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The Prairie Press



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## MAY 2023 UPCOMING AUCTIONS

**TUESDAY, MAY 9, 2023 AT 10:00 AM<sup>CT</sup>**  
Sullivan County, MO Land Auction  
*Andrew & Earla Johnson Estate*

**TUESDAY, MAY 9, 2023 AT 12:00 PM<sup>CT</sup>**  
Andrew County, MO Land Auction  
*The Curators of The University of Missouri*

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 10, 2023 AT 10:00 AM<sup>CT</sup>**  
Mercer County, IL Land Auction  
*Joan M. Mack Estate*

**THURSDAY, MAY 11, 2023 AT 10:00 AM<sup>CT</sup>**  
Hancock County, IL Land Auction  
*Known Locally as The Carl Hartweg Farm*

**THURSDAY, MAY 19, 2023 AT 10:00 AM<sup>CT</sup>**  
Adams County, IL Land Auction  
*Known Locally as The Margherita Schutte Farm*

**MONDAY, MAY 22, 2023 AT 12:00 PM<sup>CT</sup>**  
Hancock County, IL Land Auction  
*Peggy L. Putzler & Karen S. Austin*

**THURSDAY, MAY 25, 2023 AT 10:00 AM<sup>CT</sup>**  
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# Grain for Good Works provides giving opportunity

## ECCF hopes farmers will plant seeds of philanthropy

BY ROBBY TUCKER  
rtucker@prairiepress.net

As local farmers flock to the fields to plant their crops, members of the Edgar County Community Foundation hope they will consider planting a new type of seed for this fall — a seed of philanthropy and charity. Through the ECCF's Grain for Good Works initiative, farmers can donate a portion of their harvest to local causes.

Since its establishment in 1993, the ECCF involved itself with philanthropy across the county, providing scholarships, seed money and donations to a growing list of non-profits, businesses and programs within the county. Within the last 10 years, the ECCF unveiled the Grain for Good Works initiative, which allows farmers to chip in by channeling their crops into a local project of their choosing.

"It's a way for farmers and landlords to gift grain to the ECCF," ECCF board president Bob Morris explained. Morris farms in Northern Edgar County.

After filing the appropriate paperwork to transfer ownership of the grain to the ECCF, farmers simply deliver the load to the grain elevator of their choice and notify the elevator of the grain's ownership change. This process ensures the transfer is tax-deductible, which has been a big draw for many participants.

"That's the biggest driver for why it works for farmers and landlords," said Morris.

Once the ECCF takes ownership of the grain, it will be sold to bolster one of two ECCF funds: the Forever Fund or the general fund.

The Forever Fund, an endowment of the ECCF, is used in a variety of ways. A small percentage of the fund can be put toward ECCF projects or scholarships, but the majority of the fund's assets are held or invested in order to further the ECCF's mission and ensure the foundation's economic stability for years to come.

Meanwhile, the general fund directly supplements ECCF's outreach. Donations to the general fund are earmarked for donations and quickly redirected into philanthropic work.



**The Edgar County Community Foundation's Grain for Good Works program offers Edgar County farmers the opportunity to support charity and a variety of projects throughout the county. The decade-old program allows county farmers to gift the grain to the foundation, deliver it to the elevator of their choice. The gift is tax-deductible once the appropriate paperwork is filed before delivery. Pictured, from left, are ECCF directors Warren Sperry, ECCF president Bob Morris, director Harry Frost, county farmer Mary Lou Wright, The Equity's Erin Pope, ECCF past president Brad Tucker, Paul Porter of The Equity and county farmer Bill Moss. Funds support the Forever Fund which supports scholarships and other donations.**

Special to The Prairie Press

According to Morris, it is an easy way to give back to Edgar County.

"It's a great way to donate for those of us who are farmers," he said. "All of our projects are Edgar County projects."

One exciting ECCF project announced recently is a \$100,000 pledge to the REC Center's Capital and Sustainability campaign — a fundraiser aiming to re-open the REC's pool and its facilities.

While the ECCF makes regular donations to various groups, the unveiling of the foundation's gift to The REC is a highlight for Morris.

"In the past, a lot of kids have learned to swim there," he explained. "That (pool) is gonna have a big impact on young kids."

Other ECCF projects include donating new vests to the Paris and Kansas police departments, assisting with the refurbish-

ing of the Chrisman Centennial Park pavilion, updating the Hume community playground equipment and donating funds to the Kansas summer food program, among other things.

Former ECCF president Doug Hasler also believes Grain for Good Works is a simple, meaningful way for local farmers to make a difference in their own area.

"We've made it an easy way for them (farmers) to make tax-deductible donations," he explained. "It's a great way to share your blessings with the county."

Hasler compared the program's farm-to-foundation approach to the farm-to-table simplicity advertised in organic food products today.

For Hasler and the rest of the board, ensuring ECCF funds are spread evenly within the county is a task of utmost importance.

In addition to town or village-specific projects, the ECCF partners with county-wide operations such as the Edgar County 4-H and the Edgar County Arts Endowment.

"By virtue of it being county-wide, it benefits surrounding communities as well," said Hasler. "We're very cognizant that all grants apply to all areas."

The ECCF is still looking for more farmers to partner with them on the program. As more join, the ECCF can make a greater impact across Edgar County.

"We're always hoping for people to look into it," said Hasler. "It's a local foundation that helps local communities, managed by local people."

For more information or to get involved with Grain for Good Works, visit <http://edgarcountyfoundation.org/give/gift-of-grain/>.

# Keeping corn from frequenting phosphorus buffet

SPECIAL TO THE PRAIRIE PRESS

When it comes to food, plants can “eat” more than they need — just like the diner who can’t resist another stop at the buffet line despite already feeling full. Indeed, with respect to phosphorus, corn plants will keep taking up the nutrient 25 to 80 percent beyond what’s needed to reach their full grain yield, scientists with the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) in West Lafayette, Indiana, have found.

The corn plant’s gluttonous appetite for phosphorus is known as “luxury consumption,” and in extreme cases, it can decrease grain yields. Up until recently, though, corn’s luxury consumption had only been demonstrated in studies with nitrogen and potassium. However, no direct links to phosphorus had yet been established, according to Chad Penn, a soil scientist with the ARS National Soil Erosion Laboratory in West Lafayette.

To investigate the matter, Penn and Purdue University graduate student Matt Wiethorn and Purdue agronomy professor James Camberato used a state-of-the-art “grow room”

and hydroponics system. This enabled the researchers to precisely control the root environment of corn plants and the timing of phosphorous applications to them in pots filled with sand. More significantly, it allowed the researchers to monitor the bioavailability of phosphorous to corn plants more easily than growing them in field plots.

“This system demonstrated that it could produce corn that is the same as field-grown corn, both physically and chemically,” noted Penn. “Developing it was a huge hurdle in being able to do this research on corn’s luxury consumption of phosphorus,” he added.

The researchers began the study in 2019, using several corn hybrids, and published the results in the January 2023 issue of the journal *Agronomy*.

Among the study’s findings, the corn hybrids needed an average of 580 milligrams of phosphorous per plant to reach their maximum grain yield. Beyond that, “excess phosphorus uptake caused a decrease in grain yield, which was attributed to reduced movement (translocation) of copper and zinc from the corn plant

roots to grain,” said Penn, whose team published a companion paper in *Agronomy*.

Penn noted that the research is a first step towards determining whether current phosphorus application recommendations can be refined based on what the corn plant actually needs for optimal yield and how much of the nutrient is already present in the soil (the type and condition of which can vary from one loca-

tion to another). “Knowing the target phosphorous uptake value of 580 milligrams per plant can be used in developing more robust and precise soil phosphorus fertility recommendations in the future,” he added. More broadly, such adjustments can contribute to natural resource sustainability since phosphorus fertilizers come from materials mined from finite geologic supplies in different parts of the world.



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# US commodity groups set priorities for 2023 farm bill

SPECIAL TO THE PRAIRIE PRESS

National commodity groups' priorities for the 2023 farm bill's titles on commodity programs, credit and crop insurance were on display Wednesday at an all-day House Ag hearing.

Lawmakers on the Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities, Risk Management, and Credit heard from the heads of the National Corn Growers Association, American Soybean Association (ASA), National Association of Wheat Growers and national groups representing canola, cotton, dry pea and lentil, peanut, rice, sorghum and sugar farmers.

Most of those leaders united around a few central messages related to the bill, encouraging policymakers to expand the ag safety net by: protecting federal crop insurance; raising commodity and marketing assistance loan rates; and making changes to the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs.

Those latter changes include updating the benchmark and reference prices used in calculating payments under ARC and PLC and giving farmers the option to update their base acres.

"It is difficult to envision a scenario that would provide meaningful assistance without significant improvements to the current reference price and program elements of ARC and PLC," said ASA President Daryl Cates, who farms in Columbia (Monroe County).

PLC payments are triggered when market year average prices for commodities fall below their PLC reference prices.

The 2023 reference price for corn is set at \$3.70 per bushel and soybeans is set at \$8.40 per bushel, meaning the corn prices that had been hovering near \$7 and bean prices in the mid-teens would need to drop by about 50% before farmers would receive a PLC payment.

"When prices fall that far, there's effectively no safety net at all for farmers," said Brent Cheyney, Wheat Growers president.

Revising programs under Titles I and XI are contextualized by production costs that surged the last two years and have remained elevated for the 2023 growing season, a point highlighted Wednesday by subcommittee members from Illinois.

"Over the past few years, farmers have really faced increased input costs," said U.S. Rep. Mary Miller, R-Oakland. "And now more than ever it's important that we protect our crop insurance and ensure that farmers have a strong safety net. That's very important to the producers in my area."

She later asked Cates to explain how crop insurance has directly affected his business,



Nine Illinois Farm Bureau leaders met with members of Illinois' congressional delegation on Capitol Hill during a three-day trip as part of IFB's Leaders to Washington Program. They include: Berkeley Boehne, DeKalb (back row, left); Clayton Abbott, Kankakee; Christopher Vick, Pulaski-Alexander; Alex Rhoda, McLean; Steven Nightingale, Henry; Tammy Halterman, IFB District 5 director, Grundy (front row, left); Lance Buzzard, Fayette; Eugene Lamczyk Jr., Washington and Dane Stayton, Macoupin.

Special to The Prairie Press

and he noted "almost every year we have some kind of weather event in the spring that I have to come back and either replant some corn or some soybeans and so I am using my crop insurance to help pay for that replant."

U.S. Rep. Nikki Budzinski, D-Springfield, further asked the commodity group panelists how the sharp rise in energy prices is impacting their operations.

Shawn Holliday, with the National Cotton Council, explained how "energy prices have a main line to everything that we do," from imported materials used in fertilizer production to diesel fueling farm machinery and trucks hauling grain.

Budzinski later in the hearing also questioned the panel about ways the federal government could better support young and beginning farmers.

Cheyney called for a "complete overhaul" of the Farm Service Agency's Beginning Farmer program, noting "it, like me, has gotten old" and should be upgraded because it doesn't distribute capital fast enough for new producers to succeed.

Craig Meeker, Chairman of the National Sorghum Producers, largely agreed and said program rules should be revised. He said by the time he needed financing through FSA he

had more than five years of production history and was no longer considered a "young and beginning farmer" by the agency but was still one "in real terms."

Visibly emotional, Meeker further noted how he observed his father survive the 1980s farm financial crisis, a situation he said he doesn't want his children to go through because they couldn't get access to credit.

"We need to figure out how we can continue to entice the young generation to farm and not export the greatest generation that we have, and that's the next one," Meeker added, his voice cracking.

# Cargill has long history in county

BY DANIEL BRISEÑO  
daniel@prairiepress.net

Grain mills and elevators are an essential part of the Midwest's agrarian economy, and a big player in that field is Cargill.

The company was founded by William Wallace Cargill in 1865 in Conover, Iowa. His brother, Sam, joined the business a year later to form W.W. Cargill and Brother. The brothers created multiple branches of the grain operation in other locations and ventured into the lumber business.

A major change occurred in 1875 when another brother, James, joined the firm, and the company moved to strategically located La Crosse, Wis. Relocating to La Crosse gave Cargill better access to shipping on the Mississippi and access to the lucrative Chicago grain market via the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad route.

Sam Cargill moved to Minneapolis in 1887 to manage that branch of the operation which was emerging as an important grain center. Sam Cargill died in 1903 and John MacMillan was named general manager of Cargill Elevator Company.

When William Cargill died in 1909, MacMillan was confronted by an economic morass of credit issues which he worked diligently to resolve. After William Cargill's brother-in-law left the firm, MacMillan had full charge of the company. The current owners of the agri-business giant are descendants of MacMillan's two sons, John H. MacMillan and Cargill MacMillan Sr.

The Cargill operation in Paris started as the F.L. Kidder Mill at the same location. It was a busy mill with a daily production capacity of 6,000 bushels — an amount considered extraordinary for the time period. The mill had a storage capacity of 1.2 million bushels of grain.

More than capacity, the F.L. Kidder Mill was ahead of its time in construction. It was built using vitrified paving brick and was considered fireproof. The engines operating the various machinery had a combined 1,200 horsepower.

The mill converted corn to other products, and the company's output included hominy, corn flour, brewing supplies, corn oil and corn flakes for cereal. It was an efficient operation that minimized waste. The company baled corn husks to sell as livestock food. Corn cobs were burned as fuel.

At its peak, the F. L. Kidder Mill employed 100 laborers and purchased \$1.5 million of



Illinois Cereal Mills — now Cargill — has always used rail cars for transportation but here what they called a hopper — a larger — rail car waits in siding to be filled. These cars were the largest on the rails at the time. Special to The Prairie Press

raw materials from local farmers.

Philip Best and Company purchased the F. L. Kidder Mill sometime before 1934, because Best and Company sold in 1934 to Spencer H. Werner and Associates. Following the purchase, the business was rebranded as The Illinois Cereal Mills (ICM). In 1937, The Illinois Cereal Mills bought a Chicago Mill and doubled its capacity. The Paris branch also owned other local elevators such as the 300,000-bushel elevator at Mays Station.

ICM suffered a catastrophic loss Feb. 2, 1938, when the elevator at Mays Station was destroyed by fire. Later that year, mill workers were scared when they received orders to halt production. Management attempted to allay the concerns with claims that shut-downs are a normal part of the milling business. Milling continued until January 1939 when a lack of white corn supplies forced to stop in production.

Throughout the years, the Paris mill has experienced emergencies like a dust explosion in April 1941 and a massive fire Sept. 10,

>>> CARGILL, 9C



The Illinois Cereal Mill is seen in this aerial photo in 1993. The photo is prior to the demolition of the former CIPS ice plant the brick building at left. Just one year later one of the debrocks of the Paris community was sold to Cargill. Special to The Prairie Press

# CARGILL

From Page 8C

1946.

The Paris Fire Department fought the raging fire for nearly three hours, and firefighters' efforts to save the mill were hampered by a stiff southeast wind.

When the fire was finally extinguished 100,000 bushels of grain were destroyed with a total cost of lost goods and building damage totaling \$800,000.

Only the facility's electrical plant and gas stations survived the fire. A headline in the Paris Beacon-News summarized the situation as, "Disaster Turns Paris Plant Into Desolate Debris."

ICM management assured the community of the intent to rebuild and construction commenced in March 1947 after the site was cleared of debris.

Along with the erection of the new mill, the company built a new office building across the street at 616 South Jefferson. More construction came in 1964 with new silos for expansion.

The company expanded again in 1966 with the buying of its first dedicated railroad cars emblazoned with lettering reading, "Illinois Cereal Mills Inc." In 1971 the old office building, which had been used as a lab since 1953, was dismantled.

Cargill purchased ICM in August 1994, and in 2002, Cargill combined two of its plants, Seaforth Corn Mills and Illinois Cereal Mills Inc., as Cargill Dry Corn Ingredients.

In 2015, the Paris operation employed 100 workers, and the mill was annually grinding 16 million bushels of corn a year into grits, flour, meal and more for use in food applications like brewing, breadmaking, snack foods and cereal. The mill continuously helped the Paris community and the world.

Mark Buzek, the Human Resource Manager at Cargill in 2015, worked with an orphanage in Honduras called Plan Escalon and its partner charity Retail Orphan Initiative (ROI). Buzek knew the two entities needed help feeding their students. Buzek reached out to then Supply Chain Manager Chad Gann for help.

"It sounded like a perfect fit for us," said Gann. "With corn as a major staple in the children's diet, we just needed to find a way to get our white corn to them."

Gann knew Cargill could handle supplying the corn, but more was involved.

"The problem was, we didn't really have



Special to The Prairie Press

**Workers stand and look on as the Illinois Cereal Mill burns. The fire roared out of hand thanks to a stiff southeast wind. Paris firemen fought the blaze for three hours. In the end, 100,00 bushels of grain were destroyed along with the building with a total loss of \$800,000.**

the facilities to make it happen at Paris," said Gann. "We're corn millers, not packagers. The corn needed to be bagged. I knew if I could persuade someone to do that for us, we could use our connections across the industry to help get the corn to Plan Escalon."

With the help of Fischer Seed, a Cargill supplier, the corn was packaged in 50-pound bags for safe shipping and storage at the school in Honduras. Buzek added afterward that quantifying the impact of the donation in terms of dollars would be hard.

Cargill in Paris has donated more than \$100,000 dollars to various local organizations and employees have volunteered thousands of hours of time.

In 2022, Cargill, as a corporation, donated \$414 million for disaster relief in 32 countries, \$40 million to support humanitarian relief efforts in Ukraine and its neighbors, \$20 million in new or expanded partnerships to help improve the security of food, more than \$11 million to programs that help support farmers livelihoods and \$12 million to drive racial equality in education and nutrition.

Cargill announced a plan in 2019 to reduce the company's greenhouse gases by

30% per ton from its global supply chain by 2030. This was Cargill solidifying itself as a company that is committed to protecting the natural resources on Earth.

Cargill has stayed on track with the environmental goal by purchasing solar energy from the Prairie Wolf Solar Project near Ashmore.

The partnership in Coles County is Cargill's second renewable energy contract — the first was in South Dakota.

Other environmental areas where Cargill participates are accelerating sustainable beef, advancing soil health, reducing carbon for sustainable shipping and protecting forests in partnership with farmers in the hopes of prioritizing climate concerns.

Cargill in Paris is part of a company that employs 155,000 employees worldwide in 70 countries. With the company's 157-year history, Cargill knows what it takes for sustainability.

Cargill Dry Food ingredients is the oldest manufacturing business in Paris, although it no longer bears the familiar Illinois Cereal Mills name

"They can change the name on it all they want," said local resident Steve Smith. "It will always be ICM to me."



Special to The Prairie Press

**After rebuilding after a major fire, The Illinois Cereal grew by leaps and bounds as seen here with the addition of new grain bins.**

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# Early planted fields could be pest 'magnets'

## SPECIAL TO THE PRAIRIE PRESS

Farmers should incorporate timely scouting into their pest management plans if they haven't already for this season.

The combination of a relatively mild winter, early-April warmup and a significant amount of early planting activity could trigger issues with substantial pest populations in the weeks ahead.

"Usually from my experience, when we have a mild winter, we typically do have more pressure from insects that overwinter here," Kurt Maertens, BASF technical service representative based in Moline, told Farm-Week. "We need to scout and be ready."

One key pest that could be an early problem is the bean leaf beetle. Adults overwinter in woodlots and soybean fields, emerge in the spring and feed on any available host plants.

And there should be an ample amount of host plants as early planting activity ramped up the second week of April.

"There's been a lot of (fieldwork) activity and a lot of bean planters were rolling (the second week of April)," Maertens. "The first-planted fields are the first ones Japanese beetles go to. Anything planted early is typically a magnet for the first pests out."

"Bean leaf beetles can do a lot of early-season defoliation," he continued. "And in northern areas we have to be worried about soybean aphids. There's a chance they could pop up on us."

The economic threshold for defoliation of soybeans prior to bloom is an average of 30% of leaf tissue removed with the beetle still present in the field, Nathan Kleczewski, plant pathology and entomology lead at GROWMARK, and Nick Seiter, University of Illinois field crop entomologist, noted in an ILSoAdvisor report.

A foliar insecticide application may be required if economic thresholds have been reached at a given soybean growth stage. However, it is uncommon for bean leaf beetle defoliation to meet an economic thresh-

old, according to the entomologists.

But, bean leaf beetles can also transmit bean pod mottle virus. If transmitted early in vegetative development, some crop loss may occur.

"At today's crop prices, so much can be lost pretty quickly," Maertens said.

He noted BASF features Renestra herbicide with dual modes of action to provide broad spectrum control of soy aphids and other chewing insects. Another new insecticide from BASF, Sefina, provides a new mode of action through Inscalis that controls labeled aphid pests that have developed resistance to other insecticides.

Meanwhile, farmers should also scout and keep a close eye on potential insect pressure moving up from the south this season. The first black cutworm moths of the season were coming in heavy into western Illinois a weekend ago, according to Kelly Estes, U of I state ag pest survey coordinator.

For corn, one insect of particular concern for this season is the corn rootworm, accord-

ing to Maertens.

"We're starting to see a lot more (rootworm) pressure, more below ground feeding and above ground feeding like silk clipping," he said. "We may need to go back to yellow sticky traps to monitor populations."

"They are developing resistance to (Bt) traits we have," he added. "We need to be cautious of that, especially growers who have corn on corn."

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# Planting progress varies amid wild weather

SPECIAL TO THE PRAIRIE PRESS

Nearly ideal soil conditions ignited a barrage of planting and fieldwork activity — in between storms.

There was an average of 5.9 days suitable for fieldwork April 9-16 and many farmers in Illinois took advantage by planting 9% of the corn crop and 4% of beans that week, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service Illinois field office.

“It’s kind of been the story of spring — ideal soil conditions,” Lance Tarochione, DEKALB/Asgrow technical agronomist, said. “If you’re a believer that soil conditions trump all other factors, then you’ve got a lot of crop in the ground.”

“But, we’re at the stage of the year when you get an early window some people jump on it and others remain patient,” he continued. “So, you end up with a huge range (of planting progress). I know some growers who are done, some who haven’t started and everything in between.”

Total corn planting reached 10% complete in the state as of April 16, 7 points ahead of the average pace, while soybean planting advanced to 4% complete, 3 points ahead of average.

Nationwide, farmers planted 8% of corn and 4% of beans as of April 16, both ahead of the average pace.

Planting was generally more spotty April 17-23 as intermittent storms, some of which were severe, interrupted fieldwork. An outbreak of 8 tornadoes struck the St. Louis region April 15.

The most extensive of those twisters cut a path of nearly 20 miles in Monroe County from Maestown to Hecker. Three other Metro East towns — Valmeyer, Swansea and Belleville — were also struck by tornadoes.

Another round of severe weather produced isolated hailstorms in Fulton, McLean, DeKalb and other counties April 19, with stones ranging in size from marbles and ping pong balls to lemons, followed by more thunderstorms and hail that moved up the Illinois River valley into northern Illinois April 20, according to National Weather Service reports.

Elsewhere, sandbagging efforts along the Upper Mississippi River shifted into high gear last week as floodwaters flowed from parts of the Dakotas, Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Meanwhile, temperatures fluctuated in the state from lows all the way down in the 20s to highs in the 80s this month, with another chance of frost in the forecast to start the



week.

So, how should farmers formulate near-term planting plans amid the wild temperature swings? Tarochione says the current planting considerations are based more on psychology than agronomy.

“I’ve gotten a lot of questions about how aggressive should I be (with the planter),” the agronomist said. “It’s not black and white. It depends on each individual. Will you be more stressed worrying about the crop in the ground or more stressed that you didn’t plant on days you could have?”

Tarochione, who also farms in western Illinois, planted about two-thirds of his soybeans but no corn as of April 19. He plans to wait beyond the possible cold spell to plant corn later this month.

“It’s not ideal to put corn in the ground with the forecast,” he said. “The next 10 days, not much growth will occur and some of the crop planted (last) week could take two to three weeks to get out of the ground.”

Soybeans typically handle the temperature swings better than corn at planting according to Tarochione, who said it’s all about establishing an even stand for corn.

“We have some stuff up and some stuff that will lay in the ground longer than ideal,” he said. “As long as you get a good stand, (the delayed emergence) doesn’t mean yield potential is ruined. But, there may be more variability plant to plant.”

AgriGold agronomist Joe Stephan also emphasized the importance of a good corn stand for yield potential, based on 2022 crop emer-

gence trials.

“An uneven stand is the biggest yield-limiting factor in my area of the eastern Corn Belt where tight soils mean we often fight wet, cold

conditions that delay emergence,” Stephan noted. “It can take several days to reach desired populations, and in some years, partial stands force replant decisions.”

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# Oldest US ag plots go digital: see 130-plus years data

SPECIAL TO THE PRAIRIE PRESS

URBANA — In 1876, when University of Illinois professor Manly Miles established the Morrow Plots, he couldn't have imagined the plots would become the oldest continuous agricultural experiment in the Western Hemisphere. Nor could he imagine, more than a century before the dawn of the internet, that the plots' data would be digitized and made available online to scientists, students, and educators around the world.

The new database, which includes crop hybrid, rotation, planting density, and yield, as well as fertilizer type and amount, came together thanks to the Morrow Plots Data Curation Working Group, an interdisciplinary team from the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES) and the University Library at U of I.

Data scientists and curators not only had to find the historical data, including in an ancient notebook held by the Department of Crop Sciences, they had to standardize it through time so that year-to-year comparisons could be made. For example, some data were missing for certain years and yield wasn't recorded at all until 1888. Thankfully, the working group was up for the challenge.

Sandi Caldron, assistant professor and University Library research data librarian, says, "The data were all in slightly different formats and needed a lot of finagling to get them to line up. My role was doing the coding required to clean up and combine those data sets and get it ready to publish. I also did a lot of the accompanying documentation that explains how we did it for folks who want to use the data or reproduce our work."

Josh Henry, associate director of information technology for ACES, initially kick-started the project in 2018 as an example for faculty wanting to curate their own research data. As few faculty have such long and complex datasets, he knew if the working group could pull it off with the Morrow Plots data, anyone could do it.

"We learned a lot of lessons about how to deal with really messy data," Henry says. "We now feel confident explaining what challenges have to be met in order to take something that was perhaps less useful and turning it into something that will be valuable for the future."

Prior to the database's publication, Andrew Margenot was fielding dozens of requests for the Morrow Plots data each year. Now he can direct those requests to the Illinois Data Bank.



"I've gotten requests from government and university researchers, both in the U.S. and abroad. They're mainly modelers trying to link weather patterns with yield and soil data; a lot of modelers salivate at the Morrow Plots data," says Margenot, assistant professor in crop sciences. "We also get requests from folks trying to understand how their long-term trials compare with ours."

Margenot says the data can also be used to understand how soil fertility is influenced by management practices of crop rotation and nutrient inputs, and how this relates to crop yields. After discovering a trove of historic soil samples from the Morrow Plots and other sites around Illinois, Margenot is eager to analyze long-term trends.

Caldron hopes the data can also be used for educational purposes.

"Students in every field need to learn how to work with data now," she says. "As instructors need to find datasets to work into their classes, I would love to see people using the Morrow Plots data. It's a longitudinal data set, and I think students in any field can get a grasp of the basics of planting, fertilization, and yield. And then, for U of I students, they learn a little bit more about their university history."

The Morrow Plots started as an experi-

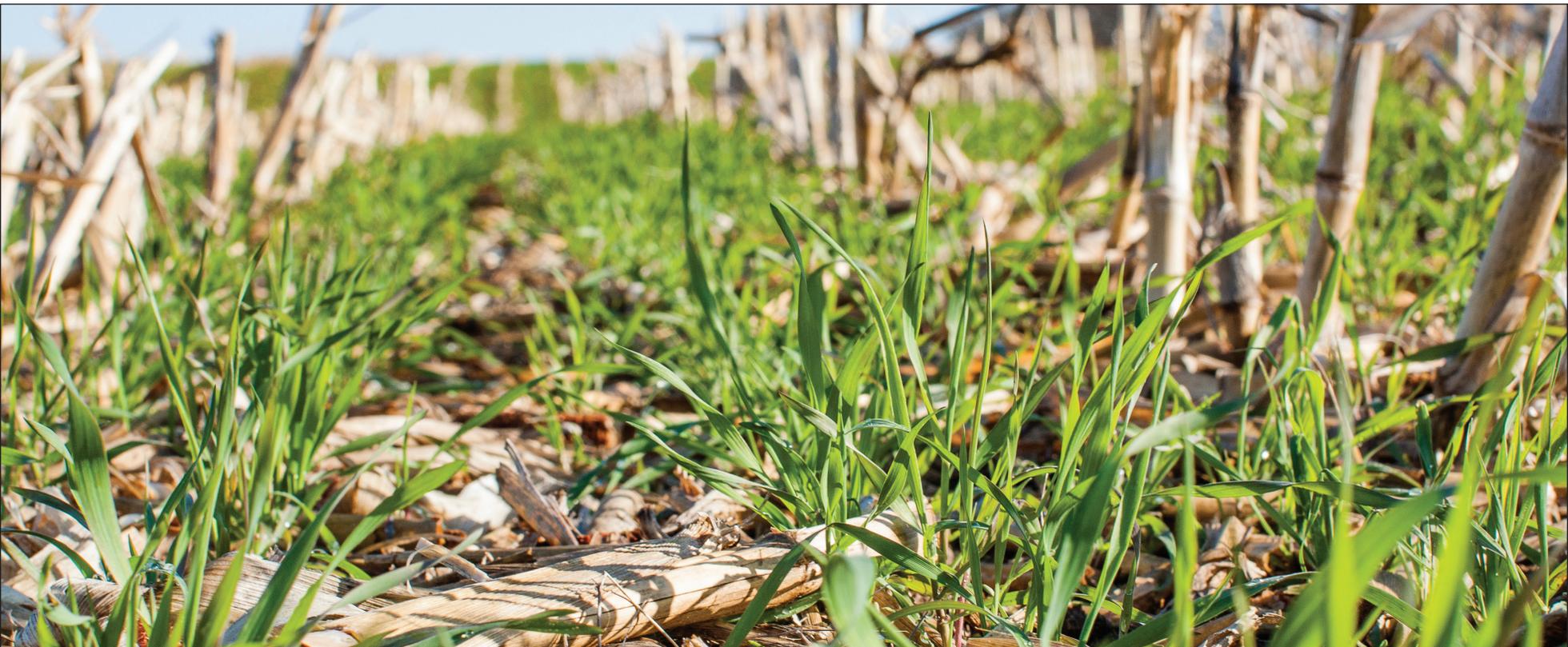


ment to test the effects of crop rotation on soil quality, but along the way, they helped establish a number of farming basics we take for granted today, including that crops require nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium; hybrid corn can boost yield, especially when planted at close spacing; and crop rotation can mean less need for fertilizers.

"The lesson of the Morrow Plots is clear: conserve the soil and maintain proper soil



fertility to sustain food production for future generations," says Robert Dunker, ACES agronomist and field trials coordinator. "Results from the Morrow Plots have given insights on how crop production systems respond to rotation and soil fertility, shaping farming practices to this day. While the Morrow Plots have become a significant historical site, they remain a continuing opportunity for researchers and student education."



Special to The Prairie Press

Winter cover crops have become increasingly important in the U.S. not only protecting the soil from erosion but also aiding in retaining nitrogen, helping to prevent runoff into runoff.

## Cover crops could reduce nitrogen in drainage water by 30%

### SPECIAL TO THE PRAIRIE PRESS

URBANA — As Corn Belt states seek ways to curb nitrogen flow from farms into the Gulf of Mexico, new University of Illinois research adds evidence for winter cover crops as an important part of the solution. A simulation study published in “*Science of the Total Environment*” finds widespread planting of cereal rye in Illinois could reduce nitrate in the state’s tile drainage water by 30%.

The research team, part of the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES) and The Grainger College of Engineering at Illinois, knew from small-scale studies that cover crops are capable of sucking nitrate out of soil water, with long-lasting effects throughout the growing season. Their new study is the first to estimate cereal rye’s potential on a statewide level.

The team simulated both cover crop planting (yes or no) and fertilizer timing (fall or spring) under real climatic conditions in Illinois between 2001 and 2020.

They used a crop simulation model known as Decision Support System for Agrotechnology Transfer (DSSAT), which allows multi-year growth projections for more than 42 crops. Although cereal rye wasn’t among them, the researchers adapted the model’s parameters for winter wheat, the most similar crop in DSSAT.

“Two management implications were revealed in this paper. One is that farmers should apply a winter cover crop, such as cereal rye, to reduce tile water flow and nitrate loss by 25 and 30%, respectively. Our data also reinforced that farmers should switch to spring fertilization, if possible. We compared spring versus fall fertilization with and without the cover crop, and fall was worse for nitrate loss in both scenarios,” says study co-author Rabin Bhattarai, associate professor in the Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering, a shared unit of ACES and Grainger.

The model also simulated cover crop effects on cash crop yield and found, overall, that cereal rye had a slight positive impact on corn and soybean under both fertiliza-

tion schedules. Bhattarai says there was some variation among years and locations across the state, but over the 20-year simulation, there was no evidence of a yield penalty.

Cover crop adoption remains low in Illinois and the Midwest despite the availability of cost-sharing programs and growing evidence touting benefits to soil health, water quality, and more.

“Our research shows cover crops work,” Bhattarai says. “They have the potential to reduce erosion as well as nutrient loss from our fields, especially with tile drainage. We wanted to explore the benefits on the whole-state level to show what could happen if thousands of farmers adopted this conservation practice simultaneously,” he says. “The water quality benefits would be significant.”

No simulation model is perfect, and Bhattarai’s struggled a little in the hillier southern section of Illinois. But when compared with real-world corn and soybean yields, the yields forecast by the model were a close match, suggesting the model

was likely accurate overall.

Early phases of the project began with small-scale field experiments to understand cover crop and fertilizer timing effects on nitrate loss in tile and runoff water. These early experiments were used to develop the modified DSSAT model capable of scaling up to the entire state. They also informed an online decision-support tool, funded by the Illinois Nutrient Research and Education Council, for farmers considering cover crops in their own fields.

“Using our dashboard, farmers can get simulated results of cereal rye growing as a cover crop in their actual fields. At different dates within a two-week window of expected planting for the cash crop, farmers can compare potential biomass in the field, C:N ratio in that biomass, nitrogen uptake, and nitrogen loss reduction. To improve results further, farmers can provide more specific information for their fields, including cropping history and management programs,” says co-author Jonathan Coppess, associate professor in the Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics in ACES.

# Run-up in food, farmland prices could ease

BY DANIEL GRANT  
FarmWeek

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Consumer food price inflation jumped to 9.9% (in 2022) as farm commodity prices rose, labor and other costs increased, supply chain problems continued and consumer demand was strong,” the FAPRI report noted.

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

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

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



Photo courtesy of Illinois Farm Bureau

The Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute at the University of Missouri predicted that food and farmland prices could return to more normal rates of inflation later this year and into 2024.

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

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

Over the next 10 years, average nominal crop prices could be much lower than they

have been in 2022-23, but remain above the average of 2017-18 and 2021-22, according to the report.

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

Society of Professional Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers.

After a ninth-straight increase last month, the benchmark federal funds rate is up to a range of 4.75% to 5%, which pushed borrowing costs to the highest level since 2007.

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

(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](http://FarmWeekNow.com).)

**If The Press didn't tell you ...  
who would?**

# Farmers talk mental health

BY TAMMIE SLOUP  
FarmWeek

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I’m still a work in progress,” Matt Hulsizer admitted. “I do talk to a therapist through telehealth, and she doesn’t have really any ag background, which makes it difficult sometimes, but she’s a quick learner.”

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

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

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

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



Photo by Tammie Sloup for FarmWeek

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

in said.

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

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

“Farmers’ businesses are on display for everybody to see. That’s why farmers are so to themselves, and everybody has this idea of ‘I

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*(This story was distributed through a cooperative project between Illinois Farm Bureau and the Illinois Press Association. For more food and farming news, visit FarmWeekNow.com.)*

