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(PHOTO BY CATRINA RAWSON OF FARMWEEK)

A bipartisan group of lawmakers are sponsoring legislation to restrict the eligibility of the 45Z tax credit to renewable fuels derived only from domestically sourced feedstock and extending the credit for seven years.

Lawmakers propose 45Z extension, limiting to U.S. feedstocks

BY TAMMIE SLOUP
FARMWEEK

A bipartisan group of lawmakers are sponsoring legislation to restrict the eligibility of the 45Z tax credit to renewable fuels derived only from domestically sourced feedstock and

extending the credit for seven years.

The bicameral and bipartisan Farmer First Fuel Incentives Act is coled by U.S. Sens. Roger Marshall, R-Kansas, and Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, with companion legislation introduced by U.S. Reps. Tracey Mann, R-Kansas, and Marcy Kap-

tur, D-Ohio.

Created by the Inflation Reduction Act, the Clean Fuel Production Credit (45Z) for low carbon fuels, including sustainable aviation fuel (SAF), will be in effect from 2025 to 2027, which is not enough time, lawmakers said.

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From page 2

Extending the credit to 10 years would give the ethanol industry the time and financial incentive to build up the infrastructure needed for the U.S. to be less reliant on foreign fuel, open new markets for farmers and increase ethanol production across the Midwest, according to a news release.

“It’s very tough in farm country with high interest rates and low commodity prices, which is exactly why we can’t have a tax policy that will lower commodity prices even more,” Marshall said. “While we support free trade and open markets,

we do not believe foreign feedstocks should be incentivized through the hard-earned dollars of U.S. taxpayers to the detriment of American farmers.”

Illinois Farm Bureau President Brian Duncan submitted comments to USDA in July stressing the 45Z tax credit should benefit only producers manufacturing biofuels from feedstocks sourced from the U.S. The department received 260 comments.

“The use of low-carbon commodities provides new market opportunities for U.S. farmers. However, without the proper framework, farm-

ers may face unnecessary barriers limiting access to these markets,” Duncan wrote. “It is imperative that the program design and structure for low-carbon feedstocks is done correctly the first time so there will be optimal participation from farmers across the country.”

Illinois’ two senators and four representatives, including Nikki Budzinski, D-Springfield; Darin LaHood, R-Dunlap; Eric Sorenson, D-Moline; and Robin Kelly, D-Matthewson, previously signed onto bipartisan letters in support of limiting the credit to domestically produced renewable fuels derived from domestical-

ly produced feedstocks.

Failure to properly structure the feedstock sustainability criteria associated with 45Z credit will incentivize the use of foreign feedstocks over those from U.S. suppliers, contrary to the intent of Congress, the senators’ July 30 letter to Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen stated.

Commodity group leaders applauded the recently introduced legislation.

“Corn growers are making every effort to help the airline industry lower its greenhouse gas emissions through the use of corn ethanol,” said Minnesota farmer and

National Corn Growers Association President Harold Wolle. “We are deeply appreciative of these leaders for introducing legislation that establishes requirements for the tax credit that will level the playing field for America’s corn growers.”

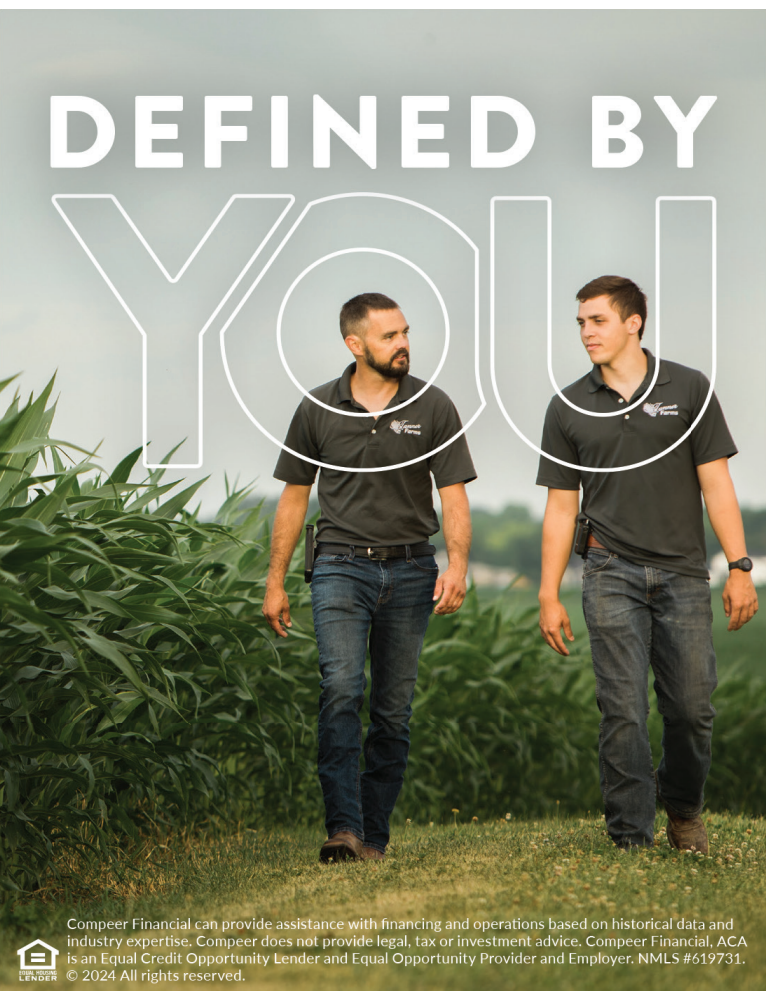
American Soybean Association President Josh Gackle said farmers who grow the crops utilized in biofuels take pride in reducing greenhouse gas emissions while supporting the U.S. economy and energy independence.

“However, for continued growth of America’s promising biofuels industry, U.S. farmers need the

support of a final 45Z rule that prioritizes domestically sourced feedstock,” said Gackle, a North Dakota soybean farmer.

USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack has said restricting the credit to domestically produced feedstocks could spur retaliation against U.S. ag exports. The ag secretary has also said he is “confident” the clean fuels tax credit will be finalized by January.

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FALL HARVEST

Harvest weather dry, starting to feel more like fall

BY RHIANNON BRANCH
FARMWEEK

FALL crops are being harvested, but recent weather felt more like summer.

State Climatologist Trent Ford said many Illinois residents got a taste of fall temperatures in early September, but the month ended much warmer.

“September average temperatures ranged from the mid-60s in northern Illinois to the low-70s in southern Illinois,” he said.

“Most of the state was between 1 and 5 degrees above normal, with the highest departures in the northern third of the state.”

Ford said there were a lot of regional variations in temperature in September with daytime highs reaching 96 degrees in Mount Vernon and 95 in Peoria, while nighttime lows dipped down to 39 in Normal and 36 in Elgin. It was the second-warmest September on record in Chicago.

But it all evened out in the end with the statewide average September temperature pegged at 68.5 degrees, 1.8 degrees above the 1991-2020 average.

Ford said rainfall also varied by region in September.

“Total September precipitation ranged from less

than 1 inch in far northwest Illinois to over 8 inches in parts of southern Illinois,” he said. “Most areas of the state south of Interstate 64 were 1 to 5 inches wetter than normal for the month, while much of central and northern Illinois were 1 to 3 inches drier than normal.”

Ford said rain from remnants of Hurricane Helene in the southern portion of the state caused the drastic differences, noting that it was the second-driest September on record in Mount Carroll to the north while Carbondale in the south was the fourth wettest with more than 8 inches for the month.

Statewide total Sep-



(PHOTO BY CATRINA RAWSON OF FARMWEEK)

An open weather window allowed farmers to accelerate the harvest pace in recent weeks, including this Peoria County field. Soybean harvest was 24% complete statewide as of Sept. 30, which was 13 points ahead of the average pace.

tember precipitation was pegged at 2.73 inches, 0.62 inches below the 1991-2020 average.

Drought remains a concern

Considering those totals, Ford said drought is still a concern in the central and northern portions of the state.

“Much of the region had a top-five-driest start to September on record, including the driest first 20 days of the month in Quincy, Danville, Moline, and Rockford,” he said.

As of Oct. 3, the U.S. Drought Monitor indicated 70% of the state is experiencing abnormally dry to moderate drought conditions.

Meanwhile the hurricane eliminated drought concerns for most of southern Illinois and dropped rain across the Ohio River Basin that improved water levels on the Mississippi River.

Statewide topsoil moisture supply was rated 44% short to very short, 49% adequate and just 7% surplus as of Sept. 30, the National Agricultural Statistics Service reported.

Harvest activity shifts into high gear

The overall warmer and

drier September conditions continued to push the state’s harvest pace ahead of average.

USDA reported as of Sept. 30, 21% of corn and 24% of soybeans were harvested in Illinois compared to the five-year average of 16% and 11%, respectively. Winter wheat planting is also ahead of normal at 11% complete with 2% emerged.

Looking ahead, the Climate Prediction Center shows higher odds of a warmer and drier than normal October, but Ford said there will still be a more noticeable transition to fall conditions.

Meanwhile, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is predicting higher chances of a wetter than normal winter season.

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FALL HARVEST

Recent farm accidents alert safety experts

BY PHYLLIS COULTER
FARMWEEK

ALREADY this harvest season, grain entrapments, utility task vehicle (UTV) crashes and other farm accidents have been reported across the state. The RFD Radio Network talked to a farm safety specialist to get relevant safety tips.

UTV vehicles

"We are seeing more and more UTV accidents," said Amy Rademaker, farm safety specialist with Rademaker Agricultural Safety and Health Services.

"There are seatbelts in those for a reason."

UTVs are being used at times as a substitute for cars and trucks, but they don't provide the same protection for drivers and passengers, including airbags. UTVs are not designed for "joyrides" but for practical purposes getting back and forth to the field and carrying tools, she said.

She encourages both UTVs and recreational all-terrain vehicles (ATVs)

be operated by only "age-appropriate" drivers.

Grain entrapments

This time of year, flowing grain is particularly dangerous. It's important not to be in a grain bin or vehicle when it is being loaded or unloaded, the safety specialist said.

"It only takes a second to get into a situation where you need to call for help," she said.

Rademaker reminds farmers to use a lifeline, harness, a spotter and belay system when working in bins and not to enter a bin when grain is moving.

She also cautioned against letting children play in grain like in a sandbox. It can send a mixed message. They might not be able to differentiate between when it is safe to play in grain. "We never want them to be in a wagon and bins," she said.

Electrical safety

Electricity is something a person can't see, smell or hear, so one can become complacent, she said. In the fields, farmers need to be cautious around overhead power lines, especially

when loading and unloading with augers.

Rademaker said a farmer's job is also to think of the safety of people working with them.

"Make sure there are no augers anywhere near 10 feet of those power lines."

Look for the safest place to unload semis and wagons. When transporting equipment, make sure the augers are lowered.

If a person spots someone suffering from electrocution, she cautions not to approach them because the onlooker could become another path to the ground. "You become another victim," Rademaker said.

It's crucial in that circumstance to shut off the power and call the electrical company and emergency services.

Mental health

After an accident, there may be ongoing stress, so it is important to pay attention to people around us and notice signs of stress and isolation.

When such situations arise, Rademaker refers people to the Farm Family

Resource Initiative, led by Southern Illinois University and the North Central Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Center, at the University of Illinois. These services are designed to help with issues including substance abuse, depression and anxiety.

In an emergency, people can call 911 and get help right away, she said. For the suicide and crisis lifeline, dial 988.

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(PHOTO BY RHIANNON BRANCH OF FARMWEEK)

A farmer climbs a ladder on a grain bin in Champaign County while preparing to unload soybeans.

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U.S. hog inventory on the rise; margins remain tight

BY RHIANNON BRANCH
FARMWEEK

THE latest quarterly hogs and pigs report from USDA showed an increase in U.S. numbers.

Inventory as of Sept. 1 was pegged at 76.5 million head, up slightly from September 2023 and up 2% from June 1. In Illinois, all hogs and pigs totaled 5.6 million head, down 3% since June but up 2% compared to last year.

During a webinar hosted by the National Pork Board after the re-

port was released Sept. 26, Brett Stuart with Global AgriTrends said there is potential for swine numbers to continue to rise.

“The WASDE (World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates) report shows 2024 pork production up 2.7%,” he said. “If we were up 1.1% in the first half, that means to get to the WASDE number, we’re going to be up 4.3% in the second half of the year.”

Stuart said given those estimates, the hog industry could be looking at larger production going into the fourth quarter.

The September report placed breeding inventory at 6.04 million head, down 2% from last year, but up 1% from the previous quarter. The breeding inventory in Illinois, 650,000 head, was down 20,000 from last year.

Market hog inventory (70.4 million head) was up 1% from last year and 2% from last quarter nationwide and up 2% in Illinois at 4.95 million head.

The report also showed increases in some of the higher weight classes for market hogs.

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(PHOTO BY CATRINA RAWSON OF FARMWEEK)

USDA's September hogs and pigs report pegged the inventory at 76.5 million head, up 2% since June.



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FALL HARVEST

Equipment sector better prepared for downturn

BY RHIANNON BRANCH
FARMWEEK

AG machinery sales are taking a hit as farmers' balance sheets tighten, but the equipment industry has been preparing.

"Over the course of history, the price of corn and the sale of tractors over 40 horsepower tend to track one to one," Association of Equipment Manufacturers Senior Vice President Curt Blades told FarmWeek. "And we know corn prices are down right now, so it is to be expected."

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(PHOTO BY RHIANNON BRANCH OF FARMWEEK)

Farm Progress Show attendees check out the vast lineup of equipment in Boone, Iowa, as part of this year's online auction held in conjunction with the show.

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"I think it's important to keep in mind as we're seeing cheaper feed costs, that could have implications for continuing those higher weights," said Lee Schulz, economist at Iowa State University. "And we may see some adjustments when we think about market timing as we go forward."

Schulz said ISU profitability models are patchy as the industry comes off months of modest profits.

"As you look at some of these seasonally higher prices, our model shows the next couple of months could continue to see some modest profits to break-even levels," he said. "But getting

into some red ink as we get into the fourth quarter and into winter."

Profitability could then resume next spring.

"On average for 2025, we see some modest profits but there is still significant variability across those profit levels, providing a lot of risk for producers," Schulz said. "But I'll also highlight the market currently is offering some opportunity with some profitable prices at times remaining this year."

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From page 7

AEM's August equipment sales report showed total sales of ag tractors in the U.S. dropped 19.4% and combine sales fell 19.6% from a year ago.

Blades said the industry learned some hard lessons from the most recent economic downturn and is better prepared for this

next phase in the cycle.

"Manufacturers have been working closely with the dealers to understand what the supply chain needs are and what the market demand is," he said. "The last thing you want is too much inventory at the dealer lot because that has a negative impact on the dealer, used prices and the rural economy."

A report by Moody's Ratings suggests the three largest agricultural equipment manufacturers (AGCO Corp., CNH Industrial and Deere & Company) are better positioned to deal with weakening demand compared to the 2014-16 downturn.

"We expect that, even in the face of significant declines in revenue,

EBITA (earnings before interest, taxes and amortization) margins in 2024 will remain in the 9-20% range for all three companies, thanks in part to key operational changes, good cost management and more flexible manufacturing processes," the report said.

The report showed the top three manufacturers are cutting back sharply on production in 2024 to decrease inventory levels in preparation for 2025.

Blades said the manufacturing industry is also focusing on options that farmers want and the variety of advantages they look at when considering equipment.

For example, Blades said this generation of machines is 20% more fuel efficient than the previous generation, allowing farmers to reduce diesel costs.

"Farmers see these as business decisions, not just emotional decisions, and they are investing in technology to make sure that they are as operationally efficient as they possibly can be to survive those downturns," Blades said.



(COURTESY PHOTO)

Seth Crawford is the general manager of PTx, a business unit of AGCO. He told FarmWeek that investing in companies like Precision Planting and Trimble has helped them remain innovative and focus on farmers' needs.

"They're the innovators that feed that dedicated channel which helps us gain traction with those innovations, so it's a nice reinforcing cycle," he told FarmWeek. "We've been able to operate (PTx) independently, and it's helped our growth."

Crawford said the Precision Planting division allows the company to bring technologies to

market that help farmers enhance their existing fleet of equipment.

"So they don't need to make that big capital investment. They can make a small investment with a fast payback that can bring them an almost instant return in one operating cycle," Crawford said. "And we do that in a scalable way to help the farmers achieve profitability even in the most difficult times."

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