THE NORTH DAKOTA
Soybean
GROWER MAGAZINE
VOLUME 15 • ISSUE 3
JUNE 2026

INSIDE:
Shop Talks Offer Real Conversations
PAGE 10

FROM YOUR FIELDS TO FIREFIGHTERS' HANDS

The more we discover about soybeans, the more valuable they become. One innovative product, SoyFoam™, creates a new, sustainable use for your crop that protects firefighters and the planet.

See how your Soy Checkoff is unlocking new markets for soybeans at **unitedsoybean.org**

SOY CHECKOFF™

NORTH DAKOTA SOYBEAN COUNCIL
4852 Rocking Horse Circle South, Fargo, ND 58104
(701) 566-9300 | www.ndsoybean.org

NORTH DAKOTA SOYBEAN GROWERS ASSOCIATION
4852 Rocking Horse Circle South, Fargo, ND 58104
(701) 566-9300 | www.ndsoygrowers.com

Contents

Departments

On the cover

North Dakota Soybean Growers Association (NDSGA) Director Brian Jodock provided an update on association and membership activities at a Shop Talk event in Grand Forks. NDSGA and the North Dakota Soybean Council held a series of gatherings across the state to connect with farmers and discuss issues and opportunities in an informal setting.

—Photo by Anna Lemm-Wiegandt

The North Dakota Soybean Grower is published six times a year by the North Dakota Soybean Growers Association, 4852 Rocking Horse Circle South, Fargo, ND 58104. Website: www.ndsoygrowers.com.

To update subscription information, please call (701) 566-9300 or email info@ndsoybean.org.

Send editorial and advertising materials to Suzanne Wolf, 4852 Rocking Horse Circle South, Fargo, ND 58104, publisher@ndsoybean.org. Publication of editorial or advertising material in the North Dakota Soybean Grower magazine does not imply endorsement by the North Dakota Soybean Growers Association. Check agronomic advice with local sources and always read and follow product labels.

Legislative Water Topics Overview Committee and the Influence on Rural Water Needs

The interim Water Topics Overview Committee met in March in a combined meeting with legislators and the North Dakota State Water Commission, which included the individuals responsible for water issues and policy during the legislative interim. All committee members, reports, presentations and hearing testimony are available on the legislative website: Bit.ly/NDWaterTopicCmte.

Reice Haase, director for the Department of Water Resources (DWR), presented a report, including a March 2026 Biennium Update and information about the department's studies relating to the state's cost-share policies, governance and finance of regional water systems. He noted that the biennium's total project allocation is $615.2 million. Of those funds, $328.2 million are obligated; $39.3 million are unobligated; and $202.5 million are expended. The DWR also has $367.6 million available in carryover funds from the previous biennium.

There is concern about a projected shortfall with future water funding. Haase explained that the state's projected water needs over the next 14 years are $3.4 billion and that there is an expected revenue shortfall of $1.3 billion for the same timeframe. Therefore, the legislature directed the DWR to examine its water cost-share policy. The DWR retained the services of an outside consultant, Deloitte, and that entity presented its cost-share study, including the findings and recommendations to date.

Among other alternatives, Deloitte presented a recommendation to reduce the state's water projects' cost share to 25% and to eliminate deferred maintenance from the eligibility for the state's cost share. This reduction, which appeared to resonate with committee members, would have a huge and unprecedented effect on rural water projects. Some individuals questioned the possible increase for rural-water user fees. Others asked about the influence on value-added agriculture, which often requires significant rural water needs or projects, and generates substantial revenue for the state.

In my understanding, there has been a huge state water policy/priority shift from rural water needs to urban water needs after the 2011 flood effects and urban water projects. Previously, there was a priority for rural water needs, such as irrigation, agricultural drainage, water conveyance and water supply. Currently, the water commission has more urban applications than anything, and applications have already reached the dollar amount set aside for municipalities. There probably needs to be a separate allocation for rural water systems. Otherwise, with rural and other systems combined, rural priorities may be displaced by other requests.

Farmers in rural areas must actively engage with decision makers for these water processes so that critical needs are not forgotten or overlooked. Rural North Dakota must greatly amplify its efforts to engage with legislators and the water commission by informing and reminding them about the importance of funding rural water projects, including value-added agriculture, which generates economic activity that helps make the projects possible. It's about bringing water to ethanol and soybean crushing plants, animal feeding operations, and the resulting increase for agriculture production and value-added agriculture. The importance of agriculture is measurably substantiated as the state's major economic contributor and is well-documented in the 2025 North Dakota Agriculture Industry Contribution Analysis.

Parrell Grossman
Legislative Director, NDSGA
Email:
parrell.grossman@ndsga.com
Website:
ndsoygrowers.com

Power in Trade

Writing the president's message to share with the North Dakota Soybean Growers Association's (NDSGA) membership is a task I greatly enjoy because it's a chance to share a few things that have been on my mind and to communicate recent highlights about the important work the NDSGA has been doing on your behalf. This letter is my last one as I finish my second term as president and let others step forward to serve. I believe it is vital to empower others to lead and not to stay in a role too long, so that path is what I intend to do. I have several years left on the NDSGA board and as one of three North Dakota American Soybean Association directors, so I'm not going anywhere anytime soon. I'm looking forward to where the next president takes our organization.

We have plenty of work left to do in Bismarck; Washington, D.C.; and around the world to help ensure that North Dakota soybean producers have access to export markets and affordable inputs. We've had significant financial challenges in recent years, and many of the fundamental issues causing these financial constraints are not going anywhere.

We have had some recent successes with pesticide regulations, the farm bill passed the house, farm financial assistance and significant biofuel wins, but there is still more work to do. The most important area requiring our focus is trade. Recent emergency, ad-hoc government payments have only replaced a small percentage of the financial losses for farms. Government efforts to reduce input costs will pale in comparison to the effect that having adequate market access can provide for our farms' financial situation. We live in a truly global economy, and we cannot hope to make a living if we don't have customers to buy our products; trade is how we accomplish that task. American farmers are exceptionally productive, and we should take great pride in that fact. We cannot consume all we grow here at home, so we will need trade going forward.

Trade has been enormously impactful to the success of American agriculture even before we existed as a country. Our nation was born because of trade conflict and unjust tariffs placed upon American trade companies, leading to events like the Boston tea party, the Declaration of Independence and war for our nation's independence. The U.S. literally owes most of our modern history and success to agricultural trade. As America celebrates its 250th anniversary this year, let's not forget what made our country great to begin with--our ability as a nation to help feed, clothe, and recently, fuel the world through our agricultural productivity, and trade.

No trade agreement in modern history has had more of an influence on North Dakota agriculture than the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) and its predecessor policies. Trade among the three North American nations has created an integrated economy and allowed all the countries to prosper. There are, and will likely always remain, some challenges or issues to resolve with the USMCA, yet the overall benefit of this trade agreement cannot be overstated.

I am exceptionally proud to be an American farmer and to do my part to help feed the world. I am even more proud to be a North Dakotan. Serving as the NDSGA president these past two years has been one of the highlights of my life. I am very proud of the hard work and dedication that all of you do every day, whether as a farmer or the people who support agriculture in our rural communities or big cities alike. This opportunity has truly been one of the great honors of my life. I look forward to where the road may continue to lead the soybean industry, but I know that, when we come together, our voice is strong and that we should all take great pride in saying "I am a soybean producer from North Dakota."

Justin Shelock
President, NDSGA
Email:
justin.sherlock@ndsga.com
Website:
ndsoygrowers.com

North Dakota Young Leaders Find Connections

Brandon Dale and his wife, Kristine Hankins, were teaching abroad when COVID hit. The pandemic brought the couple back to Dale's hometown just when his father was considering retirement from the family farm near Montpelier, North Dakota. In 2020, Dale took over the operation and became the fifth generation to operate the farm that's been in the family since 1906.

"It's been a big learning curve, but it's been good," Dale says.

Dale was golfing at a North Dakota Soybean Growers Association tournament when he was approached about applying for the Corteva Agriscience™ American Soybean Association (ASA) Young Leader Program. The two-part educational program targets individuals and couples who are passionate about agriculture, with the goal of identifying, training and building a network of future farm leaders.

"I went home and thought about it," Dale recalls. "Kristine is from Arizona, so she's not really familiar with a lot of the ag industry, so I thought it would be a good opportunity for us to grow and learn together. So, I threw our names in the hat, and we got picked."

Dale describes how farming can be a lonely endeavor with a lot of time spent alone in a tractor, combine or truck. Making connections with fellow young farmers was intriguing.

"Coming from a background in education and being in front of students and working with people, I missed that interaction, so this seemed like an opportunity for me to network and broaden my horizons in ag and to engage with like-minded people," Dale explains.

The Young Leader Program is open to individuals and couples who are engaged in farming. Hankins was also interested in participating.

"Brandon's been farming for five years, but I'm new to the ag community, so I'm learning a lot," Hankins contends. "Each year with harvest that's coming around, I'm just learning more and more. So, I viewed this as an opportunity for me to just continue learning."

Brandon Dale and wife Kristine Hankins took part in the American Soybean Association voting delegate session at Commodity Classic in San Antonio.

The first session brought young farmers from 18 states and Canada to Corteva Agriscience's™ Johnston, Iowa, campus in early December.

Hankins states that the first session of the Young Leader Program was eye opening.

"I was pretty blown away with all of the different avenues that the program led us through and showed us what associations do for farmers and the research that's going into the seed," Hankins contends. "It was pretty eye opening and really exciting."

"The tour of Corteva's breeding facility in Iowa was incredible," Dale adds. "It felt like I was in Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory."

Dale describes how the Young Leader Program provided the opportunity to learn leadership skills and to make connections with other farmers from the U.S.

Brandon Dale (right) helps his father Steve Dale prepare to empty a bin of soybeans this spring.

"It was young farmers from 18 different states, plus Canada, who are gearing up to be the next generation on the farm," Dale asserts. "It was inspiring to see other people who are passionate about the industry. Being at Corteva and seeing the technology and all that goes into their products made this a very positive and inspiring experience. I definitely want to thank the North Dakota Soybean Growers Association for giving us this opportunity."

"Everyone shared their story, and we realized they're a lot like us," Hankins maintains. "A lot of them are taking over their farm; they're fourth, fifth, or seventh generation; and they're starting out as well. Everyone has the same goals to maintain the longevity of their farm for the next generation and to practice sustainability, to keep the farm healthy. Knowing that there's like a community out there was really exciting for us, especially with our background in international teaching, which is a lot of networking as well."

The Young Leader class took part in the Commodity Classic in San Antonio, Texas, which gave attendees an opportunity to witness the ASA delegate session that forms the policy platform which the organization will use for its advocacy efforts.

"The ASA delegate process was fun to watch," Dale says. "I've never experienced something like that before, and it was great to see all the states coming together for a common purpose of moving the nation's soybean industry forward."

Dale has applied for a third session of the Young Leader Program. The ASA selects 10 people from the cohort to go to Washington, D.C., in July for further exposure to the agricultural policy world.

"I didn't fully appreciate the importance of policy until I came back to the farm," Dale explains. "Decisions made in Washington on trade, on conservation programs, on crop protection labels shape the choices I make on the farm every single season. That's what draws me to the work of the American Soybean Association, and it's what makes Corteva's commitment to 'ensuring progress for generations to come' feel so personal. Phases 1 and 2 of the Young Leader Program opened my eyes to that bigger picture."

One of the hopes Dale and Hankins had for the Young Leader Program was to find connections with other young farmers. Dale contends that the goal was accomplished. The couple enjoyed meeting other young farmers from other parts of the country, listening to their stories and learning about their experiences.

"Even though we may farm on different planets, we all still share similar challenges," Dale declares.

—Story and photos by Daniel Lemke

Brandon Dale returned to North Dakota in 2020 after teaching abroad, becoming the fifth generation to operate the family farm near Montpelier.

More Leaders Wanted

North Dakota farmers are encouraged to consider applying for the 2026-2027 Corteva Agriscience™ American Soybean Association (ASA) Young Leader Program.

The Young Leader Program was founded in 1984 and sets the bar for leadership training in agriculture, identifying and training new, innovative and engaged growers to serve as the voice of the American farmer. Participants commit to attend two training sessions, the second of which is held in conjunction with the annual Commodity Classic trade show and conference.

The Young Leader Program not only enhances participants' skills through leadership, communication and issues-based training, but also builds a strong peer network, generating increased success for their businesses and communities.

Young Leader seminars feature intense coursework that is designed to enhance leadership skills for the benefit of not only soy, but also the entire agricultural industry. Training, open to all ages 21 and up, is interactive and includes evening group activities.

Brandon Dale of Jamestown is one of many North Dakota Young Leader Program participants who strongly encourage other young farmers to consider applying.

"This program helps you grow as a person and as a leader," Dale says. "It puts you in the room with other farmers across the country who share similar struggles. You get access to some of the most important stakeholders in agriculture. It reminds you that you aren't alone in this journey we call farming."

The application process will open in late June. For more information, contact the North Dakota Soybean Growers Association.

Shop Talks Connect Neighbors and Issues

Paul Anderson
NDSC Director
Email:
panderson@ndsoybean.org
Website:
ndsoybean.org

Farm shops are extremely versatile. From fixing equipment to storing valuable farm implements and even hosting family events such as graduation parties, these buildings serve multiple purposes. Sometimes, their best use comes by spurring conversation.

As a seed dealer, I use my shop to put on several grower meetings every year. The shop is set up to give farmers a chance to see and hear about seed varieties and performance.

Recently, my shop was the site for one of the North Dakota Soybean Growers Association and North Dakota Soybean Council's Producer Shop Talks. Unlike what you'd typically find at larger conferences or meetings, the Shop Talks encourage informal discussion. Growers could ask questions, share ideas and learn from each other in a relaxed setting. This year's sessions included discussions about soybean marketing plans, agriculture and biofuel policy, production costs, legislative updates, wetlands, and farm transition planning.

With meetings at my farm by Harvey, along with other events at Berthold, Fort Ransom, and Grand Forks, folks didn't have to take a full day to learn more about what's happening in the industry.

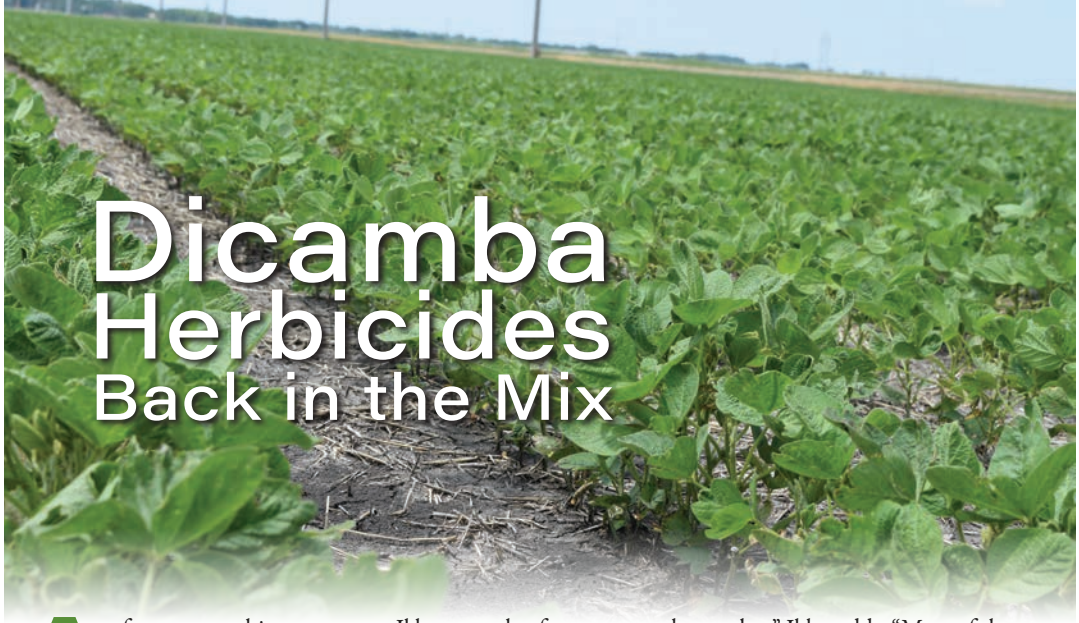
We had good participation at all the sites, and farmer leaders were able to share important information about what the soybean organizations are doing on behalf of farmers. There was plenty of interest regarding the current economic situation, soybean crushing opportunities, and more. At the event I hosted, there was a lot of discussion about wetland mitigation.

I was encouraged by the number of young farmers who participated, and we even had some high school kids in attendance. It's inspiring to have younger people involved with and interested in the future of agriculture as much of the farming population ages.

The beauty of an informal setting, such as a farm shop, is that it encourages conversation. If participants had questions, they could ask. As is often the case when farmers get together, some of the highest value comes from the interactions that happen before and after the actual meeting.

This was the second time the Shop Talks have taken place across North Dakota. It's important to get growers together to obtain updates on key issues and to find out how the state's soybean organizations are working on farmers' behalf. The topics were spot-on; the presenters delivered good, pertinent information; and good conversations occurred. As a result, it sounds like this event was a good use for a farm shop.

To read more about Shop Talks, visit pages 10–11.



Dicamba Herbicides
Back in the Mix

After a year on hiatus, dicamba herbicides are, once again, available for farmers to use on over the top (OTT) applications with soybeans.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) vacated the label for dicamba in 2024, but farmers were allowed to use existing supplies. Dicamba was not available for OTT applications in 2025. In February, the EPA granted federal registration for three dicamba herbicides: Engenia® from BASF, Stryax™ from Bayer and Tavium® from Syngenta.

North Dakota State University Extension Weed Specialist Joe Ikley, Ph.D., says that Minnesota and South Dakota have added statewide conditions, but North Dakota farmers can operate knowing the federally approved label is the law that must be followed.

Even though the registration has been granted, there are some new requirements that farmers and applicators need to follow.

"Similar to the last time we had these labels, there is mandatory training as the three approved products are all restricted use pesticides," Ikley says. "Applicators, mixers and loaders need to have their pesticide license, and they need to be trained. There are online modules offered by each company. Each of the three companies has their own training, but you just need to take one to check that box."

Ikley states that farmers can only make two applications of dicamba per year, with a half-pound of active ingredient per application. The application window is pre-plant through the first reproductive, or R1, growth stage for Engenia® and Stryax™ while Tavium® can be applied through V4.

There are specific volatility mitigations related to the Endangered Species Act, including temperature restrictions. If temperatures are equal to or greater than 95 degrees the day of or the day following application, as forecast by the National Weather Service, applications are not allowed. If that temperature forecast is less than 85 degrees, spraying is allowed. If temperatures are between 85 degrees and 95 degrees, only half of the acres in a county can be treated.

"That additional caveat was added this year based on temperature and a volatility mitigation practice in order to appease the Endangered Species Act," Ikley explains.

The dicamba labels require spray-drift buffers and run off mitigations to stay in compliance. Ikley describes how there is a 240-foot downwind buffer, but there are a number of different steps that a grower or applicator can take to potentially reduce that buffer distance.

Every application will require a drift-reduction adjuvant and a volatility-reducing agent.

"Each company's product website has these listed along with other important points to remember," Ikley adds. "Most of these requirements will be covered in the mandatory training. I do lean on those company websites because they have all developed materials to help folks make sure every application will be on label."

Runoff-mitigation practices are also required, which can vary by area in North Dakota, particularly if farmers operate in pesticide use limitation areas (PULA). In order to spray dicamba, points must be earned through practices such as contour farming and buffer strips. Three points are required for most fields, but six points are needed to apply dicamba in a designated PULAs.

The EPA publishes maps of the designated PULAs online. Ikley says that there are PULAs in North Dakota, including areas in Richland and Ransom Counties.

"In the past, some of these restriction areas were at the county level or maybe part of a county," Ikley explains. "This time, it almost seems like individual fields might be circled. So, certainly applicators in Richland and Ransom County should be aware of this and should check all the fields to see if that field is within the PULA, and again, the difference there is three versus six runoff points."

Ikley expects many farmers to consider using dicamba again in 2026 because it is effective for controlling certain weeds. Dicamba is used to help control waterhemp and ragweed, which are common in the southeastern part of the state. The product is also used to control kochia, which can be problematic in northern and western North Dakota.

As with all products, Ikley urges wise use of dicamba. Unlike other herbicides that may have a 5-year or even a 15-year label, the current dicamba approval is only for two years.

"I think this underscores the importance of stewarding this technology properly, because the registration process will begin again in two years, and if there are major issues, then these labels may look very different," Ikley contends. "It's important to understand and comply with all the label requirements, be judicious with our applications, and apply these products only where they are needed — not just to control weeds, but to steward the technology properly. At the end of two years, this whole registration process will begin anew, and we would like to have these labels in place for the 2028 season and beyond."

—Story by Daniel Lemke, photo by staff

Did you miss the April 15 dicamba webinar from NDSU Extension?

NDSU Extension specialists Joe Ikley, Ph.D., and Madeleine Smith, Ph.D., discuss current dicamba regulations and what applicators can expect for pesticide labeling heading into the 2026 season. The webinar covers key updates, requirements, and considerations for staying in compliance.

<< Scan the QR code to watch the webinar

Scan the QR code to learn more about Endangered Species Act mitigation requirements >>

Shop Talks Offer Real Conversations

NDSC Secretary Milo Braaten connects with farmers during a Shop Talk focused on local challenges, opportunities, and shared experiences.

Even when the topics are important or interesting, farmers don't often take the time to travel long distances for meetings, so the North Dakota Soybean Growers Association (NDSGA) and the North Dakota Soybean Council (NDSC) brought the gatherings to the farmers.

For the second year, the two organizations conducted a series of Producer Shop Talks around North Dakota. Sessions were held at Grand Forks, Fort Ransom, Berthold and Harvey. Shop Talks gave growers a chance to hear from industry experts, to connect with fellow farmers, and to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing North Dakota agriculture.

"These Shop Talks were focused, with real, open discussions at the local, grassroots level in a casual environment, meeting the farmers where they live and where they're at in a shop somewhere down a gravel road," explains Craig Kleven, director of industry relations for North Dakota Soybean.

The Shop Talks were hosted by farmers and covered a wide range of topics, from production challenges and marketing plans to the new dicamba herbicide label and the value of in-state soybean processing. There were also discussions about the effects of the newly released Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) volumes and transition planning. Each location had its own agenda, but the gatherings all delved into policy issues, with each session including discussions with local state legislators.

"The topics were relevant to what's happening in our backyard," Kleven says. "Roads and infrastructure were brought up. Animal agriculture came up at most of the Shop Talks along with discussions about what the North Dakota soybean groups were doing to promote and encourage animal ag development."

NDSC Vice Chairman Evan Montgomery greets a guest during a Producer Shop Talk on his Grand Forks farm, part of a statewide series bringing conversations directly to growers.

Informative Networking

NDSC director and farmer Evan Montgomery hosted the Grand Forks event, which he described as "informative networking." He added that there was value in getting farmers together to discuss what's on their minds.

"It's always interesting to get a group of farmers in a room," Montgomery states. "You're going to get a question or a thought that you hadn't considered. There were some very interesting questions that came forward, and that only happens when you have that kind of mix."

Montgomery described how participants at the session he hosted talked a lot about the overall economy and rising input costs.

Growers take part in a Shop Talk, where conversations on local issues and industry opportunities bring agriculture discussions closer to home.

The Shop Talks also provided the NDSGA and NDSC representatives with a chance to update participants on what the two organizations are doing on behalf of the state's soybean farmers.

"The best part about this is it gave me an opportunity to make sure that the knowledge we have of what's happening in the industry is distributed so that other farmers know what we're talking about, such as the issues that we face and the opportunities we have," Montgomery declares. "It's a good way to make sure that we're all as much in the know as possible."

Having the Producer Shop Talks spread throughout North Dakota opened the door for more local farmers to participate. "I think it's important that we come together as neighbors and farmers in the area, including people we don't talk to on a regular basis, and have conversations with each other," says Ted Brandt, an Enderlin farmer and NDSC director. "You get to see what everybody else is doing and what they think on some of the topics that we brought to the table and how they're addressing them."

Brandt hosted the Shop Talk in Fort Ransom. He describes how a lot of discussions revolved around land values, rental rates, commodity prices and escalating fertilizer prices.

"Rising costs have definitely been the elephant in the room the past two years," Brandt states. "It's one of the major topics everyone has been talking about."

Addressing issues and listening to concerns were at the heart of the Producer Shop Talks.

"It was a good educational experience for the growers that, maybe, don't know as much about the soybean council and the association's involvement in nationwide and worldwide activities and what their checkoff dollars are going toward," Brandt explains. "I think it gives them a little extra understanding about what those dollars are doing for them."

Brandt adds that many of the Shop Talk participants in Fort Ransom were people he knew, but there were plenty of others he hadn't met.

"I was happy to see such a great turnout and involvement from the crowd," Brandt contends. "There were a lot of familiar faces for me and a lot of new ones too, so I think the key takeaway is there was a lot of interest in what we were doing."

Close to Home

Having Producer Shop Talks located in various communities around the state allowed farmers to participate when they, otherwise, might not have had the chance.

NDSC Director Paul Anderson hosted a Shop Talk on his farm near Harvey.

"It brought people in, and they didn't have to drive to Fargo for a meeting," Anderson declares.

Discussions at the Harvey session centered on wetland mitigation as well as soybean processing opportunities.

Anderson was pleased that there were a number of young farmers in attendance.

"It was inspiring to see that a good chunk of the participants were young, and we even had some high school kids," Anderson says.

Anderson also appreciated that the presenters and attendees stuck around after the session was done to continue the conversation because, sometimes, the greatest value comes from the in-person conversations between growers.

Kleven states that the topics addressed at each location created their own discussion within the presentation.

For Berthold farmer Cody Hanson, the host of the Berthold Producer Shop Talk and the NDSC county representative for Ward County, the event offered an opportunity for many participants.

"We're not a huge soybean area, so it was good to give local guys an introduction to what the soybean council and the growers association are doing," Hanson asserts.

Hanson maintains that the growers were interested in hearing about soybean market opportunities and growth with the in-state soybean processing potential. The farmers were also introduced to some of the ways their operations are being supported behind the scenes.

"It was valuable to let growers in the area know what the soybean council is doing and for them to understand that there is someone out there working for them," Hanson adds. "That's something they may not have known beforehand. We probably touched on a few things for the first time, and it was a way to get the conversation started."

Instead of logging many miles for meetings, Shop Talk participants were able to stay closer to home and to meet with friends and neighbors while getting a fuller picture of North Dakota's soybean industry.

"We covered a wide range of topics, which exposed people to new topics and something that maybe they're not as familiar with," Kleven states. "They were also able to get individual questions answered about some of things that they're concerned about. All this information will give them something to think about when they're spending time in the tractor and the sprayer this spring and summer."

—Story by Daniel Lemke, photos by staff and Anna Lemm-Wiegandt

USSEC and North Dakota Soybean Leaders Differentiate and Elevate U.S. Soy

Justin Sherlock represented North Dakota soybean farmers on a grower panel at the Southeast Asia U.S. Agricultural Cooperators Conference in Bangkok, Thailand.

On behalf of North Dakota farmers, the U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC) team actively attains market access for U.S. Soy, differentiates its quality from soy of other origins and elevates the preference for U.S. Soy among international customers around the world.

North Dakota farmers play key roles in these efforts.

For example, in March 2026, the USSEC was at work on each strategic goal:

- ***Attain market access:*** The USSEC participated in multiple U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Trade Reciprocity for U.S. Manufacturers and Producers (T.R.U.M.P.) Missions focused on growing agricultural exports to nations where the U.S. has a trade deficit.
- ***Differentiate quality:*** The USSEC hosted multiple events for critical market segments in east Asia, highlighting the quality of U.S. Soy
- ***Elevate preference:*** The USSEC signed a memorandum of understanding to advance aquaculture and to promote U.S. Soy for aquafeeds.

North Dakota Soybean Council checkoff investments help drive these efforts, with North Dakota farmers front and center in growing global demand for U.S. Soy.

Attain Access: Trade Missions to Central America and Vietnam

Cindy Pulskamp, a Hillsboro farmer who serves as a USSEC director, joined the USDA T.R.U.M.P. Mission to Guatemala and El Salvador from March 9-12. Luke Lindberg, the USDA's undersecretary for trade and foreign agricultural affairs, led the mission to strengthen agricultural cooperation and to promote a more predictable trade environment for the agri-food sector in both countries.

The delegation met with government officials and industry leaders to discuss market access, trade facilitation, logistics infrastructure, and science-based regulatory standards. Pulskamp and Rosalind Leeck, the managing director of the USSEC, reinforced the role of U.S. Soy in regional feed and animal protein production. They highlighted the advantages of U.S. Soy, including reliable supply chains, sustainability, and tools such as the Sustainable U.S. Soy label. Both countries source nearly all of their soybean meal from the United States.

A few weeks later, Justin Sherlock, the current North Dakota Soybean Growers Association (NDSGA) president from Dazey, joined the mission Lindberg led to Vietnam. This trip focused on strengthening agricultural engagement and trade collaboration between the U.S. and Vietnam.

Sherlock and USSEC CEO Jim Sutter represented U.S. Soy, highlighting its reliable supply, quality consistency, and sustainability. While Vietnam imported 47% of its whole soybean needs from the U.S. in the 2024-25

Monte Peterson and Avery Hansen, NDSC, participated in the Southeast Asia U.S. Agricultural Cooperators Conference and the Asia Soy Excellence and Food Summit in Bangkok, Thailand, on behalf of North Dakota soybean farmers.

marketing year, U.S. soybean meal comprised just 15% of Vietnam's 6.3 million metric tons of soybean meal imports. That figure represents a significant market for soybean meal that could flow from North Dakota through the Pacific Northwest corridor to Vietnam.

Differentiate Quality: Key Customer Events in East Asia

The USSEC regularly gathers customers, industry leaders, regional stakeholders, exporters, and U.S. farmers to strengthen relationships. The content presented at USSEC conferences and summits differentiates U.S. Soy from competitive products.

South Korea

Sherlock provided a personal perspective to Korean customers for U.S. Soy. He spoke about the 2025 U.S. soybean crop, 2026 planting intentions, and his sustainability practices at both the 2026 U.S. Soybean Meal Conference on March 18 and the 2026 U.S. Food Bean Buyers Conference on March 20. Both events were held in Seoul, South Korea. Customers value this firsthand insight.

The U.S. Soybean Meal Conference highlighted the importance of the soybean meal's quality for swine production and sustainability. The U.S. Food Bean Buyers Conference covered market updates, non-GMO acreage, Sustainable U.S. Soy label adoption, and the role of soy in healthy aging. Both events included meetings with suppliers and buyers, facilitating direct business engagement.

Thailand

North Dakota soybean farmer Monte Peterson and Avery Hansen, international market development specialist for the North Dakota Soybean Council (NDSC), joined Sherlock in Bangkok, Thailand, for the Southeast Asia U.S. Agricultural Cooperators Conference. The USSEC teamed up with the U.S. Grains and BioProducts Council and U.S. Wheat Associates in Bangkok, Thailand, to host the annual conference on March 23-25. Attendees from throughout East Asia often purchase multiple U.S. commodities, and the individuals value connecting with all their U.S. suppliers in one place.

Sherlock participated in a farmer panel, sharing firsthand perspectives about production practices and farm management. He discussed managing productivity, efficiency, and sustainability at the farm level. The conference also highlighted how production trends, policy development, and shifting trade dynamics continue to influence market outlooks in an increasingly complex global trade environment. Reliability and long-term relationships remain key aspects when navigating

Justin Sherlock represented USSEC at the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Vietnam Association of Seafood Exporters and Producers to advance Vietnamese aquaculture and elevate preference for U.S. Soy in aquafeed.

market uncertainty.

On March 25-27, the USSEC hosted its Asia Soy Excellence and Food Summit 2026, also in Bangkok. The event emphasized innovation, nutrition, and sustainability, highlighting the expanding role of U.S. Soy in meeting Asia's evolving food needs.

Participants explored how sustainably sourced U.S. Soy can support healthier diets and more resilient food systems across the region. The program underscored the demand for food-grade and identity-preserved soybeans, alongside the importance of verified sourcing and traceability to meet buyers' expectations for a consistent supply.

Networking is at the heart of all these events, allowing Peterson, Sherlock, and Hansen to be the faces of North Dakota soybean farmers for U.S. Soy importers and customers, who ranged from food manufacturers to livestock and aquaculture producers. At these events' infrastructure and facility tours, North Dakota farmers saw how their soybeans get to East Asia and how customers use the products. Personal connections and firsthand discussions about sustainability and quality set U.S. Soy apart in the global market.

Elevate Preference: Strengthening Industry Relationships

In many markets, memorandums of understanding (MOUs) formalize agreements to work together. The USSEC often signs MOUs with industry organizations in specific markets in order to deepen relationships and broaden opportunities to collaborate. Ultimately, these agreements elevate the preference for U.S. Soy within that industry.

The USSEC representatives on a USDA trade mission to Guatemala and El Salvador, including Cindy Pulskamp (far left), joined Undersecretary Luke Lindberg, highlighting Incaparina, a ready-to-drink blend that includes soy protein.

Following the USDA trade mission in Vietnam, Sherlock represented the USSEC at the signing of an MOU with the Vietnam Association of Seafood Exporters and Producers on March 26. The country ranks as the fourth-largest aquaculture producer in the world, making it a valuable potential market for U.S. Soy protein products.

This MOU builds on more than 30 years of agricultural cooperation between the U.S. and Vietnam. The agreement aims to advance sustainable aquaculture, to strengthen technical collaboration, and to support U.S. Soy use for aquafeed. The partnership reflects shared priorities to enhance feed performance, to support industry competitiveness, and to contribute to long-term food security and sustainability.

Sherlock spoke on behalf of North Dakota and U.S. Soy farmers, reinforcing how working together can sustainably support an aquaculture industry that is critical for feeding a growing population.

These efforts provide a snapshot of a few short weeks in the USSEC's calendar, clearly demonstrating how North Dakota farmers support USSEC efforts to promote soy products from the U.S. and North Dakota.

—Story and photos courtesy of the USSEC

Dazey farmer Justin Sherlock gave a first-hand perspective on the 2025 soybean crop, intentions for 2026, and sustainability to attendees of the U.S. Soybean Meal Conference and U.S. Food Bean Buyers Conference, both in Seoul, South Korea.

U.S. Identity Preserved

ALLIANCE CONTINUES GLOBAL OUTREACH WITH INTERNATIONAL SUMMIT

NDSC International Market Development Specialist Avery Hansen, right, participates in a networking activity during the U.S. Identity Preserved International Summit.

The U.S. Identity Preserved International Summit went worldwide in March 2026, welcoming 160 participants from 18 countries to Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Along with sponsoring the event, North Dakota Soybean Council International Market Development Specialist Avery Hansen and farmer Monte Peterson attended.

"North Dakota soybean farmers play an important role in the growth of identity-preserved crops, and it's been worthwhile to see our investment of time and resources pay off as demand continues to expand," Peterson said.

Hosted by the U.S. Identity Preserved Alliance (USIP Alliance), the leading voice for delivering traceable, high-quality, variety-specific crops to global food markets, the summit served as a catalyst for discussions and networking centered on identity-preserved agriculture.

"The summit is an opportunity to share ideas, explore innovations and strengthen partnerships that support transparency and trust throughout the identity-preserved supply chain," USIP Alliance Chair Bryan Severs stated during his opening remarks.

The summit opened with Severs, who farms in Illinois, and featured an agenda of industry experts, including U.S. Soybean Export Council CEO Jim Sutter; World Initiative for Soy in Human Health Program Manager Tate Jeffries; and Edil Vidal Torres, a food technologist and scientist at the Northern Crops Institute. Paul Newnham of the SDG2 Advocacy Hub highlighted the "Beans is How" campaign, which aims to double global bean and pulse consumption by 2028, and the role identity-preserved crops can play.

"Identity preservation is not just a technical system; it's a promise," Newnham asserted. "A promise that what was planted is what will be delivered. A promise of integrity from seed to shipment. A promise that trust can travel across oceans."

That promise underscores the summit's importance to the USIP Alliance's mission of promoting value across the supply chain, from farmer to food company. The agenda included perspectives from growers, researchers, exporters and international buyers.

"Quality doesn't cost; it pays back," added Identity Preserved Crops Adviser Raquel Hansen, who farms in southern Minnesota.

Other speakers included Jin Yoon, a Korean food manufacturer; Matt Tripodi of Euromonitor; Hans Eisenbeis with The Non-GMO Project; and Shinsuke Yamada of Yamada Foods, a Japanese soyfood manufacturer. The summit also featured a U.S. IP growers panel as well as sessions on contracting, the Chicago Mercantile Exchange markets and transportation, generating discussion around key industry topics.

The identity-preserved agriculture industry is gaining momentum, and the USIP Alliance continues to support a reliable supply chain that ensures product integrity.

"It's been exciting to see participants from so many countries and backgrounds, with different uses of IP crops," USIP Alliance Executive Director Randy Duckworth said.

—Story and photos courtesy of the U.S. Identity Preserved Alliance

North Dakota farmer Monte Peterson introduces a speaker at the U.S. Identity Preserved International Summit.

Helping Hands for Rural North Dakota

North Dakota is dotted with hundreds of small towns and rural communities that many of the state's residents call home. Rural municipalities and townships offer services and resources which are vital to community members, farmers and others who live in the area, but many of those communities lack the staff or resources to identify or to respond to opportunities or challenges.

North Dakota is equipped with organizations, including regional development councils and economic development organizations, that were created to help companies and communities maintain vital services or grow.

"Our purpose is to address both issues as well as opportunities that transcend individual community borders," says Dawn Mandt, executive director of the Red River Regional Council (RRRC). "Today in our world, that means addressing workforce shortages, housing shortages and really just doing the things that require specialized expertise beyond one community."

The RRRC is one of eight regional councils that work in the areas of project development, planning and implementation.

Needed Expertise

Small towns often have very little in terms of professional staff, and city leaders are primarily concerned with basic issues, such as maintaining infrastructure, clearing roads, making sure people have clean water and ensuring the city is managed well. Mandt describes how small towns often rely on volunteers to help build the community, but that approach has limitations. Regional councils can help identify needs and can respond to opportunities.

"As a former mayor and in the role I have now, I think the regional councils are so important because they are staffed by local people who live in our communities," asserts Justin Sherlock, North Dakota Soybean Growers Association president and a former mayor of Dazey. "They're our neighbors, and they have the necessary knowledge and experience regarding grant opportunities or what programs are available and might be a good fit for rural entities, whether it's a city, a small town, a township or a county."

Sherlock agrees that most small communities don't have staff with the experience or expertise which larger towns enjoy, but outside resources, such as the regional councils, can fill that void.

"For rural communities and rural parts of our state, it's such an important asset to have them (councils) here to partner with us and do so affordably," Sherlock states. "They are truly a partner trying to help a city look at their long-term needs, create an actionable plan to address those needs, and then identify possible funding sources and grant opportunities that could help them meet those needs. We just don't have the experience or expertise in many of our small communities to address many of the challenges we face dealing with these big projects, but the regional planning councils help guide us through the process and be our partner, step by step through the entire process. I truly believe we couldn't do many of these infrastructure or community development projects without their support."

The RRRC has a lengthy record of success stories. The organization secured funding and helped develop a childcare center in Walsh County in order to meet needs in the community of Grafton and beyond. The RRRC is actively working to address rural housing challenges that affect agriculture. Due to an increased demand for H-2A visa workers, there is a lack of suitable housing in many rural communities. Mandt says that a study showed a need for 4,000 housing units in rural areas, which the RRRC is helping to address.

Mandt details how the RRRC is emphasizing connections with agriculture.

"It's really important for our local producers to also become engaged and invested in the community, to partner with guys like us, and make their needs known as

Melissa Beach is economic development administrator for MinnKota Power Cooperative.

Dawn Mandt serves as executive director for the Red River Regional Council.

an industry," Mandt contends.

Mandt adds that, over the past five years, the regional councils secured nearly $1 billion in funds that were invested in North Dakota communities.

The regional councils will be part of delivering the Rural Health Transformation Program, which is making $1 billion available over the next 5 years to help modernize rural health care.

"We'll bring the expertise of how we can leverage these projects and these ideas in even bigger and better ways and create regional solutions to the barriers that we see to health and wellness across the state," Mandt explains.

Business Support

Melissa Beach, the economic development administrator for Minnkota Power Cooperative, based in Grand Forks, N.D., is the current president of the Economic Development Association of North Dakota (EDND). She says that economic developers are also a resource for communities, businesses and farmers.

"We help to provide some education as new programmatic areas come about or (as) state and federal programs are developed," Beach asserts. "We work together to understand how these programs work and make accessing them a bit easier because many communities don't use those programs every day."

Beach maintains that the EDND advocates for policy that keeps North Dakota business friendly. The organization also works to connect with communities in order to share opportunities and to help address challenges.

"We help to support those local economic developers and the regional folks, but we also see it from a bigger lens of how can we make this whole region more competitive," Beach says.

Economic developers frequently work in the areas of business retention and business attraction.

"I think one of the barriers and challenges that we still see in communities is that they don't necessarily see the opportunities that really are out there," Beach explains. "We share those opportunities with communities that, yes, there are companies from Canada, Iowa and Wisconsin, that are looking to expand into this area."

Available land, power and water access, as well as the Bank of North Dakota, are key selling points for attracting businesses, according to Beach. Not all opportunities for community and business growth come from outside the state.

"The thing that I would love to see better connected in North Dakota would be the connection between producers and the economic developers because, so often, we are catering to the traditional businesses that we see," Beach contends. "Some of those farmers have spin-off businesses on their own farm, so how can we help to encourage more of those, but also support that farm as a strong business as well? Those operations are so critically important in our rural areas, so I would love to encourage our producers to reach out to their local, regional or statewide economic developers."

—Story by Daniel Lemke, photos provided by Melissa Beach and Dawn Mandt

USDA FUNDS SUPPORT Soy Marketing Efforts

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) is awarding more than $212 million through the Market Access Program (MAP) and Foreign Market Development (FMD) program to help expand the export markets for U.S. food and agricultural products.

The MAP and FMD programs are longstanding, cost-share partnerships that help producers build and maintain a competitive presence in the global marketplace.

The American Soybean Association (ASA), the U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC) and the World Initiative for Soy in Human Health (WISHH) were allocated over $16.8 million in MAP and FMD funds to support the promotion of U.S. soy in international markets during the 2026 program year, which runs from January through December.

"The FMD and MAP programs are essential tools that enable American soybean farmers to compete and succeed in the global marketplace," says Stephen Censky, ASA CEO. "Through our partnerships with (the) USSEC and WISHH, (the) ASA strategically leverages these resources to build long-term capacity and demand for U.S. soy around the world."

A 2022 study examining 17 years of USDA market-development investments found that every dollar invested returned $24.50.

"These program investments are vital for helping U.S. soy sustain and expand global market opportunities by building partnerships, addressing customer needs, and delivering the transparency and sustainability that international buyers value," states Jim Sutter, the USSEC CEO.

The USDA-FAS funding will be distributed via the ASA, the cooperator of record for U.S. soy's participation in the MAP and FMD programs, to the USSEC and WISHH in order to enhance market access, technical support and demand-creation activities through strategic market development in emerging, developing, expanding and maturing markets worldwide, creating long-term demand and expanded trade opportunities for U.S.-grown soybeans.

In April, USDA-FAS allocated $14 million in funding through the new America First Trade Promotion Program (AFTPP).

The funds will be invested to support the joint initiative of USSEC and ASA/WISHH to grow global demand for U.S. soy by equipping international buyers with the tools, data, and technical support they need to prefer, procure, and promote soy of U.S. origin in their markets.

"This AFTPP funding is a welcome and especially timely opportunity coming just as new trade agreements are opening doors, and diversifying demand for U.S. Soy in international markets," said Mike McCranie, USSEC Board Chair and South Dakota farmer. "USSEC is eager to turn that momentum and this new investment into export sales and measurable returns for U.S. soybean farmers."

—Story by Daniel Lemke

Canada and North Dakota:
Growing a Prosperous Future Together

By Beth Richardson
Consul General
of Canada

I was raised on the prairies, where the horizon stretches wide, and the land teaches you early lessons about independence, resilience, and humility. I grew up looking at fields of corn and grain, watching the seasons shape not only the land, but also the people who worked it.

That prairie upbringing stays with you. It reminds you that food does not come from nowhere; food comes from good soil, hard work, and communities that look out for one another. Farm life also gives you a deep appreciation for the natural abundance of this region.

Canadians and Americans share these values, especially here in the Upper Midwest.

Canada and the United States have long been nations shaped by the land. We are rich in natural resources and proud producers of high-quality food, fuel, and goods that help power the global economy. As trading nations, our daily lives are deeply influenced by markets beyond our borders: by global demand, shifting trade policies, and economic uncertainty.

As Canada's representative to the Upper Midwest, I see how vital the Canada-U.S. relationship is, particularly for agriculture. Together, we share one of the largest and most diverse trading relationships in the world, which is worth more than $1 trillion every year. Billions of dollars in goods and services cross our shared border every day, often without much fanfare and often without the deserved recognition.

For North Dakota, Canada is more than a friendly neighbor. Canada is North Dakota's top customer. North Dakota sells more to Canada than to all other countries combined, and agriculture sits at the heart of this relationship. Nearly half of all North Dakota's agricultural exports go to Canada, including millions of dollars' worth of grains and oilseeds.

Take soybeans as an example. Many North Dakota soybeans travel north as part of a deeply integrated, cross-border supply chain. In Canada, they are crushed and turned into feed for livestock, ingredients for food and industrial products, and inputs for a growing biofuel market. Canada provides a steady, reliable demand for North Dakota soybeans, along with dependable transportation networks that help move crops to market. That kind of certainty matters when margins are tight and when planning ahead is everything.

When you dig a little deeper, you see just how balanced and interconnected this agricultural partnership really is. Canada supplies key inputs, such as potash, that help fertilize North Dakota's crops. Downstream processing supports manufacturing jobs on both sides of the border. Together, we are stronger, more competitive and better prepared to weather global volatility and changing market demands.

This partnership didn't happen by accident. It's been built by decades of fair and open trade between Canada and the United States, an arrangement that many countries around the world admire. With the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), most goods cross our shared border tariff free, guided by clear rules, predictable market access and science-based standards.

Because so much of this trade happens quietly every day, it's easy to take it for granted. With the USMCA up for review this summer, we cannot afford to be complacent. Canada is working hard to highlight the benefits of free trade and to support the renewal of this critical agreement. I am grateful to the North Dakota Soybean Growers Association and the American Soybean Association for standing with us, utilizing efforts such as the Agricultural Coalition for USMCA.

Canada's agricultural relationship with North Dakota is about more than trade figures and balance sheets. Our companies and universities work side by side, sharing research to improve yields, fight disease and strengthen crops. Grain handlers and processors collaborate to streamline logistics and to improve efficiency.

In a very literal sense, we are in the fields together. Canadian-made equipment–seeders, sprayers and headers–is trusted on farms and ranches across North Dakota. Canadian companies work alongside North Dakota innovators at Grand Farm, testing new technologies in a climate and landscape that feels familiar to a prairie kid like me. It's one of many ways that North Dakota punches above its weight in agriculture and AgTech, and I am proud that Canada is part of that ecosystem. I look forward to being in Fargo for AgTech Week this June.

For North Dakota soybean producers–and for prairie people everywhere–the Canada-U.S. relationship is proof that, when neighbors work together, everyone eats better, lives better, and grows stronger. Together, we are well-positioned to meet global food-security challenges and to drive economic growth. Let's keep a good thing growing.

USMCA Review Will be Closely Watched

The U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) faces a formal review by all three countries in July 2026. Many people in those three nations, perhaps none closer than North Dakota farmers, will be watching the process very closely.

Nationwide, soy products were the number one agricultural export in terms of value and volume in marketing year 2024-2025. U.S. soybeans and soy product exports totaled $29.6 billion, according to the American Soybean Association (ASA). Soy industry leaders say that those volumes help support farmer income and are a positive factor with the U.S. trade balance.

U.S. soybean farmers exported 7.6 million metric tons (MMT), or about 279 million bushels, valued at $3.2 billion to Mexico, and 1.5 MMT, or 55.1 million bushels, worth $700 million to Canada in the 2024-2025 marketing year.

The importance of trade with Mexico and Canada is not lost on North Dakota farmers and agribusinesses.

According to the North Dakota Trade Office, ag exports from the state to Mexico and Canada in 2025 were valued at $1.34 billion. North Dakota alone accounted for about 4.7% of the value of all U.S. agricultural exports to Canada and Mexico. These values represented commodity, food and biofuel exports, but the amounts don't include other ag-related exports, such as ag machinery or the parts that are produced in North Dakota and exported to Canada and Mexico.

North Dakota ag exports to Canada and Mexico surged in recent years. Sales of soybeans and soy products, including soy oil, totaled over $77 million in 2023.

By 2025, that figure jumped to over $336 million. Soybeans became North Dakota's largest ag-export category to USMCA partners.

Topic of Importance

During recent visits to Washington, D.C., USMCA renewal was a priority issue for the ASA directors. Dazey farmer, North Dakota Soybean Growers Association President and ASA Director Justin Sherlock was one of dozens of industry leaders who were pressing lawmakers to support renewal of the USMCA.

"We stressed the importance of (the) USMCA and how we should renew and review some of the areas of concern, but not renegotiate or go to individual bilateral trade agreements," Sherlock says. "We stressed the importance of maintaining that trilateral trade relationship, why that is so important and how much it has benefited North Dakota soybeans."

Since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) entered into force, U.S. soy exports to Mexico quadrupled, and exports to Canada doubled. Under the USMCA, both markets have continued to grow. According to the

—Story continued on page 33

North Dakota Positioned for Data Center Growth

Newly planted crops aren't the only things sprouting in North Dakota this year. The state has become fertile ground for data centers: buildings that house internet technology infrastructure, including computer servers, storage systems, and other computing and networking equipment.

As the nation's appetite and demand for computing capacity grows, so too do the plans for data centers.

North Dakota has 23 centers that are either under construction or are currently operating, according to Data Center Map, datacentermap.com. The Williston area is home to nine centers of various sizes.

A data center's size is measured by the power capacity needed to power the servers, storage equipment, and other key infrastructure. Data centers are used for cryptocurrency mining, artificial intelligence (AI) data processing, and cloud computing.

Powerful Attraction

North Dakota's relatively low energy costs and available capacity make it an appealing location for developers.

Cass County Electric Cooperative (CCEC) President and CEO Paul Matthys says that, in recent years, there has been strong interest from companies "kicking the tires" on possible data centers.

"We're still working with a few companies that have inquiries to us about serving Bitcoin and data mining, but mainly demand has been for the AI factories over about the past year and a half," Matthys states.

A not-for-profit cooperative, CCEC serves all or parts of 10 counties in southeastern North Dakota, including numerous farms, businesses, and hospitals. The cooperative is also providing power for one of the largest data centers under construction in North Dakota.

Applied Digital's Polaris Forge 2 is a $3 billion, 280-megawatt AI factory being built near Harwood. It is expected to be operational this fall and at full capacity in early 2027, according to a release from the company. Applied Digital broke ground for the center on the 900-acre site in late 2025.

"Our part of the project is to serve them electricity if we can feasibly do that without disrupting service or reliability to our members, which we can do," Matthys explains.

Matthys attended several town hall meetings prior to the Applied Digital project breaking ground in Harwood. Nearby residents and farmers voiced concerns about noise, water use and the potential for higher electricity rates as a result of the factory.

Matthys contends that Applied Digital is paying 100% of the costs for both transmission and distribution improvements with the electrical service, as well as other transmission line upgrades planned to eliminate any issues downstream.

"We're building out and extending our 345 kV transmission line and constructing a new substation that will be built to serve that data load. All those costs are being paid for upfront and 100% by Applied Digital," Matthys says, "so we don't have any of that capital cost that is put on our books or on the backs of our legacy members."

Matthys explains that the cooperative's goal was not to add any additional risk or burden to legacy members, which includes homes, farms, schools, and businesses, while taking advantage of the opportunity. A structured large-load interconnection process ensures that Applied Digital pays for the infrastructure improvements through every step of the process, which helps mitigate risk for CCEC and its members. Matthys adds that the cooperative has the capacity to add the additional load without jeopardizing service for existing and new members.

There is already pressure on electricity rates from inflation, labor costs, and the building of new infrastructure. Matthys outlines how CCEC is utilizing the additional revenue from large loads, such as the data center, to drive down costs and reduce the pressure for rate increases.

With much of the coal-powered generation infrastructure more than 50 years old, Matthys asserts that margins paid by large load facilities, such as data centers, could help finance the modernization of electrical generation plants.

Varying Interest

Rapidly growing interests to put data centers in North Dakota have prompted some entities to pause and to evaluate how they want to handle the proposed projects. Mercer County commissioners voted to suspend data center development in the county for one year. Oliver County commissioners removed a 180-day pause to develop guidelines about where projects could be located.

In addition to concern with electrical consumption and potential rate increases, residents near some proposed sites have voiced concerns about land use, including farmland preservation,

Paul Matthys, president and CEO of Cass County Electric Cooperative, on North Dakota's growing role in powering the data center industry.

water usage, noise, traffic, and light pollution.

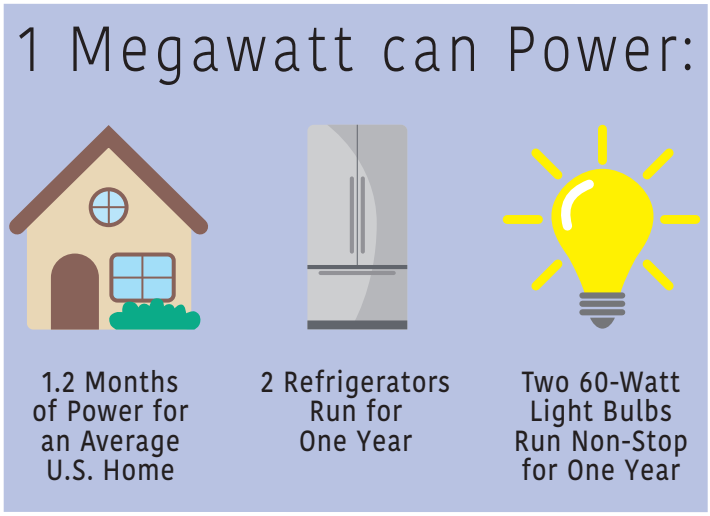
Oakes farmer Scott German can see the cranes being used to build Applied Digital's Ellendale data factory from his living room, even though the site itself is several miles away. He understands that the data center is a mixed blessing for smaller communities, especially during construction, because the influx of workers presents some challenges for housing and even for inventory at local grocery stores.

"I think you could poll 100 people, and probably 50 people would say it's the best thing since sliced bread and 50% would feel differently," German declares. "In my opinion, the data centers are good if they're used for good purposes; they're bad if they're used for bad purposes."

Agriculture is a huge contributor to data generation, and the industry stands to be a big beneficiary of the growing data-processing capacity.

"When I look at what technology has done for agriculture in the last 15 years with auto steer, variable rate fertilizing, variable rate satellite imagery for seeding, variable rate irrigation and all the different technologies that have made us more efficient at producing more on less acreage or with less fertilizer, I don't even think we've stuck our toe in the pond," German contends.

How data centers are viewed is undoubtedly shaped by where they're located. The Harwood facility is on the outskirts of Fargo, so its influence will likely be different on that community than the facilities being built close to smaller cities like Ellendale or Jamestown. However, the demand for AI isn't limited by location.



"AI technology is going to open up doors for everything from medicine to farming to accounting," German says, "and these centers are going to generate a lot of tax revenue."

Matthys states that agriculture technology users, healthcare, and utilities are leading the need for processing capacity. That demand isn't likely to subside anytime soon.

"There's just a tremendous amount of demand for AI," Matthys adds. "In my opinion, I'd rather have the control over those data centers here in the United States versus sending that somewhere overseas. I think it's smart of us from a national security standpoint."

As the appetite for computing capacity grows for industries such as agriculture, North Dakota is likely to continue playing a prominent role in the nation's AI future.

—Story by Daniel Lemke, photo courtesy of Cass County Electric Cooperative and stock

Early Season Diseases

Vibrant green rows of soybeans emerging from the warming soil are a welcome sign that the growing season is off and running. Soybean plants face multiple pests and diseases that can threaten productivity. Knowing what's affecting soybean growth and development is critical for managing the crop this year and in years to come.

Early Season Diseases

North Dakota State University (NDSU) Extension Soybean Pathologist Wade Webster, Ph.D., says that there are two groups of pathogens that can potentially affect soybean seedlings: fungi and water molds. Scouting newly emerged soybean fields can help identify potential issues.

Fungal pathogens such as Fusarium and Rhizoctonia can affect soybean seedlings. "Fusarium will have blackened taproots on those seedlings. Then, the Rhizoctonia will form sunken, rusty brown cankers," Webster describes. "These pathogens may not completely kill off the seedlings; however, they will cause stunting and long-term yield losses throughout that season."

Oomycetes, or water molds, include Pythium and Phytophthora. Webster notes that these diseases can cause poor emergence, as they can kill or rot soybean seeds, but they're typically not season-long issues.

"If you plant in fields that have long-lasting water or wet conditions, look out for those water molds to develop," Webster adds. "If you see some poor germination, evaluate stand counts to determine if replanting is necessary."

Water is a key issue for seedling diseases. Water molds prefer standing water, while Fusarium and Rhizoctonia also thrive in moist soils.

If fields have had disease issues in the past, it's likely there will be challenges again in the future.

"Disease risk will likely be at higher levels than what they were in previous years because the pathogen was able to develop greater levels of inoculum in the soil," Webster explains.

Seed selection is a first line of defense against many soybean pests, but Webster says that, aside from Phytophthora, there isn't a lot of genetic resistance to seedling diseases, so seed treatments become increasingly important.

Some disease pathogens can be controlled by crop rotation. For example, Phytophthora species that infect soybeans cannot infect other crops. However, pathogens such as Pythium or Fusarium can move between the different crop species. If farmers had seedling disease issues in dry beans, sunflowers, small grains or corn, those pathogens may also cause issues in soybeans."

Webster maintains that soybean-seedling disease management is entirely preventative.

"Once you see that particular disease develops, it's too late, and there are no management strategies available to us," Webster asserts.

The key to minimizing the risk for soybean-seedling diseases is effective water management and proper seed treatment. With widespread economic challenges, farmers are looking to reduce costs without sacrificing yields and profitability. Because disease pathogens can move across a field through tillage and other methods, farmers need to know what's in their fields so that they can manage effectively.

"There are differences in seed treatments, so if you are looking to save costs, looking at what those particular active ingredients are on that seed can be tremendously valuable," Webster states.

Because seedling disease pathogens can linger in the soil from year to year, scouting and keeping good records of disease pressure can help farmers formulate a management plan. Webster also recommends that farmers reach out to county Extension agents or send plant samples to the NDSU plant diagnostic lab to identify the

Early season is a good time to scout for potential disease issues.

Seed treatments are often the best defense against soybean diseases.

pathogens affecting the soybean.

"It can be very difficult to distinguish between these seedling diseases, and it does take a trained eye in order to determine what the causal agent is," Webster adds. "Accurate identification is important because the disease is going to be managed with different chemical seed treatments. Making sure that you understand what that particular issue is in each field is tremendously important for the next season, whether it's going into soybeans or any other crop."

Later Season Diseases

Sudden death syndrome (SDS), caused by the fungus Fusarium virguliforme, is another disease that typically infects plants in the early season around the V1 or V2 growth stage. However, symptoms may not be evident until August or early September. As with other fungi and water molds, noting where SDS is present this year can be valuable for future seasons because there are no in-season treatment options.

Farmers saw elevated white mold (Sclerotinia stem rot) pressure in 2025, which may increase disease risk in subsequent seasons due to the buildup of sclerotia in the soil. Sclerotinia affects a wide range of broadleaf crops, including soybeans, canola, sunflowers, and dry beans. Infection generally occurs in July, leading to disease issues later in August and September, which can result in substantial yield losses, especially when conditions are consistently wet.

Webster explains that white mold is the only disease for which farmers have an in-season management option, "which is a fungicide application during the flowering growth stage of soybeans."

The North Dakota Soybean Council has helped support the development and validation of white mold risk maps that are available through the North Dakota Agricultural Weather Network (NDAWN).

"Those maps are accessible during the growing season," Webster says. "Farmers can get a risk level across the entire state based on local NDAWN stations to help guide fungicide decisions during the flowering window."

Phytophthora root and stem rot can cause disease throughout the entire growing season. Considered one of the top three yield-reducing diseases of soybeans in North Dakota, Phytophthora can weaken and even kill plants throughout the entire growing season, resulting in substantial stand and yield losses. The pathogen can also remain present in the soil for many years.

Phytophthora root and stem rot symptoms can appear at any stage of plant development. Early infections may result in seed rot or pre-emergence damping off, where seedlings fail to emerge. In post-emergence stages, infected seedlings may wilt and die. Later in the growing season, symptoms include stem rot creeping up from the soil line, wilting, yellowing of the leaves and plant death.

The most damaging threat to soybeans remains soybean cyst nematode (SCN). This microscopic roundworm injures soybeans and can inflict substantial yield loss. Losses of up to 30% can occur with no visible symptoms to the plant. Heavily infected areas can exhibit yellowing plants and stunted growth; however, those symptoms alone aren't enough to confirm SCN. Taking soil samples and submitting them for SCN testing is the best way to confirm SCN.

Among the best management practices for many soybean diseases is seed selection. Knowing what's present in the field this year can help guide future decisions, including selecting resistant varieties, planning crop rotations and prioritizing fields for monitoring. Taking a proactive approach allows farmers to reduce disease risk, protect yield potential and make more informed management decisions in the seasons ahead.

—Story by Daniel Lemke, photos courtesy of NDSU Extension

Fueling Performance:
HOW SOY SUPPORTS UND ATHLETES

Nutrition plays a critical role in overall health, but for collegiate athletes, nutrition can be a game changer. At the University of North Dakota (UND), student-athletes are paying closer attention than ever to what fuels their performance. For many athletes, soy is becoming an essential part of that equation.

Leading this effort is board-certified sports dietitian Jenn Haugen, who has spent years working with UND athletes. Haugen, a senior sports dietitian at Sanford, supports UND teams through individualized counseling, team education and nutrition programming.

"I work with all the teams, focusing on both one-on-one guidance and group education," Haugen explains. "It's about helping athletes understand how nutrition supports their training and recovery."

From Farm to Fuel

Haugen's interest in soy-based nutrition grew after attending the Food and Farm Tour organized by the North Dakota Soybean Council. The event connects food professionals with farmers while highlighting the versatility and benefits of soy. She gained hands-on experience preparing soy-based dishes alongside culinary students from the North Dakota State College of Science.

"That experience really opened my eyes," Haugen says. "Not only did I learn about the science behind soy, but I also got to see how versatile it can be in everyday meals."

Inspired by the experience, Haugen helped develop a "Soy for Sports" initiative at UND. It is an educational program that brings together student dietitians and student athletes. The program emphasizes both the nutritional benefits of soy and the practical ways to incorporate it into daily routines.

Why Soy Works for Athletes

One of soy's key advantages is its protein content. Compared to many plant-based alternatives, soy offers a more substantial protein boost because it has all nine essential amino acids, which means it is a complete protein, making it especially valuable for athletes who are recovering from intense workouts.

"After training, protein is essential," Haugen notes. "Soy provides about 6 to 8 grams per serving, which is significantly more than many other alternatives."

This higher protein content helps support muscle recovery, reduce soreness and improve overall performance. In addition, soy offers heart health benefits, which is an important factor for athletes thinking about their long-term well-being.

Recognizing these benefits, Haugen introduced soy milk and soy yogurt into UND's athlete fueling stations. These options continue to be available for student-athletes to use for recovery following workouts and in a grab-and-go station to use during study time.

Beyond the Locker Room

Haugen's work doesn't stop at providing snacks. Through partnerships with the University of North Dakota's nutrition and dietetics program, she organizes interactive cooking sessions where student-athletes learn how to prepare soy-based meals.

"If athletes can make something on their own and enjoy it, they're much more likely to keep it in their routine," Haugen explains.

These sessions get nutrition students and athletes into a collaborative setting. Participants prepare recipes, including buffalo tofu wraps; stir fry using soy curls; and baked goods, such as muffins and oat bars, that are enhanced with soy ingredients.

The response has been overwhelmingly positive.

"Many of them (student-athletes) are surprised by how good everything tastes," Haugen adds. "It changes their perception and gets them excited about trying new foods."

Building Knowledge that Lasts

The program benefits more than just athletes. Student dietitians gain hands-on experience teaching nutrition while athletes develop skills to carry beyond the college years.

"Higher education is about expanding knowledge," Haugen states. "We're giving both groups tools they can use long after they leave UND."

For Haugen, the initiative is also deeply personal. Growing up in North Dakota, where her family farmed soybeans, she takes pride in connecting local agriculture to athlete performance.

"It's rewarding to see everything come full circle," Haugen reflects. "We're introducing athletes from all over the world to something that's grown right here and helping them appreciate its value."

Add More Soy to Your Plate

For those looking to incorporate more protein into their meals, soy offers a simple and versatile solution. Resources like the Just Add Soy cookbook, supported by organizations such as the North Dakota Soybean Council, provide creative, approachable recipes for home cooks of all skill levels.

From smoothies and snacks to full meals, adding soy can bring both flavor and nutrition to the table.

—Story and photos by staff

To download the Just Add Soy cookbook, scan the QR code.

Fighting Misinformation and Protecting Your Bottom Line:

The Soy Checkoff Champions Seed Oils

As conversations around seed oils grow, U.S. soybean farmers can feel confident that their investment in the edible-oil market is backed by strong, peer-reviewed science. Research continues to reaffirm the health benefits of seed oils, particularly soybean oil, emphasizing its value in the food industry and strengthening consumer trust in U.S. Soy.

The United Soybean Board (USB) is highlighting the essential role of soybean oil in American diets. This product continues to benefit consumer health and to drive profitability for U.S. farmers.

"The Soy Checkoff invests in protecting U.S. soybean farmers' position in the edible oils market and supporting the strong health reputation of soybean oil," said Cindy Pulskamp, a USB director from North Dakota. "Alongside our partners, we are working to shift the conversation around seed oils and ensure consumers have a clear, accurate understanding of the decades of research behind them."

Despite misinformation about seed oils, the Soy Checkoff is leading efforts to set the record straight. Through a strategic collaboration with the Soy Nutrition Institute (SNI) Global, the corn and canola commodity groups, and leading nutrition researchers, the checkoff is making sure that the latest science-based findings are widely available.

It's important to discuss the critical role that soybean oil plays in the food supply. Forty-five percent of the soy-oil market is used in cooking oils, baking, frying, salad dressings and margarine. The product's versatility and affordability make it a top choice for both consumers and food manufacturers.

Recent peer-reviewed studies, coordinated by SNI Global and then published in the British Journal of Nutrition and Nutrition Today, confirm that seed oils which are high in unsaturated fatty acids—such as soybean oil—offer significant health benefits. Linoleic acid, the primary omega-6 polyunsaturated fatty acid in soybean oil, has been shown to lower cholesterol levels and to reduce the risk of chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes.

In addition, soybean oil has a qualified health claim, backed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, that eating about 1½ tablespoons of soybean oil, which contains unsaturated fat, daily may reduce the risk of coronary heart disease.

"Emerging research highlights the significant health benefits of seed oils, particularly those rich in the essential omega-6 fatty acid linoleic acid, such as soybean oil," explained Mark Messina, Ph.D., M.S., director of nutrition science and research for SNI Global. "These oils not only contribute to lowering cholesterol levels, but also play a crucial role in reducing the risk of chronic diseases when included in a balanced diet. The evidence underscores their value as an important component of heart-healthy eating patterns."

To amplify seed-oil benefits and the findings from these checkoff-funded manuscripts, the USB secured top-tier media coverage in the New York Post, CBS News, EatingWell, Men's Health and Good Housekeeping. SNI Global has also engaged 300+ health professionals who've cited the manuscript data in their blogs, newsletters and speaking engagements. In addition, several fact sheets were created: Expert Q&A on seed oils, Health risks of avoiding seed oils and 5 fascinating facts about seed oils are all shareable resources.

For more information, visit sniglobal.org/seedoils or ussoy.org/AllAboutSeedOils.

—Story and photos courtesy of the United Soybean Board

From the farm to the kitchen, soybean oil remains a trusted, research-backed ingredient supporting both consumer health and farmer profitability.

The Why and How of Soyfoods

The soybean is highly valued for its versatility as a high-quality feed ingredient and a renewable energy feedstock. The North Dakota Soybean Council (NDSC) is committed to ensuring that soy's value as a human food source is not overlooked.

The NDSC sponsored the recent North Dakota Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' Nourishing Health Symposium at the Fargodome. The conference had registered dietitians, health professionals and students. The two-day event featured national and local experts who presented on current nutrition research, clinical and community dietetics, and emerging trends.

The NDSC participated in the conference to connect directly with professionals who guide dietary recommendations for their clients.

"Our goal was to share the science behind soy, address common misconceptions, and also demonstrate how North Dakota-grown soy can be a nutritious and sustainable part of a balanced diet," says Shireen Alemadi, NDSC outreach and engagement director. "We wanted attendees to walk away with a better understanding of soy: what it is, how it benefits health and how easy it is to incorporate into meals."

Clearing Misconceptions

Mark Messina, Ph.D., a nutrition science fellow with the Soy Nutrition Institute (SNI) Global, provided attendees with an overview of the nutritional and health attributes of soyfoods. He also addressed some common misperceptions.

"Soyfoods provide high-quality protein, but they're low in saturated fat, so they can help meet the higher protein recommendation that is part of the newly released Dietary Guidelines for Americans without exceeding the recommended limit on saturated fat intake," Messina states. "Soy protein also directly lowers blood cholesterol levels."

Messina noted that soybean oil plays a huge role in the U.S. food supply, providing over 40% of our intake of both essential fatty acids. Because of its high polyunsaturated fat content, Messina explains that, when soybean oil replaces sources of saturated fat in the diet, blood cholesterol is reduced. Both soy protein and soybean oil have Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-authorized health claims for the prevention of heart disease.

Messina also discussed the potential role of soyfoods in reducing breast cancer, noting that observational studies suggest a possible link.

"There's is intriguing evidence that consuming soy during childhood and adolescence is the period that offers the most protection against breast cancer," Messina contends. He recommends that all girls consume at least one serving of soy per day.

One concern that Messina addressed was the notion that soyfoods could increase the risk of developing breast cancer in high-risk women and could worsen the prognosis of breast cancer patients.

"There is a wealth of research showing that neither soyfoods nor the isoflavones in soybeans adversely affect markers of breast cancer risk, such as breast tissue density and breast cell proliferation," Messina explains. "Furthermore, observational studies indicate consuming soy after a diagnosis improves prognosis."

Messina also dispelled the myth that soyfoods feminize men when, in fact, the products are a good source of protein for building and maintaining muscle.

Linda Funk, executive director of the Soyfoods Council, was another of the event's presenters. She brought soy to life by demonstrating its versatility in the kitchen, providing attendees with practical tools and inspiration to incorporate soy into healthy, approachable meals. She says that Messina's presentation provided the "why" for soyfoods while she supplied the "how."

"The focus of my presentation was to show how easy it is to add soyfoods to everyday foods," Funk adds.

Funk demonstrated how to make stuffed shells, meatballs, edamame salad, a variety of sauces, and even desserts, including lemon pudding and chocolate soynut butter pie.

Spreading Knowledge

Partnering with nutritionists and dieticians is important for soyfood advocates because professional staff members "are the ones out in the community as well as hospitals and clinics talking to consumers," Funk asserts. "They need to understand soy protein, so they can recommend adding it to diets and dishes."

Alemadi affirms that the presentations and conversation about soyfoods hit the mark.

"We got lots of great feedback from the attendees," Alemadi declares. "There were many participants who noted the information helped to clear up misconceptions and gave them new ideas for using the wide variety of soy products in balanced meals."

Messina contends that, throughout his career, the primary audience for him and for SNI Global has been dietitians and nutritionists.

"My goal is to provide science-based information on soy so that these folks can then convey that information to patients, clients and the general public, through direct interaction as well as social media," Messina states.

—Story by Daniel Lemke, photo by staff

North Dakota Voices Help Shape the Future of Global Soy

Brandt and Pulskamp bring a farmer's perspective to international leadership roles

When it comes to building global demand for U.S. soy, the work often begins far from the farm. But for two North Dakota leaders, that global effort remains firmly rooted in the realities of production agriculture.

Ted Brandt of Enderlin and Cindy Pulskamp of Hillsboro have been selected to serve on the U.S. Soybean Export Council's (USSEC) Soy Excellence Center Global Advisory Panel for the 2026–27 term. Their appointments place North Dakota at the table where key decisions are made about training, outreach, and capacity building for soy professionals around the world.

Brandt is a director of the North Dakota Soybean Council, while Pulskamp serves as a director on the United Soybean Board as well as with the U.S. Soybean Export Council. Together, they bring both state-level and national perspectives to a global program focused on strengthening the soy value chain.

The Global Advisory Panel, known as GAP, helps guide the Soy Excellence Center, a program designed to strengthen the global soy industry through education and workforce development. Operating across regions that include the Americas, Asia, India, the Middle East and North Africa, and Nigeria, the program connects early- and mid-career professionals with the knowledge and skills needed to grow protein markets.

For Brandt, the role is an opportunity to ensure farmer priorities remain central in global conversations.

"Programs like the Soy Excellence Center matter because they help build long-term demand," Brandt said. "But that only works if the people making decisions understand what's happening on the farm. That's the perspective I hope to bring."

Pulskamp sees her appointment as a natural extension of her work connecting farmers to international markets.

"U.S. soy has a strong story to tell, and it starts with how we raise our crops," Pulskamp said. "Being part of GAP allows us to share that story while also learning what global customers need from us in the future."

Their selection comes as the Soy Excellence Center continues to expand its reach and impact. The program is built on the idea that investing in people across the value chain strengthens long-term market development. That approach has made the Global Advisory Panel a critical component of its success.

Brent Babb, executive director of the Soy Excellence Center, said the panel helps ensure the program stays grounded in real-world needs.

"The Global Advisory Panel plays a central role in keeping our work relevant," Babb said. "It ensures our efforts reflect both farmer priorities and the needs of global customers."

The newly elected panel is led by Anne Meis of the Nebraska Soybean Board, who will serve as chair, alongside leaders representing soybean organizations and industry partners across the country.

> *"Programs like the Soy Excellence Center matter because they help build long-term demand," Brandt said. "But that only works if the people making decisions understand what's happening on the farm. That's the perspective I hope to bring."* —Ted Brandt

Ted Brandt, back row, fourth from right, and Cindy Pulskamp, second from right, join fellow members of the 2026–27 U.S. Soybean Export Council Soy Excellence Center Global Advisory Panel.

For North Dakota, having two representatives on the panel underscores the state's growing influence in international soy markets and highlights the importance of farmer leadership in shaping global demand.

Both Brandt and Pulskamp bring decades of experience in production agriculture and board leadership, connecting local farm decisions to global opportunities.

"Everything we do ultimately ties back to the farm," Pulskamp said. "If we're building strong relationships and strong markets overseas, that creates opportunities at home."

As the 2026–27 Global Advisory Panel begins its work, that connection between local insight and global impact remains central. With Brandt and Pulskamp at the table, North Dakota continues to play a meaningful role in guiding the future of U.S. soy.

—Story by staff, photo courtesy of USSEC

FARM TO ELEVATOR:

Is your delivery the most profitable?

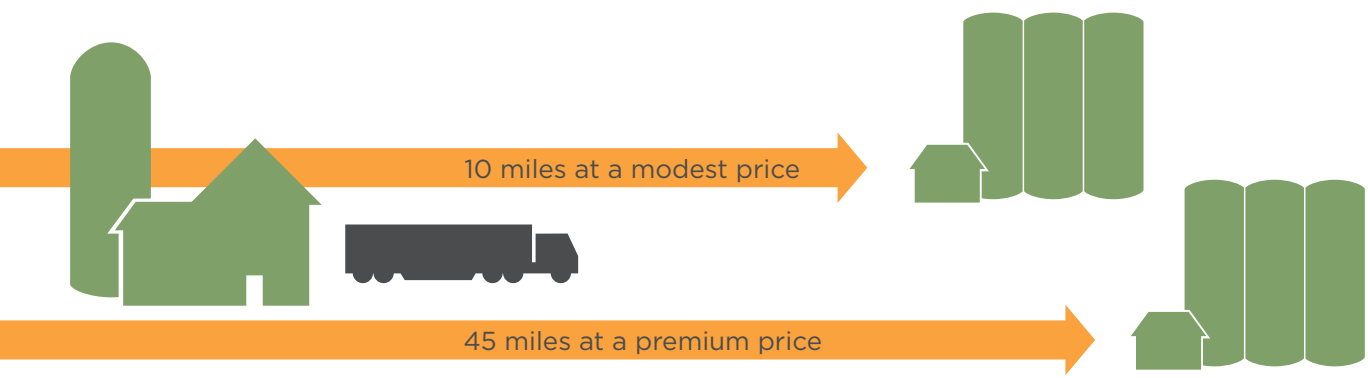
SOY TRANSPORTATION COALITION

NDSOYBEAN COUNCIL

TRANSPORTATION CALCULATOR

Where should I deliver my soybeans or grain?

Should I deliver my soybeans or grain to the local elevator and/or processing facility offering a more modest price or the more distant market offering a premium price?



Farmers must not only be mindful of the price received, but also the costs associated with the delivery. After all, the goal is to maximize profit vs. maximize revenue.

The calculator works for soybeans, corn, wheat and other commodities. In a few short steps, farmers can determine not only how much money will be received but also how much will be spent.

The calculator can be accessed online at *soytransportation.org/calculator.*

Established in 2007, the Soy Transportation Coalition is an organization comprised of the North Dakota Soybean Council, thirteen other state soybean boards, the American Soybean Association, and the United Soybean Board. Funded by the soybean checkoff.

Biodiesel Is More Than Clean Fuel: It's Rural Resilience

By Ryan Pederson

I farm in north central North Dakota, about 20 miles from the Canadian border. Up here, farming looks a little different. Our rotation is broad: wheat, soybeans, canola, sunflowers, barley and corn. We can't specialize the way some farms in the Midwest do, but we can do a number of things well, and that diversity is our strength.

Diversity goes beyond what we grow; it also includes where our products go. That fact means developing new products and expanding options within the U.S. market. Our generation has added value to agriculture by creating fuel markets that previous generations of farmers and industry leaders could never have imagined.

Today, biodiesel is essential for farming.

I've been tied to this land since I was a kid. In second grade, I wrote a book about my dad's work on the farm. The first 12 pages were all about planting, growing and harvesting. Page 13 simply read, "And my mom's a nurse." That book about sums it up; I've always known I was meant to farm.

Now, I've got three kids of my own, and one of them, my daughter, is already leasing land and getting her boots dirty. I hope at least one of them keeps the family operation going. If they do, I hope it's in a world that values what we grow: not just as food, but also as fuel.

Years ago, we used to say that we were feeding the world. Today, we're helping fuel it, too.

North Dakota was home to one of the first biodiesel plants in the country that used canola oil instead of soy. We've been growing canola for decades. Now, some of that oil ends up coming right back to our farm in the form of biodiesel. There's something full circle and satisfying about that scenario.

On our farm, we burn 30,000 to 40,000 gallons of diesel a year. It is not a massive number compared to national fleets or public transit, but for us, it's significant. Every gallon matters. The biodiesel we use now doesn't cause problems. It's clean, consistent and supports something bigger than our fuel tanks.

What matters most to me is what biodiesel does for farmers, small towns and rural economies. A few years ago, nearly all the soybeans in North Dakota had to be shipped to the coast for export to China. Then, we built two soybean crush plants to feed the state's growing renewable diesel market. Now, over half the state's soybeans are processed right here. That process keeps the value local, which is more important than ever right now, and creates jobs in rural communities that need them.

Biodiesel diversifies our markets. If you raise a commodity crop, your best bet at higher returns is to add value. That task could mean selling seed wheat, malt barley or canola for fuel. Every time we build a local processing facility or create a domestic use case, we're keeping more of the pie in our communities.

From a national perspective, biodiesel adds resilience. It's about having options. Just like crop rotation makes soil healthier, having multiple fuel sources strengthens our energy security. If 10% of the diesel fuel disappeared overnight, prices at the pump would spike. Biodiesel fills that gap, and the product is made right here in the U.S., often by small and mid-sized producers spread across the country. Here's something most people outside ag might not realize: we're not turning entire soybeans into fuel. Only about 20% of a soybean is oil, which goes to biodiesel. The remaining 80% becomes animal feed, and because the oil adds value, the meal is cheaper for livestock producers. Everybody wins.

Let's not forget about clean air. Out here, we've got space; air quality isn't something we talk about much. On the coasts, in the cities, where congestion and pollution are real concerns, biodiesel makes a difference. It burns cleaner. It's something we can take pride in, not just because it helps our bottom line, but because it improves lives far beyond our own communities.

Yes, I raise crops. I also help power school buses, delivery trucks and tractors across the country. That possibility makes me feel good.

When agriculture runs on tight margins, every added value counts. If my soybean can leave as a seed and come back as fuel, that pattern is a win. It's more than economics. It's personal.

—Photo by Clean Fuels Alliance America and Wanbaugh Studios

INPUT COSTS WEIGH ON Planting Decisions

Farmers were already dealing with escalating crop input costs prior to the start of an armed conflict with Iran. Production disruptions in the Middle East and shipping stoppage through the Strait of Hormuz drove prices for nitrogen and phosphate even higher and, in some cases, limited the availability of those products.

The nitrogen complex has been most problematic. Urea prices were 35% higher on April 1 than they were March 1, and anhydrous ammonia climbed over $1,000 per ton in April. Phosphate and potash prices have also climbed, but not to the same degree as nitrogen.

Rapidly rising costs likely changed planting intentions for 2026, but how much of an influence the prices had remains to be seen.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) prospective plantings report released in March showed that North Dakota farmers intended to plant less corn and wheat while seeding slightly more soybeans in 2026 than they did in 2025. The USDA information led to estimates of 6.7 million acres of soybeans for 2026, up from 6.55 million acres a year ago. Corn dropped to an estimated 4.4 million acres, down from 4.7 million acres last year. Estimated wheat acres also dipped in the report, from 6.43 million acres in 2025 to 5.83 million acres this year.

The USDA survey happened during the early stages of the conflict with Iran.

North Dakota State University Crops Economist Frayne Olson, Ph.D., says that some farmers may have adjusted their plans due to the rising input costs.

"Based on what people were talking about before all of this happened in Iran, versus when they filled out the forms for the March prospective plantings, I do think some farmers have adjusted and changed their plans," Olson stated. "What that will actually mean by the time we get to spring planting and putting seed in the ground, that's anybody's guess."

Olson explains how many farmers have already prepaid for fertilizer or already have had it applied. North Dakota farmers enjoyed largely favorable fall weather, so a lot of fertilizer was put down last year. Once that action has occurred, growers aren't likely to switch from crops that need nitrogen, such as corn or wheat, in favor of soybeans.

"The increase in fertilizer prices for some farmers will change their planting intentions, but when you look at either the state of North Dakota or when you look at it nationally, I think any change will be pretty muted," Olson asserts.

Acreage shifts will be most likely to happen when farmers have not pre-priced their fertilizer or not enough for their needs. Some growers waited to buy fertilizer, hoping nutrient prices would decrease.

"I think those folks are rethinking what they're planning to do," Olson adds.

Planting options may be limited because crops such as spring wheat, corn and canola are all heavy fertilizer users.

Tom Lilja, market risk analyst for Progressive Ag Marketing in Fargo, expects the nation's planting mix to change because of high fertilizer prices.

"We have a situation where we've got skyrocketing high fertilizer prices, so the odds are the June 30th final planting number could be considerably different than the March 31 prospective plantings report," Lilja contends.

"Farmers tend to stick with their rotations," says Josh Linville, vice president of fertilizer for StoneX. "They go with what they are used to, so I don't think we're going to see a great breakout from that, but what's happening this year isn't something we've ever seen before. I won't sit here and say, 'no, it's absolutely not possible,' because this year, who the heck knows?"

Barring dramatic weather events or other unforeseen happenings, even with volatile fertilizer prices, Olson expects actual planted acres to be close to the USDA's March estimates when the USDA June acreage report is released.

"It varies by farm and what each operation chooses to do," Olson states. "A significant number of the farmers that I have talked to have already purchased their fertilizer, and they're not concerned. They're concerned about next fall. They're concerned about high fertilizer prices, but they know it's not going to impact their bottom line right now."

—Story by Daniel Lemke, photo by United Soybean Board

Renewable Volume Obligations: A Boost for Farmers

In March, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) finalized the long-awaited and historic renewable volume obligations (RVO) for biomass-based diesel for 2026 and 2027. The increased volumes will bolster U.S. soybean farmers and boost soy-based domestic biofuel production.

Biomass-based diesel volumes for 2026 were set at 9.07 billion gallons and will jump to 9.2 billion gallons in 2027. The advanced biofuel volumes were set at 11.1 billion gallons and 11.32 billion gallons, respectively, for those years.

The updated 2026-2027 renewable volume obligation rule will increase biomass-based diesel blending to approximately 5.4 to 5.5 billion gallons, which represents an increase of over 60% from the 2025 volumes. The rule also reallocates 70% of the retroactive 2023-2025 small refinery exemption (SRE) volumes that the EPA took action on last year in addition to the 2026-2027 compliance years.

"Bottom line, in what is a tough farm economy right now on the trade side and just dealing with overall demand for soybean production, the numbers look good," says Kulm farmer and American Soybean Association (ASA) director Josh Gackle. "I'm happy to see that (the) EPA and the White House finalized what would be the largest increase in RVO numbers for biomass-based diesel and renewable diesel that we've ever seen."

Domestic biofuel production accounts for over half of all domestic soybean oil consumption and serves as a critical U.S. market for soybean farmers. Renewable volume obligations set through the Renewable Fuel Standard are the cornerstone for driving domestic soy-based biofuel demand. The EPA's 2026-2027 RVOs are the most significant year-over-year improvement to the Renewable Fuel Standard rulemaking for biomass-based diesel and, subsequently, for U.S. soybean farmers.

"(The) ASA and farmers on an individual level were engaging with (the) EPA during the rulemaking process to remind them as they put this policy forward that strong RVO numbers are important for farmers and important for a healthy and strong rural economy," Gackle explains. "We're glad to see what they came out with, and as it's implemented in the next few months and going forward, we hope to see some positive developments here for domestic demand in the U.S."

A key issue for soybean farmers has been limiting how much credit refiners can get for using imported feedstocks. The new EPA rule does not make immediate changes to prioritize domestically sourced biofuel feedstocks, but the EPA will reduce the credit generated for imported biofuels and biofuel feedstocks beginning in 2028. If maintained in the next RVOs, the credit reduction for imports will serve as a significant economic driver for the entire domestic biomass-based diesel value chain and will catalyze domestic demand for U.S. soy.

The priority that the new rule places on expanding the use of American-made ethanol, biodiesel and renewable diesel in the marketplace is estimated to reduce the nation's dependence on foreign oil by roughly 300,000 barrels per day in 2026 and 2027.

"The entire U.S. clean fuel industry–from farmers and feedstock providers to fuel customers–is grateful to see this rule finalized," Kurt Kovarik, Clean Fuels' vice president of federal affairs, stated. "U.S. biodiesel, renewable diesel and sustainable aviation fuel producers are eager to get to work and bring the 7 billion gallons of existing production capacity up to speed to meet 10% or more of America's demand for diesel fuel."

In 2025, biodiesel and renewable diesel facilities were forced to shut down or run far below prior-year production levels due to market uncertainty. U.S. biodiesel production declined by one-third in 2025, compared to 2024.

Kovarik describes how biodiesel and renewable diesel represent 10% of the value of every bushel of U.S.-grown soybeans.

"American farmers and other feedstock providers are eager for the growing domestic clean fuel market to drive value in agriculture, along with economic growth and job creation in rural communities," Kovarik said. "American consumers are desperate for secure, affordable domestic energy."

Kovarik and others call the new EPA rule a win for the nation's energy security.

—Story by Daniel Lemke

	Proposed Volume Requirement			Finalized Volume Requirement			SRE Reallocation Volume		Total Applicable Volume	
	2025	2026	2027	2025	2026	2027	2026	2027	2026	2027
Cellulosic biofuel	1.19	1.30	1.36	1.21	1.36	1.43	0	0	1.36	1.43
Biomass-based Diesel	N/A	7.12	7.50	N/A	8.86	8.95	0.21	0.25	9.07	9.20
Advanced biofuel	N/A	9.02	9.46	N/A	10.82	10.98	0.28	0.34	11.10	11.32
Total renewable fuel	N/A	24.02	24.46	N/A	25.82	25.98	0.99	1.04	26.81	27.02

Note: All volumes are in billion RINs. One RIN is equivalent to one ethanol-equivalent gallon of renewable fuel. SRE are small refinery exemptions.

New Guidelines Largely Favorable for Agriculture

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans (Dietary Guidelines) is the foundation for federal nutrition programs and provides food-based recommendations to promote health, to help prevent diet-related chronic diseases and to meet nutrient needs. New Dietary Guidelines for 2025-2030 were released in January.

The guidelines provide advice directly to consumers while serving as the cornerstone for federal nutrition programs and policies.

"The 2025-30 Dietary Guidelines have a focus on 'real foods,'" says Julie Garden-Robinson, Ph.D., R.D., L.R.D., a professor and food and nutrition specialist for North Dakota State University (NDSU) Extension. "Similar to past guidance, they emphasize fruits, vegetables, whole grains, high-quality proteins and dairy. They recommend reducing highly processed foods and added sugars."

In addition, Garden-Robinson states that the new guidelines increase the amount of protein to consume daily and promote the consumption of full-fat dairy. She contends that many professionals in the nutrition field have long recommended consuming more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, high-quality protein from plant and animal sources, and calcium-rich dairy.

Much of the guidance is very similar to previous Dietary Guidelines, which come out every five years, Garden-Robinson asserts. Dietary guidance dates back to the time of World War I.

The new guidelines promote protein at each meal, which is consistent with the long-standing idea of consuming protein throughout the day.

"We have long recommended consuming adequate protein from a variety of sources, including plant- and animal-based foods, along with protein-rich milk to get enough calcium," Garden-Robinson explains. "However, the new guidelines recommend a higher amount of protein than many nutrition experts recommend. Typically, the average consumer more than meets recommended protein amounts, so the enhanced amount may or may not change eating habits."

Plant proteins fit well with overall protein recommendations for both the current and previous versions of the Dietary Guidelines, Garden-Robins declares. Plant proteins include beans, peas, lentils, nuts, seeds and soy. Plant proteins provide fiber and many key nutrients in addition to the protein.

Soyfood advocates say that the Dietary Guidelines appropriately recognize soy as a healthy protein source.

"Soy protein is one of the few whole, plant-based proteins, making it particularly important for individuals following plant-based diets or those seeking to diversify their protein intake," states American Soybean Association (ASA) President Scott Metzger. "The guidelines underscore the role of animal proteins in healthy dietary patterns, many of which are produced using soy meal as a primary feed ingredient. They also emphasize prioritizing healthy fats, including oils rich in essential fatty acids like soybean oil. All together, these findings reinforce the importance of soy as a nutritious and integral component of the human food system."

Metzger describes how plant proteins are budget friendly, can be used to stretch animal proteins in recipes and add variety to the diet. For people following vegetarian or vegan diets, soy and other plant-based proteins play a major role in meeting protein needs.

Soybean industry leaders were concerned about what would be included in the final Dietary Guidelines because draft versions were critical of seed oils. The final Dietary Guidelines didn't overtly mention seed oils; however, Garden-Robinson delineates how the new guidelines specifically called out olive oil as a healthy oil. The guidelines named beef tallow and butter as options, but these choices are high in saturated fat, which consumers should limit to 10% of total daily calories according to the guidelines.

The ASA appreciates the support for soy as a healthy protein and source of essential fatty acids, but organization leaders believe that the guidelines could have done more to emphasize the role of soy in human health. The guidelines did not directly cite soybean oil as a source of essential fatty acids, despite it being one.

"Overall, I think we need to focus on eating a variety of foods from all the food groups, with moderation in mind," Garden-Robinson says. "Most people do not consume enough fruits, vegetables and whole grains, so that is a good starting point for improving the diet. Consulting a registered dietitian can be an important step to establishing an eating plan focused on your needs."

—Story by Daniel Lemke

— *Story continued from page 19*

ASA, Mexico is the second-largest trading partner for U.S. soy, and Canada's market share is projected to grow as domestic, U.S. crush capacity increases.

U.S. soybean farmers are reliant upon cross-border trade not just for exports, but also for imports. Over the past five years, potash costs have risen significantly. U.S. farmers source 87% of their potash needs from our northern neighbor, Canada. Because potash imports from Canada into the U.S. are duty free with the USMCA, farmers save additional cost by not having to pay import duties.

ASA leaders explain that the USMCA is a gold-standard trade agreement that bolsters market access and offers benefits to U.S. soybean farmers. The USMCA provides stability and predictability for the integration of the North American agricultural markets. The agreement offers duty-free treatment for soybeans and soy products; strengthens rules around the sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures as well as the included critical agricultural biotechnology provisions; and supports cross-border investments in logistics, infrastructure, and processing.

Soy industry leaders contend that failure to renew the USMCA for a full 16-year term would create chaos and uncertainty at a time when U.S. agriculture needs steady and open markets.

Sherlock describes how increased purchases by Mexico and Canada have helped ease the reduced exports to China. Disruptions with the USMCA would have a decidedly negative effect on North Dakota, which is why he and other state leaders stressed to the lawmakers in Washington, D.C., that farmers don't want to lose what's been gained through the agreement.

"If you look at North Dakota soybeans, both whole beans and soybean meal, China, Mexico and Canada are the three largest soybean customers coming out of this state...and, if we fail to renew (the) USMCA, all three are all potentially up in the air this year," Sherlock explains. "These countries make up the bulk of our soybean exports and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future, so trade was one of our biggest topics."

With Canada and Mexico as two of its dominant export markets, North Dakota has a sizable stake in the outcome of the USMCA review.

—Story by Daniel Lemke

USSEC
U.S. SOYBEAN EXPORT COUNCIL

DRIVING DEMAND FOR U.S. SOY IN 90+ COUNTRIES WITH EXPORTS UP 13% YEAR-OVER-YEAR.

58% OF THE TOTAL CROP.

Marketing Year 2024/25 U.S. Soy Exports

U.S. Soy Complex
(Whole Soybeans, Soybean Meal, Soy Oil)

68.7 MMT

$29.6 billion

Source: USDA, Global Agricultural Trade System (GATS), January 2026

NORTH DAKOTA SOYBEAN
GROWERS ASSOCIATION
4852 Rocking Horse Circle South
Fargo, ND 58104
(701) 566-9300

PRINTED WITH SOY INK

THE NORTH DAKOTA Soybean GROWER MAGAZINE

Join the NDSGA for a day of fun on July 28, 2026, at Jamestown Country Club in Jamestown, and on August 25, 2026, at Leonard Country Club in Leonard. Enjoy golf, lunch, social time, dinner, and prizes. Register as an individual or a full team by visiting bit.ly/NDSGAGolfTourneys or by scanning the QR code. For more information, contact Shireen Alemadi at (701) 566-9300 or salemadi@ndsoybean.org.