three main crops in Illinois for soybeans and



Staggering inflation levels have added costs for farmers throughout the summer growing season. Experts say higher-than-average expenses will continue through the fall harvest season. (Photo by Illinois Farm Bureau photographer Catrina Rawson)

wheat. A tight stocks-to-use ratio for soybeans could give that market a chance to rally back to \$15 heading into harvest.

Meanwhile, ending stocks of wheat have dipped to the lowest level since 2013 and could leave the door open for prices to get back to the \$9-\$9.50 range.

"We still think there's some bullish fundamentals out there," Pope said. "There's factors out there

that could take (wheat) stocks out of the world market, which would keep things competitive."

Despite the recent news of some grain shipments embarking from war-torn Ukraine, the pace of Ukrainian grain exports fell from 6 million tons before the Russian invasion to about 1 million tons since. And one recent shipment was rejected for quality issues after sitting in storage

for months.

"The fact is, they've been able to get some (grain) shipments out," Pope said. "But, to think Ukraine will suddenly be a major player in the world export market is far-fetched."

However, with total corn production on the rise globally, Pope believes that market is the least bullish of the three top Illinois crops heading into harvest. He foresees possibilities in

which corn could rally to \$6.60 or \$6.70 or where it could tumble to near the \$5 mark during harvest.

Either way, farmers should plan to manage volatility and price risk ahead.

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IFB President: Much collaboration during summer field days

By **RICHARD GUEBERT JR.**
Illinois Farm Bureau President

The heat and humidity may be cranked up during the summer, but Illinois farmers are still hard at work making management decisions on their farms.

With corn and soybeans planted across the state each spring, many farmers take time in the hotter months of the year to learn about new, innovative ways they can maximize crop yields while protecting the en-

vironment. Illinois Farm Bureau (IFB) supports these efforts through a series of Nutrient Stewardship Field Days each year.

Farmers care about conserving our natural resources. Preserving the soil and

water quality on Illinois farms minimizes costly inputs and maximizes crop yields. Balancing production costs allows us to grow the food American families rely on, while also creating opportunities for future generations to return to the family farm.

IFB's 2022 Nutrient Stewardship Field Days are funded through the organization's Nutrient Stewardship Grant Program. The program, now in its seventh year, committed more than \$150,000 to 2022 projects and is working with 25 counties on 21 projects, including field days, throughout the state. To date, IFB has partnered with County Farm Bureaus and others on more than 100 projects across 70 Illinois counties.

So, what happens during these field days?

Field day events offer



Andrew Margenot, assistant professor for the Crop Sciences Department at the University of Illinois, shares nutrient stewardship research with attendees at the Fulton County field day earlier this year. The event was hosted by Fulton County Farm Bureau, Illinois Farm Bureau, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago, U of I and the Illinois Nutrient Research and Education Council. (Illinois Farm Bureau file photo)

farmers the chance to share environmentally friendly tools that work well on their farms. Through research shared with their peers, researchers, universities, ag retailers and industry professionals, different types of on-farm projects can be developed to test the use of cover crops, livestock manure management, woodchip bioreactors and other technologies that improve the land. These efforts benefit surrounding communities and ultimately support our state's Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRS).

The Illinois NLRS, which was released by the Illinois Department of Agriculture and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency in July 2015, calls for wastewater treatment plants, urban areas and agricultural areas to reduce the state's phosphorous load by 25% and its nitrate-nitrogen load by 15% by 2025. The eventual target is a 45% reduction in the loss of these

nutrients to the Mississippi River.

Field days, on-farm research and collaborative projects are all integral parts of Illinois agriculture's role in working toward the state's NLRS. IFB supports these voluntary farmer efforts by focusing on education and outreach, supporting research and implementation of best management practices, and reporting progress as it's made.

I am proud of our farmers' efforts to minimize environmental impacts in Illinois. You can learn more about the progress Illinois farmers continue to make toward NLRS goals and see a full list of 2022 Nutrient Stewardship Field Days at www.ilfb.org/FieldDays.

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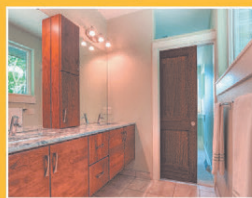
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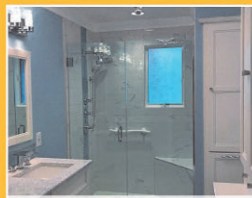
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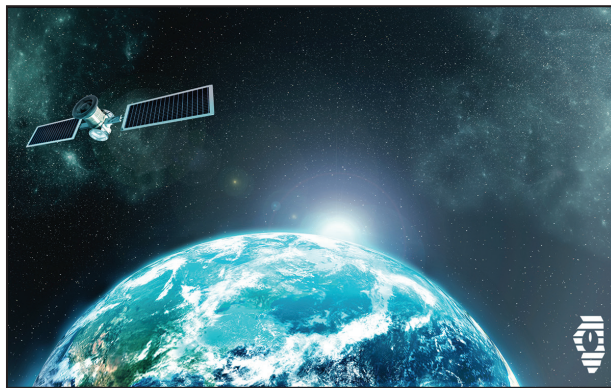
NASA data and agriculture: The connection that might surprise you

Space may be the final frontier, but for years, NASA has been leveraging technology to give farmers a leg up on getting more from their earth. It's true, and a bit of a well-kept secret, that there's a 50-year history of using satellite data for ag purposes. The idea that satellites are directly affecting things like the World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates (WASDE), pricing, markets, and food aid seems at best a remote thought looking up from the soybean fields of Illinois, but their impact grows every year.

"It started with global assessments of the food supply, and with the next generation you're seeing better crop production across the globe due to better data," says Bradley Doorn, Ph.D., Water Resources Application Area & Agriculture Application Area for NASA. "What's interesting is that often, farmers don't know it."

That's because typically, NASA data is integrated with other organizations, such as the U.S. Drought Monitor produced jointly by the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the USDA. In fact, much of the data funnels through the USDA, so farmers wouldn't necessarily know where it originates.

Crop-CASMA, for example, combines NASA data with USDA-NASS and George Mason University delivery systems. This web-based geospatial application lets farmers and other stakeholders see soil moisture and vegetation



For 50 years, satellite data has been used to advance agriculture. This trend shows no signs of stopping, with new uses and technologies in the works.

data to assess U.S. crop vegetation conditions and soil moisture conditions.

NASA Data Generates & Measures Groundwater

For groundwater specifically, NASA data fuels GRACE (Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment), which generates groundwater and soil moisture indicators weekly. To give you an idea of just how granular satellite data can be, this technology detects small changes in the Earth's gravity field caused by the redistribution of water on and beneath the land surface.

Paired satellites travel about 137 miles apart at an altitude of 300 miles and record small changes in the distance separating them as they encounter variations in the Earth's gravitational field. The result is maps of shallow groundwater, root zone soil moisture and surface soil moisture. And the data doesn't stop with water.

Global Crop Monitoring Using NASA Data

NASA data also contributes to crop monitoring globally, in an effort to provide earlier warnings on production shortfalls. One such platform is the

NASA Harvest Portal, which was created during the COVID-19 lockdown, when food supply concerns became paramount. Similarly, the NASA Harvest Crop Monitor provides monthly reports on global commodities and food security, with a focus on timely, science-driven data on crop conditions worldwide and by crop. Users are able to subscribe to the reports or visit the site for data as they choose.

While NASA data has long been feeding food production monitoring efforts, water use is a new and emerging field for satellite data leverage. "It's mostly relevant to irrigation currently," Doorn explains. "We're able to provide better and more consistent soil moisture data."

Water really may be the next frontier for satellite data, he believes. "The emerging idea farmers may want to pay attention to is that traditionally the NASA data is huge [and complex], and while it is free, it has not been easy to access," Doorn says.

See NASA, page 6



Farm Fresh Produce



Constructed wetlands are highly effective ways to cut agricultural nutrient runoff

CHICAGO — A 12-year research study by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and partners shows that building edge-of-field wetlands can significantly reduce excess nitrates and dissolved phosphorus from agricultural drainage tiles that might otherwise flow into freshwater streams and rivers in Illinois, causing water quality issues and potential public health risk.

In the new peer-reviewed study published in the *Journal of Environmental Quality*, scientists at TNC, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and The University of Illinois found that over the 12-year period even the smallest wetlands can reduce nitrates as much as 38% and dissolved phosphorus as much as 81%.

This is important because excess nutrients contribute to cyanobacterial blooms — a serious concern for the wellbeing of people and wildlife. Illinois is among the highest contributors of nitrogen and phosphorus to the Gulf of Mexico, where excess nutrients ultimately result in oxygen depleted areas called hypoxic zones that threaten the health of marine life and local economies.

Since 2005, agricultural landowners and farmers in the Mackinaw River watershed of central Illinois have worked with TNC and partners to integrate more than 20 wetlands into field-scale farm management operations, 16 of which are designed specifically to intercept and treat tile drainage.

All of the constructed wetlands have been enrolled in a federally funded Farm Bill conservation program, primarily the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The CRP program is designed such that landowners pay all upfront practice construction costs and receive reimbursements upon completion and certification of the project. However, these engineered wetlands are expensive to construct, and upfront costs ranging in the tens of thousands of dollars can be a major deterrent for many landowners.

“Despite their proven effectiveness, constructed wetlands can be difficult to implement on private lands, given that they provide downstream water quality improvements rather than direct on-farm economic or operational benefits to

agricultural landowners,” said Maria Lemke, Ph.D., director of conservation science at The Nature Conservancy in Illinois and the study’s lead author.

“As a longtime Illinois farmer, I know we need to protect our waterways,” said John Franklin, landowner and farmer in McLean County, Illinois. “We all live downstream of someone else, after all. And farmers want to keep our nutrients in our soil. This study shows that it’s possible through creative solutions, but we can’t afford to bear all of the cost.”

This emphasizes the importance of Farm Bill programs, like CRP, which provide support to farmers wanting to enroll in voluntary conservation programs. Recently, the Biden administration increased incentives for these wetlands and other CRP practices, providing a strong foundation for future partnerships, which will be needed to provide technical assistance, engineering, and other unmet expenses.

It also supports how investments in the 97 Soil and Water Conservation Districts across Illinois are critical, as their staff and



Building edge-of-field wetlands can significantly reduce excess nitrates and dissolved phosphorus from agricultural drainage tiles that might otherwise flow into freshwater streams and rivers in Illinois.

those of Natural Resources Conservation Service Districts and Farm Service Agency offices are the primary local point of contact for landowners and farmers interested in technical and financial assistance for conservation programs.

Illinois is among 12 states working together to implement the USEPA’s 2008 Gulf Hypoxia Action

Plan to improve water quality in the Mississippi River Basin and mitigate gulf hypoxia. Since 2015, Illinois has been working toward an ultimate reduction goal of 45% for both nitrogen and phosphorus.

However, a recent science assessment from the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRs) showed that nitrogen levels

in Illinois waterways have increased by 13% and phosphorus by 35% from baseline levels. These results suggest that it is unlikely Illinois will meet its water quality targets without new investment in conservation practices.

To read more about TNC’s work to protect waterways in Illinois, visit TNC’s website.

NASA

Continued from page 5

Understanding NASA Satellite Data with Technological Advancements

Today, NASA is working with partners to make the data both more available and easier to understand. One example is an Open ET Platform, which NASA is working on with Google and other partners to provide evapotranspi-

ration (ET) information for irrigators, billed as “filling the biggest data gap in water management.” Simply put, the platform uses advance science to provide easily accessible satellite-based estimates of ET.

“Soon, satellite data will all be in the cloud, and industry and farmer groups will be able to develop it,” he says. “These technolog-

ical advances will really open and allow a more diverse group of users to access it. We’re trying to bring the data to them and to more stakeholders.” As these technologies progress, Doorn says we will see an emergence in the coming years of more ability to work with the data at the industry level.

“We’re calling next year ‘The Year of Open

Science,’ which means having more people access the data,” he explains. “We’re going to start to see real new value in all of these areas in the coming years. Technology is moving so fast that the question becomes, ‘How do we use it, and how do we adjust to it?’”

It’s also important to recognize that the commercial industry and NASA are

not mutually exclusive. “It used to be that we were the only guys on the block,” says Doorn. “Now, it’s international, and we work with industry evaluating these commercial products.” That commercial side is just exploding, he says, and farmers are going to see more and more customized applications out of the commercial sector.

NASA Harvest, for

example, aims to facilitate delivering those benefits to ag and food. The group, which includes experts from universities, research centers, industry, space agencies, humanitarian organizations, ministries of agriculture, and more, has a mission to enable and advance adoption of satellite Earth observations.

In the end, maybe home is the final frontier.

Soil and Water Outcomes Fund enrollment open to Illinois farmers

The Soil and Water Outcomes Fund, a leading agricultural ecosystem services program, announced Illinois farmers are eligible to enroll up to 50,000 acres in its program that provides payment for environmental outcomes resulting from conservation practice implementation.

The USDA-NRCS, Ingredion, Nutrien, PepsiCo, and the Illinois Soybean Association are partnering with the Soil and Water Outcomes Fund in Illinois to catalyze farmer adoption of conservation practices that generate verifiable carbon reductions and water quality improvements.

The Soil and Water Outcomes Fund provides up to \$40 an acre to farmers who transition to on-farm conservation practices that yield outcomes like carbon sequestration and water quality improvements. New conservation practices that qualify could include tillage reductions, including strip-till, vertical till, and no-till, as well as implementing cover crops, extending crop rotations, and fertilizer management.

Farmers in northern Illinois are eligible to apply; a map of eligible areas are shown on the Soil and Water Outcomes Fund website.

“The Soil and Water Outcomes Fund team has been super helpful, and I know if I need anything I can shoot them a message,” said Betsy Rowland, of West Bureau Farms in Princeton, which enrolled in the program in 2021 and 2022. “Last season we had a slow winter and a windstorm put 3,000 acres of corn on the ground, so I hadn’t harvested one of our fields. The SWOF team was so understanding and helpful—no challenges, no arguments. They worked to help us figure things out and I really appreciated that.”

In 2022, the Soil and Water Outcomes Fund is seeking to enroll up to 50,000 acres of cropland in northern Illinois, an important supply shed for Ingredion, Nutrien, and Pepsi. This is a significant expansion of the program, which targeted 20,000 acres in Illinois in 2021. Farmers or landowners interested in enrolling should contact Conservation Agronomist Kevin Schabacker or enroll on the Soil and Water Outcomes Fund website (www.theoutcomesfund.com).

“As the most farmer friendly ecosystem services program in the industry today we pride ourselves on our ability to deliver practical and flexible conservation agronomy support to farmers to enhance the value of their land for years to come,” said Adam Kiel, managing director of the Soil and Water Outcomes Fund.

“We are thrilled to partner with the USDA-NRCS, Ingredion, Nutrien, and Pepsi to provide new conservation incentives to Illinois farmers and to deliver verified greenhouse gas emission reductions to meet corporate net zero target and to improve water quality on farms,” said Dan Yeoman, managing director of the Soil and Water Outcomes Fund.

ISA commends USDA support for double crop expansion

BLOOMINGTON – Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) commends the United States Department of Agriculture for its support expanding double crop soybean production in Illinois.

Following a May visit from President Biden to the farm of Jeff and Gina O’Connor in Kankakee, the USDA has been working to develop policy that helps Illinois farmers expand their crop rotation options and expanding the practice of double cropping soybeans following winter wheat. This process gives farmers the unique opportunity to

have two crops in a growing season. While double crop production is commonplace in southern Illinois, there is interest from many farmers in other parts of the state to add double cropping to their existing crop rotations.

USDA recently announced added flexibility for producers in accessing crop protection tools that encourage the expansion of the double cropping practice in Illinois. USDA is expanding counties that have double crop coverage as well as instituting a blanket written agreement process for farms in counties with double crop

history to have increased access to crop insurance options.

ISA Chairman Steve Pitstick thanks USDARMA staff for their strong support. “As a farmer, I am always looking for opportunities to add more tools. Gaining increased support for double cropping wheat followed by soybeans gives farmers another option to manage soil health and the profitability of their operations.

“I want to commend USDA and especially USDA RMA regional staff for their dedication to this issue and working to add

tools for Illinois farmers.”

The Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) checkoff and membership programs represent more than 43,000 soybean farmers in Illinois. The checkoff funds market development and utilization efforts while the membership program supports the government relations interests of Illinois soybean farmers at the local, state, and national level, through the Illinois Soybean Growers (ISG). For more information, visit the website www.ilsoy.org and www.ilsoygrowers.com.



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