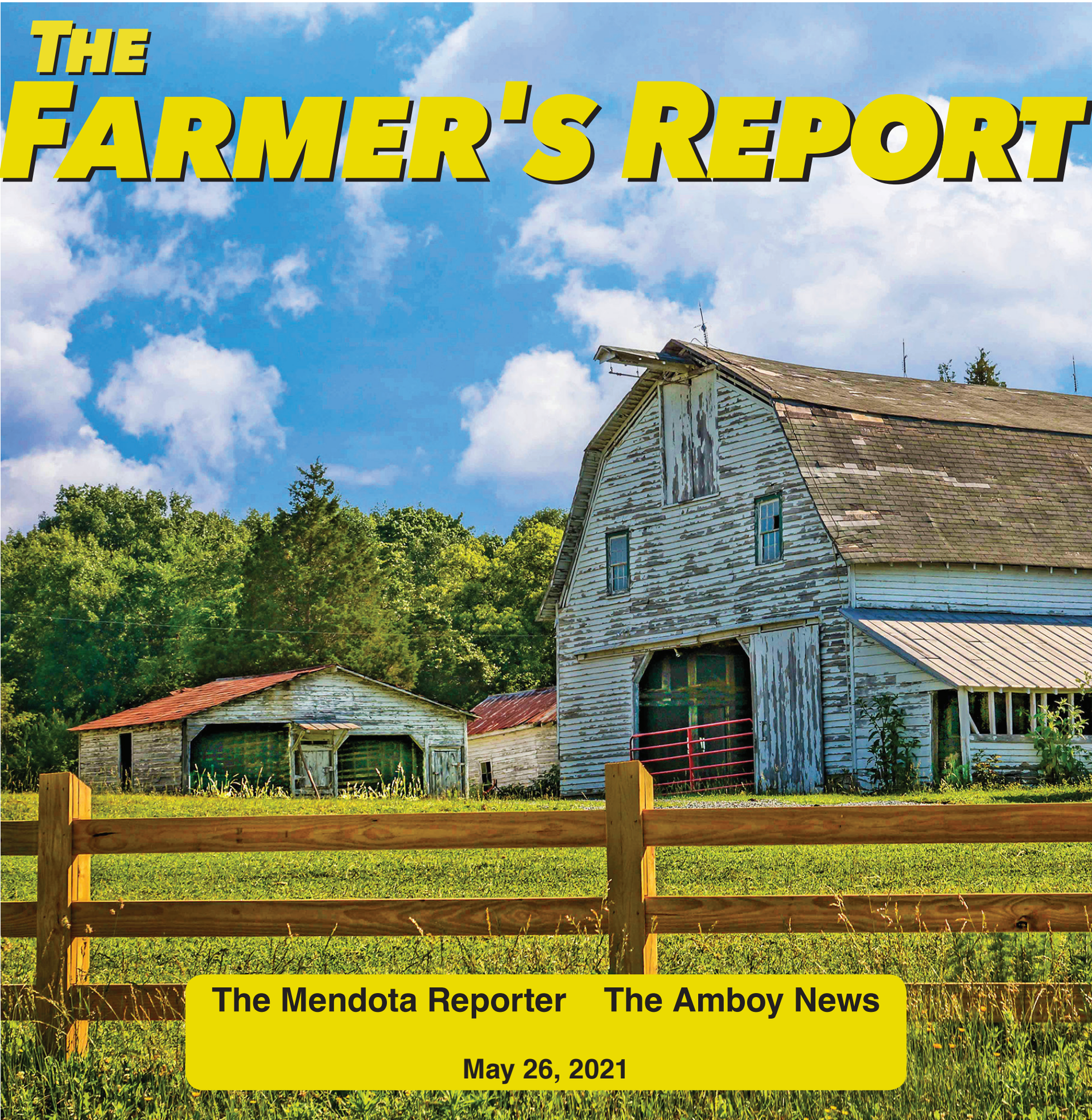
# The Farmer's Report



The Mendota Reporter  The Amboy News

May 26, 2021

# USDA expands and renews Conservation Reserve Program in effort to boost enrollment and address climate change

**WASHINGTON**–Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that USDA will open enrollment in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) with higher payment rates, new incentives, and a more targeted focus on the program's role in climate change mitigation. Additionally, USDA is announcing investments in partnerships to increase climate-smart agriculture, including $330 million in 85 Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) projects and $25 million for On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials. Secretary Vilsack made the announcement at the White House National Climate Task Force meeting to demonstrate USDA's commitment to putting American agriculture and forestry at the center of climate-smart solutions to address climate change.

The Biden-Harris Administration is working to leverage USDA conservation programs for climate mitigation, including continuing to invest in innovation partnership programs like RCPP and On-Farm Trials as well as strengthening programs like CRP to enhance their impacts.

"Sometimes the best solutions are right in front of you. With CRP, the United States has one of the world's most successful voluntary conservation programs. We need to invest in CRP and let it do what it does best—preserve topsoil, sequester carbon, and reduce the impacts of climate change," said Vilsack. "We also recognize that we can't do it alone. At the White House Climate Leaders Summit this week, we will engage leaders from all around the world to partner with us on addressing climate change. Here at home, we're working in partnership with producers and local organizations through USDA programs to bring new voices and communities to the table to help combat climate change."

### Conservation Reserve Program

USDA's goal is to enroll up to 4 million new acres in CRP by raising rental payment rates and expanding the number of incentivized environmental practices allowed under the program. CRP is one of the world's largest voluntary conservation programs with a long track record of preserving topsoil, sequestering carbon, and reducing nitrogen runoff, as well providing healthy habitat for wildlife.

CRP is a powerful tool when it comes to climate mitigation, and acres currently enrolled in the program mitigate more than 12 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent ($CO_2e$). If USDA reaches its goal of enrolling an additional 4 million acres into the program, it will mitigate an additional 3 million metric tons of $CO_2$ equivalent and prevent 90 million pounds of nitrogen and 33 million tons of sediment from running into our waterways each year.

"We want to make sure CRP continues to be a valuable and effective conservation resource for our producers for decades to come," said Vilsack. "USDA will continue to find new and creative ways of putting producers and landowners at the center of climate-smart practices that generate revenue and benefit our planet."

CRP's long-term goal is to establish valuable land cover to help improve water quality, improve soil health and carbon sequestration, prevent soil erosion, and reduce loss of wildlife habitat. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) offers a number of signups, including the general signup and continuous signup, which are both open now, as well as a CRP Grasslands and pilot programs focused on soil health and clean water.

### New Climate-Smart Practice Incentive

To target the program on climate change mitigation, FSA is introducing a new Climate-Smart Practice Incentive for CRP general and continuous signups that aims to increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Climate-Smart CRP practices include establishment of trees and permanent grasses, development of wildlife habitat, and wetland restoration. The Climate-Smart Practice Incentive is annual, and the amount is based on the benefits of each practice type.

### Higher Rental Rates and New Incentives

In 2021, CRP is capped at 25 million acres, and currently 20.8 million acres are enrolled. Furthermore, the cap will gradually increase to 27 million acres by 2023. To help increase producer interest and enrollment, FSA is:

Adjusting soil rental rates. This enables additional flexibility for rate adjustments, including a possible increase in rates where appropriate.

Increasing payments for Practice Incentives from 20% to 50%. This incentive for continuous CRP practices is based on the cost of establishment and is in addition to cost share payments.

Increasing payments for water quality practices. Rates are increasing from 10% to 20% for certain water quality benefiting practices available through the CRP continuous signup, such as grassed waterways, riparian buffers, and filter strips.

Establishing a CRP Grassland minimum rental rate. This benefits more than 1,300 counties with rates currently below the minimum.

### Enhanced Natural Resource Benefits

To boost impacts for natural resources, FSA is:

Moving State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) practices to the CRP continuous signup. Unlike the general signup, producers can sign up year-round for the continuous signup and be eligible for additional incentives.

Establishing National Grassland Priority Zones. This aims to increase enrollment of grasslands in migratory corridors and environmentally sensitive areas.

Making Highly Erodible Land Initiative (HELI) practices available in both the general and continuous signups.

Expanding Prairie Pothole Soil Health and Watershed Programs

# New dairy cattle nutrition, management may improve production, profit

**ST CLOUD, Minn.** — The dairy industry fuels the U.S. economy, supporting nearly 3 million jobs directly and another 2 million jobs in related industries, according to the U.S. Dairy Export Council. Illinois ranks eighth in the number of jobs generated by the dairy industry. As exports of dairy products rise, the need for better dairy production and management also rises.

Learn the latest information in dairy nutrition and management at the 2021 Four-State Dairy Nutrition and Management Conference to be held June 9 and 10. The virtual platform will include interaction and discussion between participants and speakers.

On June 9, University of Illinois animal science professor Jim Drakley will explaining a new system for determining the nutrient requirements of young dairy calves. Bill Weiss, Ohio State University, will discuss updated energy systems for dairy cows. Following both presentations, the two experts will join nutritionists in a panel discussion on the future of feeding cows.

On June 10, Jesse Goff of Iowa State University and Laura Hernandez of University of Wisconsin will discuss hypocalcemia treatment and prevention. Kan Kalscheur, USDA Forage Research Center, will show how to improve lactation performance using high digestible forage. Luiz Ferreretto, University of Wisconsin, will discuss corn silage fiber digestibility.

All presentations are pre-recorded and available to participants before the conference. Speakers will provide a live 5-minute summary, followed by a 45- to 60-minute question and discussion period. Recordings will be available for 45 days following the conference.

Select breakout topics include:

Lackluster calves: Using lung ultrasound to identify a "calories-out" problem

Interpretation and use of new passive immunity guidelines

Optimizing the use of sexed semen

Nutritional strategies for alleviating heat stress in dairy cows

Dairy heifer coccidiosis research with novel egg antibodies and essential oils

Using summer-to-winter ratios to evaluate summer slump

What is happening in the gut in the scouring calf and effective fluid therapy

Mineral bioavalability

For details and to register, one may visit fourstatedairy.org/ or contact Jim Salfer at salfe001@umn.edu, 320-203-6093.

The conference registration fee is $100. This conference is a collaborative effort of Iowa State University Extension, University of Illinois Extension, University of Minnesota Extension, and University of Wisconsin-Extension.

# Illinois soybean and pork producer teamwork targets billion-dollar seed-to-feed value improvement

**BLOOMINGTON** – A joint program designed to advance the livestock feed value of soybeans through careful selection of soybean varieties is being undertaken by the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) and the Illinois Pork Producers Association (IPPA).

The program will focus on and coordinate communications and industry relations activities conducted by both associations. This teamwork will increase the ability to reach both soybean farmers and pig producers with information they need to increase soybean quality, improve soybean industry revenue and maintain pig production performance and producer profitability.

Objectives for the joint program include increasing both the bushel value and feed value of Illinois-grown soybeans; demonstrating how and why soybean quality and feed value are declining; highlighting how soybeans are being replaced by synthetic alternatives that reduce gross farm income and impact swine health; and positioning high-quality soybeans as the solution to reversing farm income losses while maximizing pork industry success.

"Improving soybean quality is essential if we are going to continue meeting the unique needs of pork producers, and to maintain and grow soybeans' share in critical livestock feed markets," says Brock Willard, an ISA director who raises both soybeans and pigs in Pittsfield, Ill. "This collaboration between the two associations is a win-win for both soybean and pork producers, and it should have a positive impact on the balance sheets for both groups."

"Working closely with the Illinois Pork Producers Association will be very powerful because of the innovation in bringing the concepts of 'seed and feed' together," says Dr. Linda Kull, director of ag innovations for ISA's checkoff program. "This joint effort opens doors to grassroots teamwork with other major pork-producing states and throughout the soybean and pork industries."

IPPA District 1 director Jill Brokaw grows soybeans and operates a farrow-to-finish and PIC gilt multiplier operation, Biddle Farm, Inc., in Joy, Ill. She also coordinates feed logistics with contract growers in western Illinois and eastern Iowa. "The teamwork between ISA and IPPA is a very positive development because it brings both ends of the value chain together," Brokaw says. "Yield and quality are important to soybean farmers and pig producers alike. We look at feed ingredients as 'quality in, quality out'. The ability to unlock billions of dollars in value at the soybean variety level requires everyone knowing how easily shared value can increase at no cost to soybean farmers."

The discovery that selection of soybean varieties with high livestock feed value provided mutual benefits to both soybean farmers and livestock producers was made six years ago by ISA and gave birth to that association's High Yield PLUS Quality (HY+Q) program.

Checkoff-funded research has determined that half of the soybean varieties available today already offer higher feed value than the other half. Taking that discovery a step further, ISA, university and industry research has analyzed over 50,000 soybean samples and determined which varieties best meet the unique needs of livestock producers based on livestock feed value scores as determined by amino acid profiles.

Feeding soybean meal made from high-value soybean varieties lowers feed costs, increases livestock feed efficiency, and benefits the processing and feed industry by supporting sustainable livestock production. If all farmers selected soybean varieties with high livestock feed value, pork producers could reduce feed costs by up to 40 cents per finishing pig.

In addition, soybean checkoff, university and industry research show that soybeans have anti-viral, anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects at the cellular level, naturally promoting growth and helping pigs return to health after PRRSV infection.

For a comprehensive list of hundreds of soybean varieties and their livestock feed value scores across many national and regional seed brands – and to order a postage-paid sample kit so you can have the soybeans you are growing tested for amino acid, protein and oil content – go to www.soyvalue.com.

# Growing sweet corn at higher densities doesn't increase root lodging risk

**URBANA** – Sweet corn growers and processors could be bringing in more profits by exploiting natural density tolerance traits in certain hybrids. That's according to 2019 research from USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and University of Illinois scientists.

But since root systems get smaller as plant density goes up, some in the industry are concerned about the risk of root lodging with greater sweet corn density. New research says those concerns are unjustified.

"Root lodging can certainly be a problem for sweet corn, but not because of plant density. What really matters is the specific hybrid and the environment, those major rainfall and wind events that set up conditions for root structural failure," says Marty Williams, USDA-ARS ecologist, affiliate professor in the Department of Crop Sciences at Illinois, and author on a new study in Crop Science.

Williams and his co-authors used multiple approaches to understand the effects of planting density on root lodging in sweet corn. First, they planted sweet corn hybrid DMC 21-84 – a density-tolerant type that happens to be one of the most widely grown commercial hybrids – at five densities in experimental plots on U of I farms. When plants were at the tasseling stage, the researchers simulated a natural lodging event by flooding the field and knocking the corn over with a two-by-four.

"We mimicked a root lodging event with pure brute force," Williams says.

When corn is flattened in the process of root lodging, it can, depending on the growth stage, right itself through the plant's natural inclination to grow toward the light. As corn grows back upward from its repose, the base of the stem often carries a curved reminder of its lodging legacy, known as a gooseneck.

Williams and his team found most plants recovered to a near vertical position, albeit with a bit of goosenecking, within a few days of the artificial lodging event. They also measured yield metrics, and found no statistical difference in sweet corn yield between lodged and non-lodged plants.

But a two-by-four and brute force can't replace nature.

"Testing a crop's root lodging potential experimentally is inherently difficult. Simply put, a natural root lodging event may not happen in any given field experiment. As such, phenotyping crops for root lodging often employs the use of artificially created lodging events, like the ones we created," Williams says. "While artificially created root lodging events are helpful, used alone they often fail to capture a broad range of environments in which the crop is grown."

That's why the research team leveraged data from on-farm sweet corn trials across Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Between 2013 and 2017, the team evaluated economic optimum density for DMC 21-84 and 10 other hybrids under real-world farm management. And during that time, natural lodging events happened to occur in six of the 30 fields.

"We happened to take notes on lodging severity. It wasn't our specific focus at the time, but we figured, let's go ahead and score this and maybe we'll use it later. Turns out it was great that we collected root lodging data, because we were able to use it for this study," Williams says.

Those fortuitous notes showed that when sweet corn density increased from the current standard to the economic optimum density, typically a few thousand more plants per acre, there was absolutely no difference in the severity of lodging.

"What excited me about this work is that we combined an experiment where we created lodging artificially and looked at the response, and then we also tapped into this network of naturally occurring events. Together, they told a pretty convincing story," Williams says. "Simply put, root lodging potential should not keep us from using plant density tolerant hybrids and growing them at their correct density. I mean, there's always the possibility that root lodging could occur, but it's not going to be due to planting a few more plants."

The article, "Economic optimum plant density of sweet corn does not increase root lodging incidence," is published in Crop Science [DOI: 10.1002/csc2.20546]. Co-authors include Williams, Nicholas Hausman, Daljeet Dhaliwal, and Martin Bohn, Department of Crop Sciences, and Tony Grift, Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering. Both departments are in the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences at the University of Illinois. Williams' primary affiliation is with the USDA-ARS Global Change and Photosynthesis Research Unit in Urbana, Illinois.

# Greener livestock industry viewed as key part of climate solutions

By DANIEL GRANT
Illinois Farm Bureau

The U.S. livestock industry continues to meet growing demand for its products around the world while reducing its carbon footprint.

This despite an onslaught of claims to the contrary, including a recent academic study from North Carolina that attempts to link ag emissions with health issues and fatalities around the country.

"Science does tell a different story than what this academic study claims," Jennifer Tirey, executive director of the Illinois Pork Producers Association (IPPA), told the RFD Radio Network.

What has the livestock industry done to become greener at a time it also faces increased demand? Tirey described monumental progress in the hog industry the past 50 years.

"We've doubled production from 12 billion to 24 billion pounds, yet we've been able to reduce our land use by 76 percent, water usage by 25 percent and our overall carbon footprint by more than 7 percent," she said.

Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from the U.S. pork industry currently account for about 0.4 percent of all GHG emissions nationwide, compared to 29 percent from the transportation sector and about 25 percent from electricity usage, Tirey noted.

"I think there are a lot of stories not being explained clearly. It's almost like they're trying to put fear into consumers," the IPPA leader noted of anti-livestock claims, such as the North Carolina-based ag emissions study. "That study also encourages consumers to choose a plant-based diet. So, you wonder about the motivation of the study to begin with."

It's a similar story in the cattle industry where, despite major environmental strides, farmers remain the target of negative campaigns.

Yet, better breeding, genetics and nutrition increased efficiency as it takes 93 million head of cattle to meet higher demand now than it did in the 1970s, when it required 140 million head of cattle. The beef industry currently accounts for about 2 percent of all GHG emissions, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

In fact, when managed correctly, cows help restore healthy soils, conserve sensitive species, enhance ecological functions and can help mitigate climate change, according to the University of California–Davis.

"Farmers who raise any species of livestock implement various tools and technologies to improve not only their respective farms, but also to improve sustainability by including cover crops, improved genetics and nutrient management on their farming operations," said Tasha Bunting, Illinois Farm Bureau assistant director of commodities and livestock programs. "This has allowed today's farmers to produce more, using fewer resources."


**When managed correctly, cows help restore healthy soils, conserve sensitive species, enhance ecological functions and can help mitigate climate change, according to the University of California-Davis. (Credit: Illinois Farm Bureau file photo)**

Shifting to milk production, the Journal of Animal Sciences reported the U.S. dairy industry considerably reduced its environmental impact the past 75 years.

It currently accounts for about 1 percent of GHG emissions.

"Industrywide, we've definitely shifted to look more at sustainability, with a goal of being carbon-neutral by 2050," said Bill Deutsch, chairman of the Illinois Division of Midwest Dairy and DeKalb County Farm Bureau member who farms with his brother, Pat, near Sycamore. "In general, a lot of people don't realize in dairy production we're just a fraction over 1 percent of the carbon footprint (nationwide)."

The U.S. dairy industry produced about 186 billion pounds of milk from 9.2 million cows in 2007 compared to 117 billion pounds of milk from 25.6 million cows in 1944. Over that time, the carbon footprint from a gallon of milk produced in 2007 was just 37 percent of that produced in 1944, according to a Cornell University study.

# Illinois, Nebraska scientists propose improvements to precision crop irrigation

**URBANA** – With threats of water scarcity complicating the need to feed a growing global population, it is more important than ever to get crop irrigation right. Overwatering can deplete local water supplies and lead to polluted runoff, while underwatering can lead to sub-optimal crop performance. Yet few farmers use science-based tools to help them decide when and how much to water their crops.

A new University of Illinois-led study identifies obstacles and solutions to improve performance and adoption of irrigation decision support tools at the field scale.

"We wanted to offer our perspective on how to achieve field-scale precision irrigation with the most recent and advanced technologies on data collection, plant water stress, modeling, and decision-making," says Jingwen Zhang, postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences (NRES) at Illinois and lead author on the article in Environmental Research Letters.

Zhang says many farmers rely on traditional rules of thumb, including visual observation, crop calendars, and what the neighbors are doing, to decide when and how much to water. Better data and more advanced technologies exist to help make those decisions, but they aren't being leveraged currently to their full potential.

For example, some fields are equipped with soil moisture sensors or cameras that detect changes in crop appearance, but there aren't enough of them to provide accurate information across fields. Satellites can monitor vegetation from space, but the spatial and temporal resolution of satellite images is often too large to help make decisions at the field scale.

Kaiyu Guan, assistant professor in NRES, Blue Waters professor with the National Center for Supercomputing Applications, and project leader on the study, pioneered a way to fuse high-resolution and high-frequency satellite data into one integrated high spatial-temporal resolution product to help track soil and plant conditions.

"Based on remote sensing fusion technology and advanced modeling, we can help farmers get a fully scalable solution remotely," he says. "That's powerful. It can potentially be a revolutionary technology for farmers, not only in the U.S., but also smallholder farmers in developing countries."

With modern satellite technology and Guan's fusion model, data acquisition won't be a limiting factor in future precision irrigation products. But it's still important to define plant water stress appropriately.

Historically, irrigation decisions were based solely on measures of soil moisture. Guan's group recently called for the agricultural industry to redefine drought, not based on soil moisture alone, but on its interaction with atmospheric dryness.

"If we consider the soil-plant-atmosphere-continuum as a system, which reflects both soil water supply and atmospheric water demand, we can use those plant-centric metrics to define plant water stress to trigger irrigation," Zhang says. "Again, if we use our data fusion methods and process-based modelling, we can achieve precision irrigation with very high accuracy and also high resolution."

The researchers also looked at challenges regarding farmer adoption of existing decision support tools. Because current products are based on less-than-ideal data sources, Guan says producers are reluctant to switch from traditional rule-of-thumb methods to tools that may not be much more reliable. Non-intuitive user interfaces, data privacy, and inflexible timing compound the problem.

Trenton Franz, associate professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) and a coauthor, says farmers will be more likely to adopt precision irrigation decision tools if they are accurate down to the field scale, flexible, and easy to use. His and Guan's teams are working on technologies to fill this need and are actively testing the technology in irrigated fields in Nebraska. This includes participating with Daran Rudnick, assistant professor at UNL and co-author of the study, in the UNL Testing Ag Performance (TAPS) program, which focuses on technology adoption and education for producers across the region.

"We're pretty close. We have real-time evapotranspiration data, and we're adding the soil moisture component and the irrigation component. Probably in less than a year this will be launched as a prototype and can be tested among the farmer community," Guan says.

# Hemp growers help new industry grow by joining research project

**URBANA** – Industrial hemp is one of the fasting growing crops across Midwestern fields and researchers are recruiting producers in the race to learn more.

For the second year, University of Illinois Extension commercial agriculture educators are working with growers to source field data that provides producers with cutting-edge research through the Midwestern Hemp Database.

Producers who participate in the 2021 program will receive discounted cannabinoid testing. Applications are available now through July 16. Visit go.illinois.edu/HempDatabase to review eligibility information and fill out the online survey to start the application process.

"The database is an interactive platform, updated weekly during the growing season that helps provide regional insight for growers," says Phillip Alberti, an Illinois Extension commercial agriculture educator. "Together, we're working to understand the performance of production practices and several hundred hemp cultivars used in the Midwest."

In 2020, more than 130 hemp growers submitted information about their crop. University staff analyzed and share that data with the public through the public database. In exchange for their involvement, growers receive discounted cannabinoid laboratory testing on samples.

Results from the 2020 growing season are available at go.illinois.edu/MHDReport.

"As this is a new crop, we simply do not know what is and is not working in the Midwest," Alberti says. "This project allows us to learn a lot in a short period of time while allowing growers to conduct their own analysis."

The database is useful for processors and regulators. Information from the Midwestern Hemp Database was used to support rule changes in the USDA Final Rule.

"The impending adoption of these rules has made 2021 another valuable year to gather information for producers," Alberti says.

The database is a collaborative project between private laboratories Rock River Laboratory, Inc., Pride Analytics and Consulting and ACT laboratories, and four Midwestern land grant universities: Michigan State, University of Illinois, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Purdue University.

"This project puts data from around the Midwest into an easily accessible and interactive format," Alberti says. "Growers can feel confident using this database to make informed decisions about their operation."

Anyone interested in participating in this program can contact Alberti at palberti@illinois.edu or 217-300-7392.

# Cover crops deliver big bang for the buck

**By KRIS REYNOLDS**
Midwest regional director,
American Farmland Trust

Illinois is blessed with the black gold that feeds America: rich, deep soils that make it one of the highest producing regions in the world. Agriculture is the largest economic sector in the state, and Illinois is among the top producers of corn and soybeans in the nation. My family has been part of this proud farming tradition for five generations.

Unfortunately, despite the stewardship of dedicated farmers, erosion is steadily taking its toll on this irreplaceable resource. We've lost about half of the organic matter that we had when we started plowing.

But there's a proven way to prevent erosion, improve water quality, boost productivity and help farmers stay on the land — a practice that has gained widespread attention lately for its ability to draw carbon from the atmosphere and sequester it in the soil.

You might be expecting something high tech, but this winning strategy is the age-old farming practice of planting cover crops.

Farmers use cover crops between growing seasons to hold the soil in place and prevent excess nutrients from entering waterways. The Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy estimates that planting cover crops can reduce nutrient losses from croplands by at least 30 percent, which would go a long way to preventing toxic algae blooms in local lakes and the Gulf of Mexico. Plus, cover crops save farmers time and money on fertilizers and herbicides. Healthier soils are also more resistant to disturbances like pest outbreaks, disease or extreme weather events.

There are climate benefits as well. Planting cover crops, along with other conservation agriculture practices, has the potential to reduce emissions and sequester millions of metric tons of harmful greenhouse gases in soils. These practices can dramatically cut the agricultural sector's greenhouse gas footprint.

But as of 2019, cover crops were grown on less than 6 percent of Illinois cropland.

So why don't more farmers do it? Farming is a business with a lot of overhead and small margins. It's risky to change the way you operate, and it takes a few years to see the payoff. Farmers think of cover crops just like any other farm input. At the end of the day, I make management decisions to improve the profitability of my farming operation. If I don't, there won't be any sixth- or seventh-generation Reynolds farming in Montgomery County.

That's why the Illinois Department of Agriculture launched the Fall Covers for Spring Savings Cover Crop Premium Discount Program in 2019. The idea was simple: Offer a $5 crop insurance discount for every acre planted in cover crops.

It's working. The Illinois farmland using cover crops has doubled since 2018, to around 1.4 million acres. Now the problem is that we can't keep up. We are turning away almost four times the number of acres as the program has capacity to enroll.

If we want to meet the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy's water quality and soil health goals, now is the time to scale up the Fall Covers program.

As lawmakers sit down to make budget decisions over the next few weeks, they should consider increasing the Fall Covers for Spring Savings program to be available for at least 200,000 acres in Illinois.

Other states are excited about the idea of a good stewardship incentive. Iowa started a similar cover crop program before Illinois, and a number of other states, like Wisconsin and Indiana, have plans in the works.

We could even see this in the next federal Farm Bill. Farming practices that benefit the soil, water, climate and taxpayer dollars enjoy rare bipartisan support in Washington. With Federal Farm Bill support, a crop insurance incentive program can become a driver of an exponential increase of conservation practices on farms nationally, helping the Biden administration achieve its goal for a net-zero economy by 2050.

Illinois' success can be everyone's opportunity.

(Kris Reynolds is American Farmland Trust's Midwest regional director and leads and oversees key projects and programs, including the Upper Macoupin Creek Watershed Partnership and the Vermillion Headwaters Watershed Partnership in Illinois, where he coordinates activities with farmers and landowners that improve water quality, improve soil health, enhance nutrient efficiency, utilize conservation cropping systems, and meet the goals of Illinois' Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy.)

# Will you save a life? Register to support farm mental health efforts

**URBANA** – America's farm families are paying a heavy mental toll as they deal with unpredictable weather, variable input costs, long work hours, and unpredictable commodity prices. A gap exists between farm families and the resources they need to keep them safe.

University of Illinois Extension believes ag producers, agribusiness personnel, and others who support the agricultural community can stand in the gap and connect Illinois farmers with the resources they need.

"As their neighbors, customers, business partners, and clients, you may feel helpless," says Karla Belzer, Extension family life educator, "but Illinois Extension can provide you the tools to identify mental health issues in our agricultural communities and the communication skills to support and save lives."

Two day-long online training opportunities are available: June 29 and July 28. Participants should select one date when they register at go.illinois.edu/mentalhealth2021. Register by June 15 for the June training. Trainings begin at 8 a.m. and end at 3:30 p.m.

Prior to the live video conference, participants will complete a two-hour self-paced online course. Topics covered in the webinar include mental illness symptoms, substance use signs and addiction, crisis interaction, trauma, and self care.

The work is supported by Illinois Extension specialists Josie Rudolphi and Courtney Cuthbertson as part of the North Central Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Center, funded by USDA NIFA.

If you will need an accommodation in order to participate, please email Belzer at kbelzer@illinois.edu. Early requests are strongly encouraged to allow sufficient time to meet your access needs.

# June Agricultural, Area surveys underway by NASS

**SPRINGFIELD** — During the next several weeks, USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) will conduct two major midyear surveys – the June Agricultural Survey and the June Area Survey.

NASS will contact nearly 4,000 Illinois farmers to determine crop acreage and stock levels as of June 1. Growers can respond to the June Agricultural Survey online, by phone or mail. They will be asked to provide information on planted and harvested acreage, including acreage for biotech crops and grain stocks.

For the June Area Survey, agency representatives will interview farmers by phone. Growers will be asked to provide information on crop acreage, grain stocks, livestock inventory, land values and value of sales.

"NASS safeguards the privacy of all respondents by keeping all individual information confidential and publishing the data in aggregate form only to ensure that no operation or producer can be identified," said Mark Schleusener, Illinois State Statistician. "We recognize this is a hectic time for farmers, but the information they provide helps U.S. agriculture remain viable and capable. I urge them to respond to these surveys and thank them for their cooperation."

NASS will analyze the survey information and publish the results in a series of USDA reports, including the annual acreage and quarterly grain stocks reports to be released June 30. All NASS reports are available online.

# MAKE FARM SAFETY THE TOP CROP!

This message brought to you by: