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

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Wimbledon farmer and biofuels advocate Rob Rose, pictured, is among the North Dakota soybean farmers who stand to gain from increased biofuels demand.

Read the cover story on page 14.

—Photo courtesy of the United Soybean Board

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What You Need to Know About SBARE Priorities

By Parrell **Grossman**
NDSGA Legislative Director

North Dakota's soybean growers and farmers depend on strong agricultural research, education and infrastructure to remain competitive, to manage risk and to increase profitability.

The State Board of Agricultural Research and Education (SBARE) priorities for 2027-29 are significant and important because they directly support the research, Extension services and facilities that help producers respond to changing weather, emerging pests and diseases, rising input costs, varying market pressures and evolving production practices.

SBARE maintains that a critical priority is restoring the governor's proposed 10% reduction to operating expenses for the North Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station (NDAES).

SBARE identifies operating support as its sole 2027 legislative priority for NDAES, requesting $5.7 million in ongoing support; $3 million for the Bolley Agricultural Laboratory; $1.8 million for the main research center; and $900,000 for the branch research centers. SBARE materials state that every dollar invested in the NDAES' agricultural research returns $40 over the lifetime of the investment and supports North Dakota's $41 billion agricultural economy.

For soybean growers and other producers, maintaining this research capacity is important.

The Bolley Agricultural Laboratory brings agronomy, plant science, plant pathology, plant breeding, weed science and soil science together in a modern facility. These disciplines support the development of improved varieties, the management of emerging diseases and pests, and the advancement of soil health.

Adequate operating funds also allow researchers at the main and branch research centers to respond quickly when new production threats emerge or when market conditions change.

SBARE's request of an additional $1.4 million for continued operating support for North Dakota State University Extension is equally important.

Extension is the connection between university research and farmers in the field. Additional support would provide more field visits, expanded programming, faster disaster response and greater access to research-based

> **“For farmers, investments mean stronger research, faster access to practical information, better facilities and greater capacity to address the challenges that will determine farm profitability and competitiveness for years to come.”**
>
> *—Parrell Grossman, NDSGA Legislative Director*

agricultural information.

Extension specialists and agents help producers protect yields, reduce input costs, and improve soil and water stewardship. SBARE specifically notes that yield improvements for soybeans and spring wheat can translate into hundreds of millions of dollars in additional farm income.

Capital improvement and one-time investments are also necessary to protect the research system upon which farmers rely. SBARE requests $5 million to address deferred maintenance at NDAES and the research extension centers. These funds would target life-safety systems, efficiency improvements and critical repairs, reducing the risk of facility failures and protecting previous state investments.

SBARE also identifies ongoing, deferred-maintenance support of $1.18 million, which would provide preventive maintenance and lifecycle replacement for critical components.

Finally, the $1.5 million special authorization for the Carrington Research Extension Center’s greenspace renovation would be funded entirely through private donations. The project would create outdoor education, crop demonstration and community outreach spaces, strengthening the center’s connection with producers and the public.

Together, these priorities are investments in the future of North Dakota agriculture. For farmers, investments mean stronger research, faster access to practical information, better facilities and a greater capacity to address the challenges that will determine farm profitability and competitiveness for years to come.

The SBARE priorities are being carefully considered by the North Dakota Soybean Growers Association (NDSGA) prior to the legislative session. The views expressed herein are my views and not necessarily the views of the NDSGA.

Farming Together Through Today’s Challenges

By Chris **McDonald**
NDSGA Board President

Harvest is well underway across North Dakota, which means that we finally get to see how the decisions we made last spring and the weather we experienced all summer came together.

This year, most people would say that the weather didn’t cooperate.

Drought has been one of the biggest stories for farmers across much of North Dakota. The lack of moisture has challenged crops, pastures and livestock, making an already unpredictable business even more difficult.

Every farmer has seen different conditions, but we are reminded, once again, how much of farming is outside our control.

Drought doesn’t just affect this year’s yield. The scarcity can influence soil moisture going into next spring, decisions about what to plant, fertilizer use, water availability and the farm’s overall financial health. Therefore, having a strong crop insurance program and a workable safety net is very important. Growers need tools that help to manage the risks that come with farming in North Dakota.

While weather is always going to be a big part of our business, there are plenty of other issues that will shape the future of soybeans.

One of the major concerns is trade. North Dakota farmers depend on markets around the world, and changes with tariffs and trade relationships can have a direct effect on the price we receive. We need to continue building strong relationships with customers around the world and making sure that our soybeans remain a reliable choice.

Tariffs have a major influence on the prices we are charged for necessary fertilizers, machinery and parts. Trade is always a two-way street.

None of these issues are going away, and that situation is why farmer engagement is so important. The North Dakota Soybean Growers Association (NDSGA) is here to make sure that soybean farmers have a voice.

Whether the issue is drought, crop insurance, trade, transportation or farm policy, our association will continue to represent you wherever decisions are made.

Your involvement is key.

If you are not sure you are a member, give us a call or visit ndsoygrowers.com so that you can join today.

As we finish harvest, I hope we can take some time to appreciate what we accomplished during a difficult year.

Farming has never been easy, but farmers continue to adapt, to work hard and to find ways to move forward.

There will always be another challenge around the corner, but that task is what brings new opportunities.

McDonald farms in Leonard, North Dakota.

WETLAND EASEMENT DECISION:

North Dakota Leaders Speak Up

—By Daniel **Lemke**, Editor-in-Chief

Following an August 2026 public-comment period, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) said that, for now, it planned to take no further action on the 2024 rule governing setbacks around wetlands that are protected by federal wetland easements.

The decision has drawn criticism from some North Dakota landowners and lawmakers, including Sen. Kevin Cramer, who argued that the setback requirements infringe on private property rights, restrict agricultural drainage and could reduce the productive use of farmland without additional compensation.

"Frankly, I am stunned," Cramer said. "The blind defense of a Biden rule favored by environmental extremists at the expense of farmers confounds me, particularly at a time when our ag producers are hurting so badly. Rising fuel and fertilizer costs resulting from limited traffic in the Strait of Hormuz, along with lost international markets, have put farmers on their heels. Now, they can't even count on the administration to defend them against radical environmental activists who are advocating for the feds to take more of their land."

Locally, North Dakota landowners and lawmakers argue that the policy constitutes a "taking" and removes farmland from production without providing adequate compensation. Much of the frustration stems from a mapping process that occurred in 2019.

Prior to 2019, many of the older USFWS easements from the 1960s through the 1970s did not designate which specific wetlands were purchased by the USFWS's part of the easement. In 2019, the USFWS defined where the wetlands were, but to many landowners' dismay, the USFWS chose to map multiple, small wetlands spread across entire fields rather than defining the mapped acres in larger, permanent sloughs that the producers thought were intended acres under the contract. This

> **"Rising fuel and fertilizer costs resulting from limited traffic in the Strait of Hormuz, along with lost international markets, have put farmers on their heels. Now, they can't even count on the administration to defend them against radical environmental activists who are advocating for the feds to take more of their land."**
>
> *—Sen. Kevin Cramer*

U.S. Senator Kevin Cramer has been outspoken in his opposition to federal wetland setback rules affecting North Dakota farmers.

Dazey farmer Justin Sherlock advocates for a practical approach to wetland management that protects wildlife habitat while allowing farmers to manage their land.

scenario created frustration and left many landowners and farmers feeling betrayed by the USFWS, especially as the appeals process was cumbersome and financially burdensome for most landowners. Therefore, many mapped wetlands were not disputed due to the significant cost and technical expertise required to fight the USFWS determinations.

The 2019 mapping process, combined with the new setback rules implemented in 2024, created a situation where the USFWS now controls significant amounts of land outside the mapped easement acres because the setback rules allow the agency to control any drainage or vegetative management that may affect water flows or quality within the easement wetlands.

Dazey farmer Justin Sherlock estimated that half the land he farms has easements on it, and after the 2019 mapping process occurred, wetlands were designated in numerous locations on his fields.

"We're hearing horror stories from fellow farmers where (the) USFWS is claiming they have jurisdiction anywhere from 300 to 2,000 or more feet away from the borders of these wetlands because of the hydrology," Sherlock said. "They're claiming that, for any water that could enter that wetland, they have jurisdiction within the setback area. So now, they have control not just of the wetland, they're claiming they have jurisdiction on that half section. Because they placed these wetlands all over the half section, they essentially now control the entire half section, and they are telling me how I am allowed to perform any water management or cattail management."

Sherlock stated that most farmers with easements aren't looking to drain more ground. They want common-sense clarity and the potential to mitigate wetlands similar to what's allowed under Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) guidelines.

Through the NRCS mitigation process, landowners can buy out a wetland and drain it as long as that wetland is replaced somewhere else within the same watershed. Sherlock explained how a similar process should be created to allow USFWS wetland easements, perhaps on the same tract of land or a nearby property that is more suited to permanent wetland habitat. That change could allow farmers to turn what are, sometimes, temporary wetlands that only have water a few weeks of the year into permanent wetlands that can provide equally good or better wildlife habitat.

"We're not asking to be able to just blindly drain; we're just looking for some sort of a reasonable, practical solution that can work for the hunting, wildlife and farming communities," Sherlock added. "We're just asking for some relief from the burdensome government overregulation and taking the private property rights."

Conservation and outdoor groups support the rule, arguing that standardized or site-specific setbacks are necessary to prevent agricultural drain tile from directly or indirectly draining protected wetlands. Many farmers argue that this situation is much more than just a drainage issue. "At its core, this is a private-property rights issue that should be constitutionally protected just as the second-amendment rights are protected by the constitution," Sherlock asserted. "Government taking of private property without compensation is protected by the constitution, so a reasonable solution to this government overreach needs to be found."

NDSGA Members Travel to Washington, D.C.

—By Suzanne **Wolf**, NDSGA Communications Director

In July, North Dakota Soybean Growers Association (NDSGA) farmer leaders and staff traveled to Washington, D.C., to participate in the American Soybean Association's board meeting and to advocate for North Dakota soybean farmers.

During the visit, the NDSGA met with North Dakota's congressional delegation and staff, including Senator John Hoeven, Senator Kevin Cramer and Congresswoman Julie Fedorchak.

Discussions focused on issues that directly affect soybean farmers, including the farm economy, the farm bill, trade, biofuels, wetland easements and the future of agriculture.

The group also met with representatives from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the United States Department of the Interior and other federal officials in order to discuss policies and programs which affect farmers and rural communities.

"These meetings provided an opportunity to share the perspectives of North Dakota soybean producers directly with policymakers and decision makers in Washington, D.C.," said NDSGA Executive Director Stephanie Sinner.

"Having a seat at the table is an important part of (the) NDSGA's advocacy efforts. By meeting with elected officials and federal agencies, farmer leaders can provide firsthand insight into the challenges facing producers and help ensure agriculture remains part of important policy discussions," Sinner added.

NDSGA directors and staff in Washington, D.C., advocating on behalf of North Dakota's soybean farmers.

NDSGA farmer leaders and representatives met with Senators John Hoeven (top) and Kevin Cramer (middle), and Congresswoman Julie Fedorchak (bottom) in Washington, D.C., in August.

USDA Pilots Farm Data-Collection Program

Efforts Could Improve Farm-Data Reporting While Protecting Farmers' Privacy

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is undertaking efforts to modernize how it collects farm information while building trust and transparency with American farmers.

In early September, USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins outlined key pillars of the agency's data modernization plan, which included updating the data-reporting experience to leverage emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence (A.I.) and machine learning.

Rollins said that the USDA hopes the efforts will, ultimately, expand farmers' access to mobile surveys, explore opportunities to use pre-filled information where appropriate and strengthen coordination across the department.

The USDA is conducting the pilot program to evaluate the use of improved satellite imagery and is working with NASA and other federal government agencies to make reporting more accurate.

Quelling farmer apprehension about data sharing, program facilitators will then leverage current technology platforms to keep the information restricted and to increase privacy.

"We will protect producer privacy," Rollins stated. "We will clearly explain why information is requested and how it is used."

Rollins explained how the agency produces hundreds of reports each year through branches, such as the National Agricultural Statistics Service, which are intended to provide objective and unbiased statistics.

"Up until the last number of years, they had been considered the gold standard for market reporting," Rollins asserted. "The reality is that the service response rates have been declining for decades and that we have lost the faith of the farmer in these surveys. We've got to get it back."

In 1992, Rollins said that response rates for crop production surveys averaged between 80% and 85%. By 2016, that number had dropped to 55%. Since 2016, response rates have only declined further, with current response rates averaging between 38% and 45%.

Local Influence

Just before the modernization plan was announced, the USDA conducted listening sessions in Minnesota, Indiana, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Nebraska, Illinois, Missouri, Iowa and South Dakota to obtain input from farmers on ways to simplify data gathering and to encourage greater farmer participation.

Brooke Rollins, USDA Secretary

North Dakota's Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices are part of a pilot program for modernizing acreage reporting as part of the USDA's One Farmer, One File initiative. North Dakota was selected, in part, because growers tend to farm large acreages.

North Dakota State FSA Director Brad Thykeson described how having farmer data in digital form will make it easier to share information between agencies, such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Risk Management Agency.

"A lot of the data that we collect from producers in that certification time period is used by other agencies for determining insurance premiums or determining acres that are eligible for a conservation plan," Thykeson explained. "The vision of this administration is that they want to make sure that we streamline our process so that we aren't having to physically ship a paper map between agencies and that we can all access One Farmer, One File."

Thykeson added that there has been a learning curve with the Geospatial Enhanced Acreage Report (GEAR) program used for acreage reporting, but he is encouraged by how the process has worked.

"What we're trying to do is to give a toolbox to all these producers to do things in a whole variety of ways," Thykeson contended. "The secretary has this vision that we should modernize just like the rest of society is doing so."

USDA Undersecretary for Farm Production and Conservation Richard Fordyce said that the agency selected several states and counties across the nation to participate in the pilot effort to replace the paper maps used for mandatory acreage reporting with modern technology.

"The way that we're doing this is literally an end-to-end new design where we're going to be using a geospatial mapping platform," Fordyce maintained. "That's the basis of the modernized acreage reporting. There'll be opportunities for the farmer to look at his or her farm on a geospatial digital map. They'll even have the opportunity to change the field boundary and do some things that are different than anything we've been able to do before."

Fordyce added that, once a farmer has gone through the process of identifying the fields and putting in crop information, the acreage report is done.

"The program analyst and the county office doesn't have more work to do after that, so from a time-saving standpoint for FSA staff, I think it's going to be really important," Fordyce explained. "We believe that, once the modernized acreage reporting tool is live across the country, we're going to save considerable time for farmers and staff."

Fordyce is hopeful that, by late 2027 or 2028, the modernized reporting system will be capable of incorporating precision information that many farmers already gather through technology in their tractors and combines.

USDA staffing issues are problematic in some areas of the country, but Fordyce denied that the modernized collection process is a way to justify staff cuts.

"As the undersecretary, I don't believe that it is a way for us to validate less staff because there's still going to be plenty of work to do in those local county offices," Fordyce said. "If we can reduce the time it takes to do acreage reporting each spring and, in some cases, depending on where you are each fall, that's just going to be good for the agency, and it's going to be good for the farmers that we serve."

USMCA Review Gets **Complicated**

—By Daniel **Lemke**, Editor-in-Chief

Despite encouragement from numerous agriculture groups and other supporters to renew it, the Trump administration opted not to extend the U.S.-Mexico-Canada (USMCA) trade agreement for another 16-year term.

Combined exports of North Dakota soy products, including soybeans, soy flour and oilcake, to USMCA trading partners nearly doubled from $198 million in 2024 to $336 million in 2025, meaning that soy products are North Dakota's largest ag-export category to USMCA partners.

The Trump administration has indicated a willingness to forego agreements involving multiple trading partners in lieu of pacts with individual countries. Farmer leaders in North Dakota are trying to impress upon negotiators and the administration that multilateral agreements are preferred.

"It's so important that we keep advocating and fighting for a multilateral trade deal like USMCA with Canada and Mexico," said Justin Sherlock, a Dazey farmer and an American Soybean Association (ASA) director. "The trade and economic growth are strong between our countries because of the multilateral nature, rather than having different sets of trading rules with Canada and Mexico. We have all benefited by having a standardized set of rules. It just makes sense to have the same rules trading across our northern and southern borders with our neighbors."

To address the issue locally, North Dakota Congresswoman Julie Fedorchak hosted U.S. Chief Agricultural Negotiator Julie Callahan at an event in Grand Forks on August 19. The event highlighted the importance of increasing markets for North Dakota agriculture products and giving North Dakota producers a direct voice in U.S. trade policy. Photo by NDSGA staff.

To address the issue locally, North Dakota Congresswoman Julie Fedorchak hosted U.S. Chief Agricultural Negotiator Julie Callahan at an event in Grand Forks on August 19. The event highlighted the importance of increasing markets for North Dakota agriculture products and giving North Dakota producers a direct voice in U.S. trade policy.

"North Dakota farmers and ranchers can compete with anyone in the world when they have fair rules and reliable access to markets," Fedorchak stated. "The administration has made significant progress securing new agreements and expanding opportunities for Ameri-

The Surge in Soybean Export Values

Mexico is the second-leading importer of U.S. soybean meal, the second-leading soybean oil importer and the third-leading whole bean importer. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Foreign Agricultural Service, Mexico's soybean import value was $2.31 billion in 2025. *Source: U.S. Soybean Council*

2025 Ag Exports to Mexico and Canada

Source: North Dakota Trade Office

can agriculture. Now, producers need certainty."

Mayville farmer Brent Kohls was one of several growers who attended the meeting and stressed the need for including Mexico and Canada in an agreement.

"It's important that (the) USMCA remains a multilateral deal," Kohls contended. "Multilateral agreements give us more stability and clearer terms for all three countries. If you start to break things down individually, I think more things can go wrong."

According to North Dakota State University Associate Professor and Director for Agricultural Policy and Trade Studies Dr. Sandro Steinbach, North Dakotans and farmers, in particular, will likely feel the tariffs' effects in several ways.

Individual household bills could climb as imported products become more expensive, and energy costs could also rise.

Farm inputs, such as fertilizer and machinery, are also affected. Products sold in Canada would be subject to 50% tariffs, although major agricultural commodities, such as soybeans, corn and wheat, were exempted from the current list of items subject to Canadian tariffs.

"The Focus Is Evolving," Expert Says

Trump's decision doesn't invalidate the pact. Rather, the arrangement is now subject to an annual review each year until the current agreement expires in 2036.

Steinbach said that most agreements have sunset clauses and provisions that afford parties the opportunity to review and to address concerns on all sides. He indicated that trade agreements are negotiated at a period of time and that things change.

"The focus is evolving," Steinbach explained. "Having sunset reviews as a baseline is a good thing. You want to have the opportunity to revisit things. There is this mechanism in place to allow for revisiting, and obviously, the U.S. had certain concerns that they wanted to see addressed."

The administration noted a trade deficit with partners and a desire for stricter manufacturing restrictions among the reasons that the U.S. didn't renew the USMCA.

Steinbach contended that the U.S. does have a large trade deficit, both with Canada and Mexico, in part, because of what is imported. Mexico, for example, exports machinery, vehicles, and a lot of fresh fruit and vegetables. Canada exports energy products, minerals and machinery. Steinbach maintained that a trade imbalance isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it has been raised as a big concern.

"Ideally, things have to be balanced, which is a challenge because the United States is primarily a commodity exporter," Steinbach stated.

Also in mid-August, talks between the U.S. and Canada broke down, prompting President Trump to impose 50% tariffs on $20 billion worth of goods from Canada. Canadian officials followed suit, imposing 50% tariffs on a wide range of products, including some agricultural goods.

Steinbach suggested that the tariffs imposed by each country have thrust the U.S. and Canada into a trade war that could have major implications for North Dakota.

"Canada remains our most important trading partner," Steinbach asserted. "The number of jobs, the number of businesses that are impacted by that decision, I think can't be overstated."

Northern Plains Nitrogen Applies for FIELDS Funding

—By Daniel **Lemke**, Editor-in-Chief

Like some farmers throughout North Dakota, Darin Anderson, Valley City, has prepaid for fertilizer that didn't arrive on time due to logistical problems.

"If you look at most fertilizer production facilities in the United States, they're where the natural gas is at, or they're on the coast where fertilizer can be shipped out to other countries," Anderson said.

The issue has caused so many challenges the past several years that Anderson and others have been working to reduce the burden with the construction of a world-scale nitrogen fertilizer production facility in Grand Forks called Northern Plains Nitrogen (NPN).

"We want to transport the gas to Grand Forks and have the plant located right in the heart of the urea market, the highest demand area and the most expensive region in the country due to supply sources and logistics," Anderson stated.

The facility would serve growers in North Dakota, South Dakota

North Dakota Fertilizer Transport Logistics

Imported to the U.S.

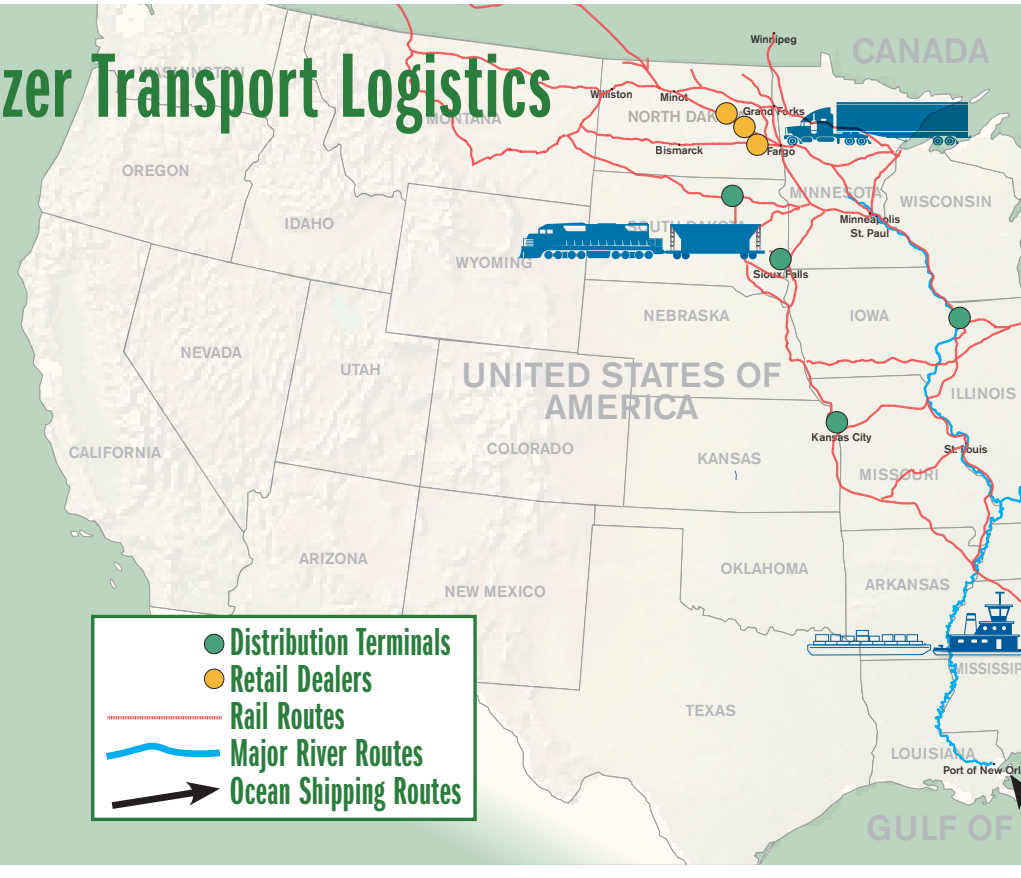
Fertilizer is imported from countries around the world and Canada. Most of the fertilizer going to North Dakota is transported from Southern Gateway ports, such as New Orleans, Louisiana.

Shipped from Ports to Distribution Terminals

Product is shipped from U.S. ports by rail or barge to distribution terminals where it is stored and blended for local needs.

Shipped from Distribution Terminals to Retailers

Fertilizer is shipped via truck local retail dealers.



What is FIELDS?

The Fertilizer Investment & Expansion for Long-term Domestic Supply (FIELDS) program is intended to expand, or to bring into operation, new, independent, domestic fertilizer production capacity in order to provide agricultural producers with additional domestic fertilizer options and to strengthen the U. S. fertilizer supply chain. FIELDS is an initiative of USDA Rural Development.

How much funding is available?

At least $500 million.

What is the maximum award amount available?

$150 million.

What kind of projects does FILEDS support?

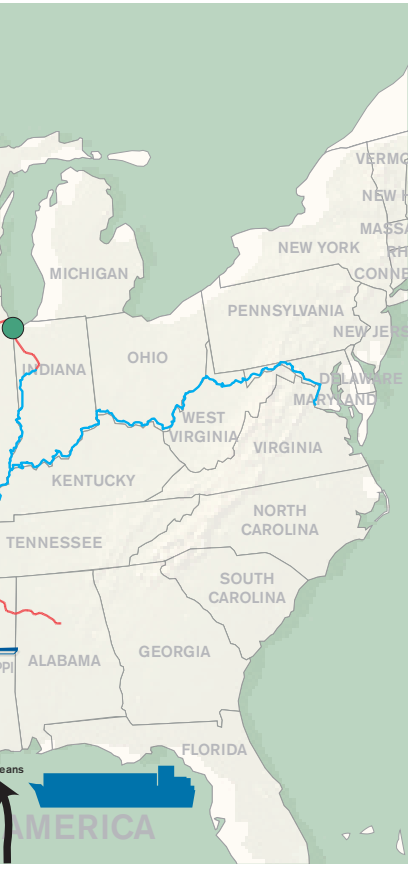
Program funding is intended to support projects that significantly increase the domestic manufacturing capacity and fertilizer availability, including expansions or upgrades of existing facilities, construction of new domestic production facilities, shovel-ready projects capable of rapidly increasing the domestic supply, and on-site fertilizer terminals and transportation infrastructure that improve supplies.

and portions of Minnesota.

NPN is farmer-backed with approximately 185 shareholders, including around 160 farmer shareholders and several fertilizer cooperatives.

"By having production here in the region, it should significantly ease a lot of the logistical issues when it comes to procuring our main nitrogen-based fertilizer," Anderson contended. "Let's get more production in the state and the region, and literally connect our oil fields to our farm fields. I think that that would be a win for both sectors."

Domestic fertilizer producers want to sell as close to the plant as possible, so much of the nation's fertilizer production is consumed by farmers in closer proximity to existing plants, leaving farmers like the ones in North Dakota, at the mercy of the supply chain. Anderson and other leaders involved with the NPN project hope to flip the script and to move the region's farmers to the front of the line.



The project is currently in the financing phase of development, and soon, Anderson, who is president of the NPN board, hopes to add funding support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) Fertilizer Investment & Expansion for Long-term Domestic Supply (FIELDS) program.

Anderson and NPN applied for FIELDS support. Applications for the program closed in August. Awards of up to $150 million per project are expected to be announced in the fourth quarter of 2026, according to the USDA.

"We think our project lines up beautifully with the FIELDS program," Anderson said. "Because the main thing the administration wants to do is increase domestic fertilizer production, and they want to have better competition."

Anderson described how there are many factors that make NPN an attractive investment for FIELDS. The company already owns the plant's site in Grand Forks, and water and wastewater pathways have been addressed.

"Most of the gateways to approval have been opened," Anderson stated. "The emphasis now is on getting the final financing and commercial pieces in place to make a construction decision."

Anderson explained that the facility will produce granulated urea, anhydrous ammonia and diesel exhaust fluid, depending on the market situation at the time.

The company's feasibility study showed that the tri-state region has a 3-million-ton per year urea market. The NPN plant would produce about 1 million tons annually, filling about a third of the regional demand.

Natural gas is the primary ingredient needed to produce urea and anhydrous ammonia. Bakken oil wells have associated natural gas that is produced when the crude oil is extracted; that gas needs a use and market. Tapping into the associated natural gas produced concurrently in the Bakken Oil Fields with the crude oil in western North Dakota to produce fertilizer for the state's farmers could connect the state's two largest economic sectors.

Anderson estimated that the NPN plant would consume 60,000 dekatherms of natural gas per day and would employ about 120 staff on a permanent basis. If funding is achieved, the plant could be fully operational in 2030.

SAVORING A WIN FOR Biofuels

—By Daniel **Lemke**, Editor-in-Chief

From soybean fields to farm equipment, the growing demand for biodiesel is helping to create a year-round domestic market for the crop.

Some things are meant to be savored: A juicy steak cooked to perfection, the perfectly brewed cup of morning joe, major wins for soybean growers.

The tastiest win for the latter occurred in March when the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) set renewable volume obligations (RVO) at 5.4 billion gallons of biomass-based diesel in 2026 and 5.7 billion gallons in 2027.

For North Dakota soybean growers, the move could deliver a broader appetite for their beans.

Whetting Appetites

The path of success for biofuels, such as biodiesel and renewable diesel, has never been linear. The RVOs announced in March have sent the industry on an upward trajectory.

"The RVOs have been absolutely enormous for the biomass-based diesel industry and, as far as we can tell, for all of the feedstocks that are utilized by our industry," said Kurt Kovarik, vice president of federal affairs for Clean Fuels Alliance America (CFAA). "There is nothing that compares to what this last RVO did in terms of jumpstarting the industry."

Kovarik stated that processors were scouring the country for feedstocks, including soybean oil, canola oil, animal fats and corn oil.

"We're having that domestic demand returning value to farmers' economic activity," Kovarik stated. Kovarik explained that the biofuel industry went from running at 50% capacity to 85% in about two months following the RVO announcement.

Energy-industry data indicated that the industry produced 500 million gallons of biomass-based diesel in June.

Calculated over 12 months, that production exceeds 6 billion gallons annually. Kovarik contended that those numbers indicate how the biofuel industry can meet the demand caused by the RVOs, which answers a question often raised by detractors of the expanded volume requirements.

Why It Matters

Growing demand benefits the production of biodiesel and renewable diesel, both of which can be made with soybean oil. Domestically, the U.S. has about two billion gallons of biodiesel capacity and five billion gallons of renewable diesel capacity.

Generous Servings

Organizations such as CFAA, the American Soybean Association and others pressed the EPA to increase the amount of biofuels, including biodiesel and renewable diesel, that blenders were obligated to add to petroleum-based fuels.

RVOs had previously short-changed biofuels. Kovarik said that the obligated volume of biomass-based diesel in 2025 was about 3.3 billion gallons, even though the industry produced over 5 billion gallons.

"We had a really good 2024 and a really poor, very lackluster 2025," Kovarik asserted. "That history is important because it demonstrates how significant this RVO is."

Soybean processors, biofuel organizations, farmers and the ethanol industry were seeking a significant step up in volumes for 2026. The groups asked for biomass-based diesel volumes to be set at 5.25 billion gallons. The EPA set the volume for 2026 at 5.4 billion gallons.

"The industry has been ramping up to go full out ever since to demonstrate that we can meet the obligations," Kovarik added.

Delectable Outcomes

In 2025, the biodiesel industry was operating at about 50% capacity, according to Kovarik. By June 2026, renewable diesel production climbed to about 85% of the processing capacity, and biodiesel was at 86% as idled plants reopened and as operating plants ramped up production.

For farmers like Rob Rose of Wimbledon, a member of the fuel work group for the United Soybean Board, the increased volumes were welcomed.

"A lot of people and different organizations worked hard at making that volume possible," Rose said.

"Having biomass-based diesel as a market driver in the state, as a farmer, I'd say it's a huge win

Potential Exemptions Could Result in the Reallocation of Obligations

Some refiners claim that blending biofuels causes undue economic harm. A specter of looming small-refinery exemptions could reduce the volume of biofuels that is actually blended, despite what was outlined in the RVOs. If those exemptions are granted, volumes could be reallocated at 70% of the original obligations.

—Source EPA.gov

Biodiesel puts soybean oil to work beyond the food chain, connecting a crop grown in North Dakota fields with the farm equipment's fuel tanks.

for us," added Philip Neubauer, a grower from Bottineau and a non-voting CFAA member.

Former North Dakota Soybean Growers Association President Joe Ericson of Wimbledon explained how the growth of biofuels is evident on his farm.

With North Dakota having two crush plants, that really does help the local basis being able to haul and process our beans domestically and not having to ship them out to China or other markets," Ericson contended.

"When you look at the fact that those two plants are crushing about half of our beans now when we were exporting nearly 90%, to all of a sudden take a huge chunk of what was being exported and process it here, that's huge," agreed Joe Morken, a Casselton farmer and former North Dakota Soybean Council chair. "We see it in our basis here."

Kovarik stated that, in May 2026, the biofuel industry utilized 1.45 billion pounds of soybean oil (about 56% of the soybean's value comes from the oil). Kovarik mentioned that, a few years ago, 50% of the soybean crop was exported while 50% was crushed domestically. Crush plants are now processing about 60% of the nation's soybeans, a direct result of the buildout in renewable fuels which facilitated the expansion for domestic soy crushing.

"We generally view the updated RVOs as a positive step that provides greater certainty for renewable fuel producers, soybean processors and farmers," said Mike Hilker, commercial manager for North Dakota Soybean Processors in Casselton. "Consistent and predictable renewable fuel policy helps support investment

—Story continued on page 34

Small Refinery Exemptions Are a Concern for Biofuel Proponents

On August 31, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced that it would remove approximately 1.8 billion Renewable Identification Numbers (RINs) from the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) compliance for small refiners.

However, the EPA also proposed to reallocate 100% of those RINs to larger refiners in the current 2026-2027 period, assuring no net loss in biofuel demand.

RINs are credits used for RFS compliance and are assigned to each gallon of biofuel produced.

Without 100% reallocation in the current period covered by the EPA's Set 2 Rule, the American Soybean Association (ASA) estimated that biomass-based diesel demand would drop by 500 million gallons and that soybean farmers would suffer almost a $1 billion loss in revenue.

The EPA exempted 29 refineries from retiring a total of 1.76 billion RINs for 2025 compliance. The agency finalized a rule to further delay the 2025 RFS compliance date to October 1 and to provide additional benefits to all refiners.

In the 2026-2027 RFS rule announced in March, the EPA estimated that it would grant SREs totaling 990 million RINs for 2025. The agency established supplemental volumes for 2026 and 2027 to ensure that the exemptions would not undercut current biodiesel and renewable diesel production and would not halt investments for additional production capacity. The Trump administration and the EPA promised to restore all 770 million RINs exempted above the prior estimate through a supplemental rule.

"America's biodiesel, renewable diesel and sustainable aviation fuel producers have been working overtime to meet the historic RFS volumes announced just last March," said Kurt Kovarik, Clean Fuels Alliance America's (CFAA) vice president of federal affairs. "The industry is producing at record pace today, providing a strong domestic market for America's farmers, investing billions in rural communities, contributing to America's energy security and providing American consumers a price break at the pump–in short, delivering measurable results on the administration's goals for the RFS."

Kovarik described how the CFAA disagrees that small refiners need some reviving after the tepid 2025 RFS volumes.

"We appreciate the administration's commitment to reallocating 100% of these additional exemptions and their intention to enter into supplemental rulemaking soon, but timing is critical," stated ASA President Dave Walton. "Any delay in reallocation risks undermining the domestic market demand that soybean farmers urgently need as we enter harvest season. (The) EPA must move quickly to fully reallocate these RINs and ensure soybean farmers are held harmless."

AG TECHNOLOGY

Incremental Progress in Livestock

—By Daniel **Lemke**, Editor-in-Chief

North Dakota livestock production lags behind Minnesota and South Dakota, yet new livestock facilities are being approved and built in the state, helping to narrow that gap.

"The swine industry still appears to be our more prolific opportunity, especially on the sow side due to our biosecurity," said Amber Wood, executive director of the North Dakota Livestock Alliance, which works to support and to promote animal agriculture in the state.

Wood stated that conditional use permits for two 6,000-head hog barns have been granted in recent months, so there is progress in pig production, too.

"Pigs are really where it's at right now," Wood explained. "It's our best opportunity. Growers are driven to move and innovate in order to put their pigs in a more biosecure area away from other pigs. North Dakota has a really a unique opportunity. We still have some growing pains that we need to get sorted out, but we are definitely making tremendous progress."

Biosecurity, feed and cool temperatures make North Dakota attractive for hog producers, and companies are taking notice.

"There definitely are some folks very interested," asserted Dr. Jon Biermacher, North Dakota State University (NDSU) Extension livestock development specialist. "I've talked to a lot of seed stock company people and people who've been down in South Dakota where they've seen quite a large expansion, and they would very much like to be here."

Wood described how it takes time to go through the entire permitting and approval process to get barns up and running. She said that there is added enthusiasm with both the younger and established generations that are looking at livestock. Adding pigs to their operations without having to be solely responsible for the project is attractive to some growers because they can use the integrator system to assist with the facility's cost.

> **"North Dakota has a really a unique opportunity. We still have some growing pains that we need to get sorted out, but we are definitely making tremendous progress."**
>
> *—Amber Wood, executive director of the North Dakota Livestock Alliance*

"It's a unique way to diversify with livestock without having to do it all on your own," Wood added.

Pork processing is limited in North Dakota, but Smithfield is expanding and moving its harvesting facility in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, which would likely offer an outlet for pigs raised in North Dakota.

Biermacher stated that, for several years, there has been a global overproduction of pigs, leading to tepid prices.

"It looks like we're starting to be back in the black, and the margins are a little better, so we're starting to see some light at the end of the tunnel," Biermacher continued.

Biermacher contended that it can be very difficult to start new, large integrated companies in North Dakota from scratch, but the state could be attractive to companies looking to expand. The North Dakota Soybean Council (NDSC) partnered with Biermacher on a checkoff-supported swine-operation feasibility study to assess the costs of establishing a swine facility in North Dakota, providing economic data that support his assessment of the state's potential for swine expansion. That report is available at bit.ly/NDSUSwineOperationsND25.

"I think there's an opportunity to relocate existing operations from states that, quite frankly, have gotten crowded," Biermacher stated.

Wood described how North Dakota farmers could diversify through increased backgrounding and finishing of beef cattle to capture additional value.

"The need for livestock is increasingly more important every year," Wood maintained. "Livestock provide alternate markets for commodities and drought-damaged crops, all while producing essential manure nutrients in these times of worsening fertilizer shortages. Animal agriculture is very heavily regulated at the state, local and industry levels to protect the environment, neighbors and communities."

Dairy Developments

Wood said that North Dakota lost two of its three milk processors recently and is currently home to only 17 dairies.

Two large dairies planned by Riverview LLP in Abercrombie and Hillsboro would nearly quadruple North Dakota's dairy herd, from about 8,000 to 45,500 cows. According to Wood, those operations represent the first new dairy farms in North Dakota since 2008. The projects received state permits from the North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality.

Biermacher mentioned that both dairies have faced legal challenges over environmental concerns; however, both operations have advanced construction plans, and company representatives have stated that they hope to be operational in 2027.

While feed and space are plentiful, Biermacher explained that livestock facilities must overcome citizens' concerns about labor, smell, water use and other environmental considerations. The challenges may be worthwhile because livestock production could be a way to diversify an operation or to bring additional family members into a farming operation.

"Our best chance for animal development, honestly, is going to be in swine and dairy," Biermacher stated. "It's an opportunity for us, but we have to want it."

NDSU offers online decision tools to help producers who are considering livestock production.

Those tools can be found at bit.ly/NDSUAgHubLivestock.

Just Like Odysseus and His Team, We Row Together

By Evan **Montgomery**
NDSC Board Chair

In July, I was one of millions who went to theaters to see "The Odyssey."

Based on Homer's poem, the epic follows King Odysseus on his 10-year journey home following the Trojan War. Through many challenges, Odysseus and his men power their ships toward their destination by digging deep and rowing together.

While certainly not as physically arduous as Homer's, leaders from the North Dakota Soybean Council (NDSC) and the North Dakota Soybean Growers Association (NDSGA) recently worked together to develop a 5-year plan to help navigate changes in the soybean industry.

Strategic planning may not sound as exciting as a summer, blockbuster film, but preparing is a necessary process to ensure that we are addressing the current and envisioning the future needs of North Dakota's soybean farmers.

There have been a lot of changes in North Dakota's soybean industry since we last formulated a comprehensive plan.

Soybean-crushing plants have been built in the state; export markets have shifted; and farm economics have been volatile and dynamic. This time was a perfect opportunity to look ahead to the future and to plan for the changes we would like to see in order to maintain the industry's long-term viability.

The multi-day planning was a very participatory process, with farmers from every corner of the state and from all walks of life voicing their concerns and ideas. Some growers have off-farm jobs. Some farmers have livestock. Some people operate businesses outside farming. At the same time, all of them grow soybeans and have an interest in bettering the soybean industry for our fellow farmers.

The process of forming a unified plan can be daunting. We were able to crystallize everyone's concerns into a plan that we can all support.

Through the process, several themes emerged, highlighting where NDSC and NDSGA efforts can be most meaningful.

The first area is animal agriculture. Growing livestock production holds great promise for utilizing more of our soybeans close to home. We are also supportive of ensuring and growing the demand for biofuels, which have become an increasingly important part of the soybean-value proposition. We're committed to diversifying our export markets to create additional soybean demand.

The NDSC also supports research that will increase the yield potential for North Dakota soybeans.

The NDSC invests checkoff dollars into soybean-related research, market development and outreach. The NDSGA advocates for policies that benefit North Dakota farmers. While each organization is on its own side of the boat, you can be assured that we are rowing together to support farm profitability and the long-term health of soybean farming in North Dakota.

Have a Voice in the Future of North Dakota Soybeans

—By Suzanne **Wolf**, NDSC Communications Director

North Dakota soybean producers have an opportunity to help shape the future of the state's soybean industry by serving as a county representative on the North Dakota Soybean Council (NDSC).

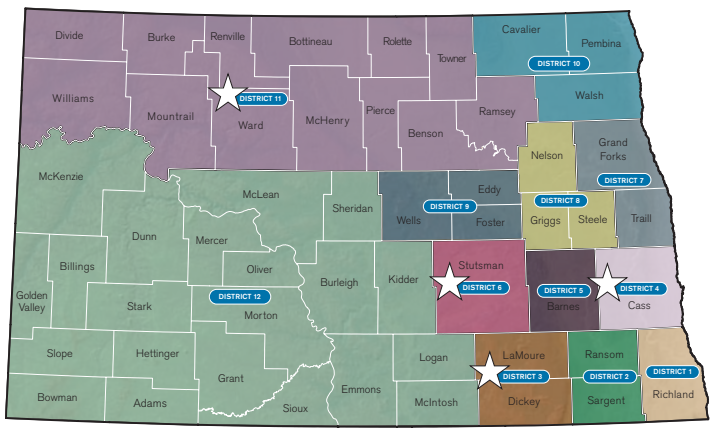
The NDSC's 2027 election process will begin in December 2026 for the following counties:

- **District 3:** LaMoure and Dickey Counties
- **District 4:** Cass County
- **District 6:** Stutsman County
- **District 11:** Divide, Williams, Burke, Mountrail, Renville, Ward, Bottineau, McHenry, Rolette, Pierce, Towner, Benson and Ramsey Counties

The election process is conducted by mail and is managed by North Dakota State University (NDSU) Extension to ensure a fair and secure election. In December 2026, soybean farmers in the designated counties will receive information about the nomination process in a green envelope. Official election ballots will be mailed in a blue envelope in February 2027.

In single-county districts, the elected soybean producer will also serve on the NDSC Board of Directors. In multi-county districts, one producer from each county will be elected as a county representative. Those representatives will then participate in a meeting organized by NDSU Extension, where one person will be selected to serve as a director on the NDSC board.

Soybean producers in these counties are encouraged to nominate a fellow producer or to consider putting their own name forward. Serving as a county representative is an opportunity to have a voice in the decisions that affect North Dakota soybean farmers and the future of the industry.



Salute to Service

—By Daniel **Lemke**, Editor-in-Chief

In America, the hard work and discipline to work on a farm often dovetails with a love of growing the world's food and a deep commitment to military service.

Not surprisingly, farmers have an oversized role in supporting the U.S. military and have a higher rate of service compared to other industries.

In 2017, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Census of Agriculture reported that farms operated by producers with military service accounted for 11% of total U.S. agriculture sales. The ag census also found that 17% of all farms had a producer who served or is serving in the U.S. Armed Forces.

In recognition of Veteran's Day in November—and to continue honoring veterans—we are highlighting two North Dakota farmers who donned a uniform in support of our country.

Jack Lueck, Spiritwood

Jack Lueck grew up on his family's farm near Spiritwood, North Dakota. Like most farm kids, he learned to work the farm at an early age and participated in Future Farmers of America (FFA).

After graduating from Jamestown High School, Lueck trained to be an electrical lineman in Bismarck. He worked as an apprentice lineman at North Central Electric Co-op, Bottineau, North Dakota, until Uncle Sam came calling.

"I got my draft notice in October, so I told the guys that I was going to quit and go goose hunting," Lueck quipped. "They had the lottery draft, and my number came up as number 22. That was a sure sign that I would be called."

Low draft numbers nearly guaranteed that men would be drafted.

Lueck was called, and he was formally drafted into Army service in November of 1970. He served in Schweinfurt, Germany, at Conn Barracks; he was a tank crew member for the 64th Armored Division, Third Infantry. He was discharged in May of 1972.

Upon returning to North Dakota, Lueck worked one summer with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department at Spiritwood Lake until the opportunity to return to farming arose.

"I had a chance, at that time, to buy some land from a neighbor, so I dove right in it," Lueck said. "I bought three quarters of land at that time. The following year, in 1973, I started farming, and I'm still doing it. This is my 53rd crop year."

In addition to farming, Lueck served on the Jamestown Rural Fire Department's board for 27 years. He also served on Spiritwood's cemetery board.

In September, Lueck, one of his neighbors and a high school classmate participated in the Veterans Honor Flight, which took veterans to Washington, D.C., to visit the memorials.

Like many veterans, Lueck is proud, but humble, about his service.

"There's a lot you can learn from service," Lueck asserted. "You have to have patience with other people."

Larry Hoffmann, Wheatland

Larry Hoffmann graduated from North Dakota State University on a Friday in May of 1966.

Spiritwood, North Dakota, farmer Jack Lueck entered military service in 1970. He served as a tank crew member for the 64th Armored Division, Third Infantry, at Conn Barracks, Schweinfurt, Germany. Photos courtesy of Jack Lueck.

Wheatland, North Dakota, farmer Larry Hoffmann joined the military and was sent to the Second Infantry Division Support Command in Korea in September 1967. Photos courtesy of Larry Hoffman.

"On Monday, I got a draft notice to come and join Uncle Sam's Army," Hoffmann recalled.

Hoffmann's father needed help over the summer, so he got a summer deferment, entering the service in September of 1966. He was inducted into the Army and qualified for officer candidate school. Training took him to New Jersey and Alabama. He was discharged, re-enlisted and went to Transportation Officer Candidate School.

In September of 1967, Hoffmann was sent to the Second Infantry Division Support Command in Korea.

"I was given the job as installation transportation officer for the Second Infantry Division, a position I retained for the entirety of my obligation, or almost two years," Hoffmann said.

After being discharged from the Army in 1969, Hoffmann returned to the Wheatland area to consider his future.

"After looking at lots of options, I was given the opportunity to farm some relatives' land. I still am on the same farm," Hoffmann said. "I've been here at this particular location for 52 years."

Hoffmann stated that his experience in the military transferred to life on the farm.

"I was in a support unit for the fighting guys, so I observed how important supply was, how important transportation was and how that could be applied to your farming career," Hoffmann added. "Have enough parts. Keep your stuff ready to go. Fill up with fuel at night instead of waiting until the morning. Know what your supply chain was. Know where your transportation was as to marketing your crops and, and getting your crops back."

In addition to learning about process, Hoffmann explained how his service helped him deal with people.

"I learned the importance of treating people the way you want to be treated and, yet in a supervisory role, providing the guidance and the structure so that they can do better," Hoffmann stated.

Hoffmann described how dedicating a few years of service gave him a new perspective on life and prepared him for many leadership roles. He's served agriculture in numerous roles: elevator and oil company boards as well as township and Farm Service Agency boards. He was vice chair of the research action team for the National Corn Growers Association and served eight years on North Dakota State University State Board of Agriculture Research and Education.

"If you enjoy living here and enjoy the freedoms that we have, two or three years of service is a very small part of your life, and it gives you a cross section of what the rest of the country is like," Hoffmann said. "If you go from high school or college to the farm and or go to college while you're on the farm, you don't get exposed to these things to realize who you're working with, who you're working for and what it's all about. Not that you can't do that, but I think it helps you understand your fellow man."

Thank you for your service!
November 11 is Veteran's Day

For the Love of Country and Crops

370,619
Number of ag producers in the U.S. who are military veterans.

129,144,965
Total number of acres farmed by U.S. military veterans.

$41 billion
Ag sales driven by farmers who are veterans.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Census of Agriculture

Fostering Vital Conversations at Soy Connext 2026

By Ted **Brandt**
NDSGA Board Vice Chair

If there was ever a doubt that North Dakota's soybeans are a global commodity, attending the 2026 Soy Connext event in Chicago put that point to rest.

Soy Connext, organized by the U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC), connects global buyers with U.S. farmers to discuss growing high-quality, sustainable soybeans.

The conference's goal is to create time and space for people in our industry to build and maintain relationships with one another. This year's gathering took place in Chicago. More than 800 people, including approximately 400 international buyers from 64 countries, attended the event.

As a representative for the USSEC, I had a lot of good conversations with delegates from countries in southeast Asia, as well as with visitors from the Middle East and the Mediterranean. Buyers from many countries shop by price first, but we were able to spend time discussing the unique ways that North Dakota soybeans deliver more bang for their buck. It made all the difference. For example, the delegates were amazed at the quality of North Dakota's soybean sustainability, essential amino-acid content, critical amino-acid value and overall quality compared to other regions of the world.

Soy Connext also presented opportunities to rebuild connections. We met with Chinese soybean buyers. There is a broken bridge with China, but there is interest from both sides to rebuild that partnership.

Many visitors combined their Soy Connext participation with on-farm visits before or after the event. Some trade teams traveled to North Dakota for stops at the Northern Crops Institute (NCI) as well as farm visits.

We talk a lot about the importance of personal connections and building relationships with our customers. That outreach is something that we, as U.S. farmers, do better than anyone. One-on-one conversations remain a vital piece of market development because buyers want to hear from farmers about the decisions that are made and the processes to produce high-quality and sustainable soybeans.

There are a lot of ways that we can spend our time. Having North Dakota farmers at events such as Soy Connext highlights our commitment to doing what is necessary in order to maintain relationships with our customers while paving the way for even more long-lasting relationships.

SCN Sampling Program Q&A

Q: How does the SCN sampling program work?
A: The NDSC covers the cost of up to 2,000 SCN samples for growers in N.D. NDSU will label, code and distribute sample bags. Growers bag and mail sample bags to the lab.

Q: When will the sampling program begin?
A: Sample bags will be at County Extension offices in mid-late August.

Q: How do I receive sample bags?
A: Each ND grower can get up to three bags at their County Extension office

Q: When is the best time to sample?
A: The number of eggs and cysts in the soil increases throughout the growing season, making SCN detection most likely if you sample at the end of the season; from just before harvest to just before freeze-up is generally recommended.

Q: What do the results tell me?
A: Results indicate how much (if any) SCN is in your soil. If you don't find SCN, excellent! If you find SCN at any level, you want to manage it immediately. If you are already managing SCN, and your levels are still high, it may be time to evaluate additional management options.

Contact Richard (Wade) Webster at NDSU with questions: richard.webster@ndsu.edu • (701) 231-7057

New Leader Takes the Helm at the United Soybean Board

By Rob **Rose**
USB Director

The United Soybean Board (USB) is comprised of 77 farmer leaders who volunteer to oversee the investment of national soybean-checkoff funds into important areas such as market development, research and the promotion of U.S. soy products. As farmers and board members, we strive to make wise investments that yield a positive return for our fellow farmers.

As volunteers, we rely on the work of the USB staff and others to help us chart the organization's course. The "boots-on-the-ground" staff help identify and to clarify complex issues. At our July meeting, the USB directors took a big step in helping to set the organization's direction by unanimously selecting a new CEO to lead the organization into the future.

Courtney Knupp comes to the USB with an extensive resume that includes leadership roles with the National Security Council, the U.S. Soybean Export Council, the National Pork Producers Council, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and more. She has also filled roles in agriculture's private sector. She grew up on a farm in Iowa and still has family there, so the importance of investing in and growing the nation's soybean industry is important to her, just as it is for us as farmer leaders.

At our July meeting, Knupp outlined her vision for the organization and her commitment to the soy industry, calling the USB role her dream job. Everyone who spoke with her came away impressed.

We all know that there are challenges and opportunities in the soy industry, both domestically and internationally. I'm confident that, with energized leadership and the commitment of 77 farmer leaders from across the U.S., the USB is poised to continue making good things happen for the nation's soybean farmers.

Rose farms in Wimbledon, North Dakota.

NCSRP Annual Meeting: Collaboration Across State Lines

—By Miki **Miheguli**, NDSC Director of Agronomy and Research

This summer, the North Central Soybean Research Program's (NCSRP) Board of Directors Summer Meeting and Tours brought industry leaders and research partners together to share expertise, address emerging challenges and shape priorities for the future.

Hosted by the Iowa Soybean Association, the NCSRP combines soybean-checkoff investments from 13 states to fund collaborative, multi-state research and outreach that support soybean farmers and advance the industry.

This year's annual meeting included research coordination, communication updates, state and regional research updates, and discussions about 2027 research proposals and funding priorities. These conversations help direct research toward practical solutions that farmers can use in the field.

Participants also toured research and diagnostic facilities, including the Kent Feed Mill & Grain Science Complex as well as the Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory, at Iowa State University. The tours highlighted research capabilities that can help the industry respond to emerging threats and advance soybean production.

For more information about the NCSRP, visit ncsrp.com.

Hosted by the Iowa Soybean Association, the NCSRP combines soybean-checkoff investments from 13 states to fund collaborative, multi-state research and outreach that support soybean farmers and advance the industry.

USB Welcomes Courtney Knupp as New CEO

—By Staff

The United Soybean Board (USB) welcomed CEO Courtney Knupp to the leadership table on October 1.

The USB's board of farmer leaders, representing more than 30 states, ratified the decision at its July board meeting in Indianapolis.

"Courtney is the right leader at the right time to advance the work of the Soy Check-off℠ and our vision of delivering sustainable soy solutions to every life, every day," said Brent Gatton, chair of the United Soybean Board.

Courtney Knupp, CEO of the United Soybean Board.

Knupp brings nearly two decades of experience that spans agriculture, international trade, public policy and market development. Her experience includes being the director of the global supply chain at the National Security Council and a senior policy adviser to the U.S. secretary and deputy secretary of agriculture on trade and food safety. She also served as vice president of international market development for the National Pork Board and as the director of global animal and aquaculture nutrition at the U.S. Soybean Export Council.

Knupp grew up on her family's farm in Iowa. She earned a bachelor's degree in agricultural business and international agriculture from Iowa State University.

Read the full announcement at unitedsoybean.org.

NDSU Reports 2026

Soybean Iron Deficiency Chlorosis Scores

Although drought conditions are now at the forefront of many growers' minds, it may be easy to forget the challenges that marked the beginning of the 2026 growing season.

Cool and wet conditions, particularly across central North Dakota, created favorable conditions for iron deficiency chlorosis (IDC) in soybeans. For some areas, prolonged periods of saturated or flooded soils further increased the severity of IDC symptoms in the soybean fields.

North Dakota State University (NDSU) conducts annual research with soybean varieties to determine their tolerance to iron deficiency chlorosis.

The North Dakota Soybean Council (NDSC) provided funding for the iron-deficiency rating studies.

"This information is crucial for farmers who deal with IDC in their fields annually," said Ana Carcedo, NDSU Extension broadleaf crops agronomist. "Choosing soybean varieties that are less susceptible to IDC is the first step in addressing this issue."

Soybean varieties exhibit genetic differences for their tolerance to IDC symptoms. In the 2027 season, producers can use the NDSU data to choose an appropriate IDC-tolerant soybean variety for fields that are known to have IDC issues.

"Selecting a soybean variety with IDC tolerance is an important management decision that can help producers minimize the negative impact of chlorosis on yield," stated Carcedo.

In the summer of 2026, NDSU's soybean breeding program evaluated 90 Enlist, GT27, Roundup Ready and Xtend soybean varieties, along with conventional varieties, for IDC tolerance.

IDC symptoms include yellowing of plant leaves with green veins, as well as yellowing, browning and stunted growth during the early stages, leading to reduced soybean yields. The test results are based on replicated trials conducted in a location with a history of IDC. Visual ratings were made on a 1-to-5 scale, with 1 indicating no chlorosis and 5 indicating the most-severe chlorosis. Ratings were recorded at three different soybean growth stages.

The test results are available at vt.ag.ndsu.edu/list/soy.

While IDC tolerance is important, producers are also advised to consider the yield potential and other important traits of soybean varieties. Plants with similar IDC tolerance can differ significantly in their yield potential. NDSU's soybean-variety trials will be published at the same link.

Reprinted with permission from the NDSU Extension and Ag Research News

IDC symptoms include yellowing of plant leaves with green veins, as well as yellowing, browning and stunted growth during the early stages, leading to reduced soybean yields.

Sowing Seeds Year Round

—By Daniel **Lemke**, Editor-in-Chief

North Dakota Soybean Council International Market Development Specialist Avery Hansen appreciates when trade teams and international buyers visit North Dakota farms to learn more about soybeans. She's particularly quick to applaud the teams that come in the summer.

"I always joke that they're here at the perfect time because it's not cold yet," Hansen said.

Feed and milling company representatives from Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia and Singapore combined participation in the U.S. Soybean Export Council's (USSEC) Soy Connext event in Chicago, Illinois, with farm visits to North Dakota in early August.

"It's really kind of a once-in-a-lifetime experience for a lot of these people because they're coming from places that usually don't grow soybeans, or if they do grow soybeans, it's not to the scale that we do here," Hansen stated.

Participants visited North Dakota Soybean Council (NDSC) Director Jim Thompson's family farm near Page for an inside look at soybean production.

The group also toured The Arthur Companies in Ayr, learning more about the important role North Dakota agriculture plays in the global supply chain. NDSC director Andy Haugen and USSEC past chair Monte Peterson also shared insights with the nearly two dozen participants.

International trade-team members tour NDSC Director Jim Thompson's farm near Page, learning firsthand about North Dakota soybean production and grain handling.

NDSC Director Andy Haugen answers questions from southeast Asian trade-team participants, sharing insights about North Dakota's soybean varieties and production.

Learning from the Source

Hansen maintained that the farm visits helped connect the dots for buyers who want to know how and where soybeans are grown as well as who is growing the crop.

Bringing buyers to North Dakota also helped drive the message that soybeans produced here have advantages over the competition. Farmers had the chance to discuss soybean sustainability, transportation infrastructure and port expansions, among other topics.

"Sustainability is very much top of mind around the world right now," Hansen explained.

North Dakota's climate and transportation infrastructure are advantageous for buyers because North Dakota soybeans are typically

Trade-team participants from Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia and Singapore gather outside the North Dakota Soybean office in Fargo.

> **"I'm always reminded and amazed how much agriculture is still a people industry. Technology has come so far, and soybeans are a worldwide industry, but at the end of the day, it's still a people business. People still want to talk to and create a relationship with you. That is a huge part of what drives customers to us beyond price and quality."**
>
> *—Avery Hansen, North Dakota Soybean International Market Development Specialist*

harvested in drier conditions than in South America and can be shipped to many Asian destinations in about three weeks.

"You really cannot beat the U.S. as far as sustainability goes," Hansen added. "The U.S. is second to none as far as care for the land and thought behind sustainability practices. Some of these bigger companies, especially, are putting in sustainability mandates within their organization. They want to reach a certain quota on sustainability. So that really gives us an advantage."

Recent port expansions in the Pacific Northwest are also making soybean-meal shipments more efficient.

"That's great because the meal market is growing, and it's growing very, very quickly," Hansen said. "Now, we're seeing even more capacity for meal, which will help us reach those southeast Asian markets where the desire for meal is growing."

Commodity soybeans aren't the only products drawing attention in North Dakota. Hansen stated that an August Northern Crops Institute seminar dedicated to soyfoods also drew visitors to North Dakota farms.

NDSC Director Jim Thompson shares the story of his family's generational farm.

Feeding the World

Hansen estimated that about 10% of the soybeans grown in North Dakota are identity preserved (IP) food beans. North Dakota is the number-one producer of natto beans, which are a food staple in Japan. Hansen said that, in addition to strong food-bean production, the state has several top-notch food-grade soybean exporters with well-established supply chains.

"When people think soybeans, they're often thinking commodity beans, but the IP/food-grade market is something that we touch as well, especially when we go over into Asian countries," Hansen explained.

There is plenty of competition for global soybean markets, but North Dakota soybean leaders are intent on leading the conversations necessary to build markets.

"I'm always reminded and amazed how much agriculture is still a people industry," Hansen asserted. "Technology has come so far, and soybeans are a worldwide industry, but at the end of the day, it's still a people business. People still want to talk to and create a relationship with you. That is a huge part of what drives customers to us beyond price and quality."

TRADE TEAMS STATS

In 2026, North Dakota Soybean's international market-development efforts have brought the following to the state:

102 visitors,
representing **86** companies
from **32** countries
giving global buyers a
firsthand look
at North Dakota soybeans.

Those visitors have come from countries around the world, including Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Sri Lanka, Italy, Thailand, Vietnam, China, Kazakhstan, Senegal, Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria, Tajikistan, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Cambodia, Singapore, Indonesia, Taiwan and the Philippines.

—By Erin **Worrell,** U.S. Soybean Export Council Communications Manager

Crucial Connections

The U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC) emphasized global market diversification and relationship building as priorities for U.S. soy exports during Soy Connext 2026.

Sponsored, in part, by the North Dakota Soybean Council (NDSC), the event was held on August 5 to 7 in Chicago, Illinois, connecting more than 800 attendees visiting from over 64 countries.

The scale of those connections was evident in every room.

"Diversifying our markets is about building relationships and creating opportunities for U.S. Soy in markets around the world," said USSEC Director Cindy Pulskamp, Hillsboro. "When customers understand the quality, reliability and sustainability of U.S. Soy, they see the value it can bring to their businesses. That benefits the entire U.S. Soy value chain, including North Dakota farmers."

Prior to this year's Soy Connext conference, customers from Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam met with North Dakota soybean processors, visiting NDSC Director Jim Thompson's farm near Page and touring The Arthur Companies in Ayr.

Following the event, another team of soyfood company representatives from China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam participated in a short course about food-soy procurement at the Northern Crops Institute (NCI) in Fargo.

Connecting North Dakota soybeans with global markets, NDSC Vice Chair Ted Brandt, far right; USSEC Director Cindy Pulskamp, second from right; and North Dakota soybean staff engaged with customers and exporters at Soy Connext 2026 in Chicago on August 5-7.

Pulskamp and Brandt celebrated the winners of the 2026 Soy Excellence Center Top Achiever Recognition (STAR) Award: Iqbal Putra, Indonesia; Pragati Salutgi, India; and Harry Chunga, Peru. The awardees were honored during Soy Connext 2026.

"Customers benefit from experiencing our culture, and we should understand how our products are used in their cultures," said Ted Brandt, NDSC vice chair, Enderlin. "During lunch with Chinese customers, we talked about what they are looking for and what we are looking for as we rebuild and strengthen soy trade."

Soy Connext 2026 also highlighted the growing global demand for protein and oil, as well as soybean's role in helping to meet that demand.

U.S. soy remains the top agricultural export from the United States, despite declines this year due, in part, to trade tensions with China.

Exports are projected to grow for the next marketing year, October 2026 through September 2027, recovering much of the losses. Two main factors are driving the projected increase: growing demand for soy across more markets and a potential return to more normal trade relationships with China.

The USSEC analysis shows that U.S. soy exports to all markets besides China have increased approximately 6.6% over the same period last year (through mid-August), building on a record set the previous year. That evidence shows that more countries are recognizing U.S. soy's advantages in value, quality, reliability and sustainability.

Soy Connext 2027 is scheduled to take place from August 16 to 18, 2027. For more information, visit ussec.org.

Number of Attendees:

Number of Countries Represented:

"Diversifying our markets is about building relationships and creating opportunities for U.S. Soy in markets around the world. When customers understand the quality, reliability and sustainability of U.S. Soy, they see the value it can bring to their businesses. That benefits the entire U.S. Soy value chain, including North Dakota farmers."

— USSEC Director Cindy Pulskamp, Hillsboro

SOY CONNEXT 2026

Now in its fifth year, the Soy Connext 2026 global conference welcomed almost 1,000 soy customers, exporters, farmers, supply chain members and industry experts. The event also created space for 134 key buyers and 42 export companies to connect with one-on-one meetings.

Weather Woes

Hot, Dry Summer Tempers North Dakota Soybean Yields

—By Daniel **Lemke**, Editor-in-Chief

The 2026 growing season began with a lot of promise for farmers across much of North Dakota because adequate soil moisture early in the spring had many growers excited about their crops' potential.

However, dry weather and poorly timed heatwaves likely took their toll on soybean yields across much of the state, depending on location.

"Yield potential really depends on where you are," said North Dakota State University (NDSU) Extension Agronomist for Broadleaf Crops Dr. Ana Carcedo.

Western North Dakota

Farmers in the western third of North Dakota dealt with drought conditions for much of the growing season, leading to aborted pods and yield loss.

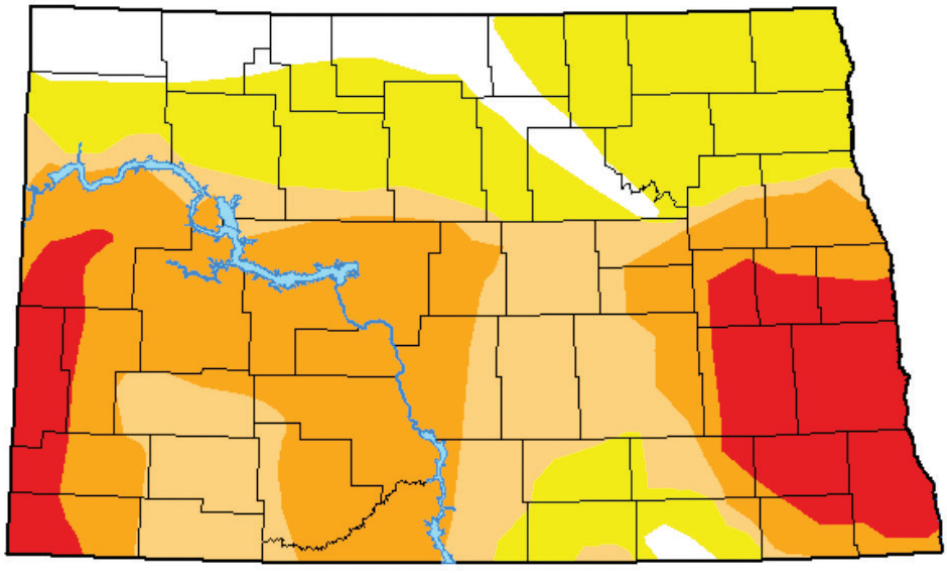
Carcedo said that soybeans in the west held their own until two heatwaves hit soybeans at critical times.

The first blast of heat came when the soybeans were flowering.

"That's not good because heat really impacts pollination, so you don't want excessive heat during flowering," Carcedo stated.

Because soybeans are resilient plants, they will keep flowering. However, a second heatwave came during the R3 stage when the plants were setting pods. The timing of that

North Dakota Drought Conditions



Drought conditions in North Dakota as of 9/8/2026
Source: ndsu.ag/drought

- None
- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Moderate Drought
- D2 Severe Drought
- D3 Extreme Drought
- D4 Exceptional Drought

heatwave was another hit.

"After plants already started to set the number of pods, having that stressor is not good," Carcedo explained. "After that, the drought continued, so we saw quite a bit of pod abortion."

Farmers whose soybeans aborted pods will see yield losses as a result.

Central North Dakota

Conditions in central North Dakota were quite different to start the growing season. Saturated soils led to higher-than-usual amounts of iron deficiency chlorosis (IDC) early in the year, which also sapped some yield potential.

After the cool, wet start of the year, rain became more infrequent, and much of the region had a drought.

"It's really incredible how we went from one extreme to the other," Carcedo asserted.

While some fields in the central part of the state held up well through the growing season, top-end yield potential was likely lost in many instances.

Eastern North Dakota

Drought also limited soybean-yield potential in eastern North Dakota, where a promising start was negated by ongoing drought conditions in July and August.

Carcedo described how there was enough stored soil moisture to keep soybeans growing for a while, but the effects of the prolonged drought will likely be evident in yield monitors this fall.

"We are going to see yield penalties for sure," Carcedo added.

Controlling What You Can Control

Farmers are accustomed to the vagaries of the weather, knowing it is one of the many things outside their control. Carcedo maintained that there are things which farmers can do to minimize the drought's effects.

"Anything that benefits your soil health will help you in these years," Carcedo said. "It's going to give you more stability because it's going to make your soil a bigger bucket. Your soil is going to hold more water when you have better soil structure."

Carcedo recognizes that changing soil-health practices is a long-term process that can take many years to accomplish.

Other practices, such as crop rotation and variety selection, can also be effective in reducing some drought results.

For more information about drought management, soybean farmers are encouraged to reach out to their NDSU Extension officer or visit

MEET DR. MADELEINE SMITH, NDSU's Pesticide Specialist

—By Daniel **Lemke**, Editor-in-Chief

NDSU's Pesticide Coordinator, Dr. Madeleine Smith, has been responsible for managing North Dakota's pesticide applicator certification program since 2024. Her role requires excellent attention to detail, and she has something else many others lack: a particular passion for pesticide education.

Here's more about Dr. Madeleine Smith and how her role at NDSU helps support soybean farmers across the state.

Q: What interested you in becoming a pesticide coordinator?

After 17 years working alongside, and partnering with, farmers and agricultural communities in the region, the pesticide program at NDSU provided a great opportunity to do all the things I enjoy about working in the ag industry.

I've always been driven to use my knowledge and skills to help individuals, communities and business around me thrive. And because I value the model of Extension and its close connection to the communities it serves, it felt like a natural move into a position that helps me communicate practical knowledge to farmers effectively. I'm very passionate about that.

Q: What are your primary responsibilities?

My primary responsibilities are to execute the program for certification and recertification training of pesticide applicators in accordance with the Environmental Protection Agency-approved certification plan for North Dakota.

We serve approximately 15,000 applicators in the state. For recertification, we conduct approximately 65 training events for commercial applicators, and county Extension agents conduct about 240 private applicator training events in the training season.

County offices also provide new applicators with the opportunity to take their initial exams. We cover topics including pesticide toxicity, appropriate protective equipment, pest identification, product selection, regulations and more.

We also maintain the infrastructure that tracks and records applicator certifications. We answer a wide range of questions from farmers and applicators.

Q: What are some recurring issues that you see?

One of the overarching issues I see is looking only at the short-term implications of decision making. One of the challenges in agriculture is simply surviving from year to year, so farmers often can't look ahead 10 to 15 years. This can have some negative impacts when it comes to pesticide use.

Weather conditions and other considerations can put applicators under pressure to get things done. This can lead to shortcuts, such as not wearing the appropriate personal-protective equipment, cutting applications volumes to save a trip to fill the tanker, incorrect calibration (and) selecting product based on what you have in the jug because it's what's on hand.

Dr. Madeleine Smith, NDSU Pesticide Coordinator, leads North Dakota's pesticide applicator certification program

These decisions can often reduce efficacy, lead to issues such as development of pesticide resistance, increase costs and could lead to chronic health issues later on.

Q: How has pesticide management become more challenging?

Pesticide management is definitely becoming more complex. Resistance issues are narrowing the number of effective products available in certain scenarios. Applicators often face weather conditions that can complicate both application and uptake of the pesticide by the target organism, resulting in reduced efficacy. Product availability and cost can impact product selection, especially when margins are tight.

The regulatory landscape is constantly changing, which can make compliance a challenge as well.

Q: Are there key messages you try to reinforce to farmers?

Plan ahead. Having a plan A and at least a plan B can help reduce the stress of suddenly finding you have a pest problem. Effective decisions can no longer be made at the side of the field in the heat of the moment.

I encourage growers to reach out to their local Extension offices to get advice and information to help make informed decisions. Remember, there is help out there.

The farmers I have worked with over the years care deeply about improving their operation for the generations that come after. Using pesticides wisely and judiciously, and following label directions is just as key as improving soil health to promote both food security and the longevity of the farming operation.

Contact Dr. Smith at madeleine.smith@ndsu.edu

A list of county Extension offices and contact information can be found here: bit.ly/NDSUExtOffices

Growing Partnerships Across the Border

—By Suzanne **Wolf**, NDSC Communications Director

At the end of July, the North Dakota Soybean Council (NDSC) welcomed directors and staff from Manitoba Pulse & Soybean Growers, along with representatives from Pulse Canada and Soy Canada, for two days of collaboration and learning in North Dakota.

The visit included a roundtable discussion about planting updates and the 2026 crop outlook. The group then traveled to Casselton for tours of the North Dakota Soy Processors crush plant and Maple River Grain's fertilizer facility.

On the second day, the group toured the North Dakota State University (NDSU) Agronomy Seed Farm in Casselton with Dr. Carrie Dottey, North Dakota's soybean breeder. The visit continued in Fargo at the NDSU Bolley Field Lab and the NDSU Peltier Complex.

The visit provided an opportunity to exchange information, to learn more about research and processing, and to discuss ways to strengthen the soybean industry on both sides of the border. The conversations also opened the door for identifying research and outreach projects that could involve Manitoba soybean growers and North Dakota partners.

Looking ahead, the NDSC will explore opportunities to collaborate with Manitoba growers and organizations on projects that address shared challenges and support soybean farmers across borders. A regional approach can help identify practical solutions that benefit growers throughout the North Central region.

The tour marked an important step toward turning shared challenges into shared opportunities, thus building partnerships for the future of soybean production.

Canadian soybean industry representatives join NDSU's Dr. Carrie Dottey at the Agronomy Seed Farm in Casselton to tour soybean trials and to exchange knowledge about research and production.

Airable Labs: Exploring New Opportunities for Soy

—By Miki **Miheguli**, NDSC Director of Agronomy and Research

As the soybean industry looks for ways to expand the demand and to create additional value from the crop, new uses for soy are an important area of research and innovation. Researchers and industry partners are exploring applications for soybean-derived ingredients beyond traditional uses.

Airable Research Lab in Delaware, Ohio, a division of the Ohio Soybean Council, focuses on developing soy-based technologies and moving the promising ideas toward commercialization.

This summer, Miki Miheguli, director of agronomy and research at the North Dakota Soybean Council (NDSC), and Dr. Eugene B. Caldona, assistant professor of coatings and polymeric materials at North Dakota State University, attended Airable's Summer Board Meeting in Delaware.

The meeting included soybean-checkoff representatives, researchers and industry partners who learned about Airable's research and commercialization efforts. Participants toured the laboratory, viewed technology demonstrations and heard updates about projects moving toward commercial applications.

For Dr. Caldona, the visit provided an opportunity to connect with researchers who were working on soy-based materials and to explore potential collaboration.

For the NDSC, the visit provided a broader perspective on how soybean organizations, researchers and the industry can work together in order to identify new uses and to develop markets that could increase the demand for U.S. soybeans.

Airable's work includes soy-based technologies for building materials, lubricants, coatings, agricultural products and other industrial applications. Some technologies are entering the marketplace while others remain in research and development.

For soybean farmers, new uses can create additional demand for soybeans and can open markets that may not exist today.

The visit highlighted the possibilities that emerge when researchers, soybean organizations and industry partners work together to answer one question: "What else can we do with soy?"

Miki Miheguli, Director of Agronomy & Research at NDSC, with Dr. Eugene B. Caldona, Assistant Professor of Coatings and Polymeric Materials at North Dakota State University, at Airable Research Lab's Summer Board Meeting.

Sam Karlock, Research Engineer at Airable Research Lab, demonstrates the lab's research to stakeholders during Airable's Summer Meeting.

NDSGA Golf Tournaments a Success

The North Dakota Soybean Growers Association (NDSGA) hosted its annual golf tournaments in Jamestown and Leonard this summer, bringing soybean growers, industry partners and supporters together for a day on the course.

The tournaments are an important fundraiser for NDSGA, helping provide the resources needed to continue policy and advocacy work in Bismarck and Washington, D.C.

To view a complete list of 2026 tournament winners and event sponsors, visit bit.ly/NDSGAGolfTourneys.

A Special Thank You to Our Sponsors

NDSGA sincerely thanks all of the sponsors who helped make this year's tournaments possible. Their support, from program and meal sponsorships to beverage carts and hole sponsorships, helps make these events successful and supports NDSGA's work on behalf of soybean growers.

The Leonard tournament's winning team was SB&B. Team members included Todd Sinner, Jeremy Sinner, Chad Bresnahan and Scott Sinner.

First place at the Jamestown tournament went to AgCountry Farm Credit Services. On the team: Lawton Allen, Cole Diede, Reegan Reule and Nick Blaskowski.

DPA Auctions Launches Member Selling Program

—By Suzanne **Wolf**, NDSGA Communications Director

Del Peterson & Associates (DPA) Auctions has partnered with the North Dakota Soybean Growers Association (NDSGA) to offer members discounted access to a nationwide, online equipment-selling program.

As part of the partnership, NDSGA members receive access to free professional equipment appraisals and can receive 50% off DPA's standard seller commissions.

Members also have access to DPA's nationwide buyer network, online auction marketing and transaction support.

Members can utilize DPA's proprietary, real-time valuation platform, which can help them understand the current value of their equipment and make more informed decisions about when to sell.

NDSGA President Chris McDonald explained the new program, which launched in August and helps soybean farmers sell farm equipment, as another powerful tool available exclusively to NDSGA members.

"Our members join (the) NDSGA because they believe in having a strong voice for agriculture, but membership is about more than policy work. We want to provide resources and partnerships that deliver value back to their operations," McDonald said. "This partnership with DPA Auctions gives producers another tool to make informed decisions about their equipment and their businesses."

NDSGA members who are interested in learning more about the partnership or taking advantage of the program can visit sell.dpaauctions.com/partner-with-dpa or call Justin Scheel at (402) 480-9000.

—Story from page 15

across the domestic soybean crush/biofuels supply chain. This RFS recognizes the important role that soybean oil plays in renewable diesel and biomass-based diesel production."

Mike Keller, president of Green Bison Soy Processing in Spiritwood, agreed that the current RVOs are at a very strong level.

"From our perspective, that's critical to the success of biomass-based diesel, demand for U.S. soybeans and to processors like us that have invested to meet that demand," Keller stated.

"When this facility was built, it was on the premise that we were anticipating strong demand for renewable diesel. We were very vocal from the beginning about our relationship with Marathon Petroleum Corporation, our oil offtake agreement and the role this facility could play in serving that market."

Keller explained that the updated volumes are already having an effect on the market.

"You can see how important that demand is when you look at where we were a year ago compared with today," Keller asserted. "Last year, when there was very little clarity, margins were low, and it impacted the entire operating environment. Today, with greater RVO clarity and much stronger demand, we've seen a tremendous difference."

Crush capacity in North America has grown rapidly in the past five years, with much of that capacity being added due to the expected demand growth for biofuels.

"The industry has stepped up to meet that demand, and we're continuing to invest," Keller added.

Wimbledon farmer Rob Rose fuels equipment with biodiesel, a growing market for soybean oil that is creating additional demand for North Dakota soybeans.

"ADM recently announced plans to increase our soybean processing capacity, which is a good example of that confidence in future demand."

Peppered with Potential

Keller described how North Dakota farmers have seen a meaningful improvement for the prices which Green Bison has offered for soybeans and how basis levels have improved. Having year-round soybean demand has also benefited the state's farmers.

"Historically, this has been a market where a lot of soybean demand was tied to an export window of roughly six months, but we're a 12-month-a-year buyer," Keller explained.

"That gives growers another outlet for their crop and a consistent, reliable source of local demand day in and day out. Now, growers have both the export market and local crush demand tied to renewable fuels. That gives them more diversification and more opportunities to market their soybeans throughout the year."

Hilker agreed that increased processing and biofuel use are wins for North Dakota farmers. "North Dakota has been a major beneficiary of the RFS program, as the state has added significant processing capacity that allows approximately half of the soybeans produced by North Dakota farmers to be processed at North Dakota crush plants," Hilker said. "This local crush capacity provides strong year-round demand for North Dakota soybeans rather than relying solely on the more seasonal and volatile export market."

"It's really helpful to see the local processors expand due to increased obligations," Neubauer stated. "It shows the farmers that they're willing to invest in the state and (that) they're going to want soybeans continually."

Balancing Flavors

North Dakota State University Professor and Crops Economist Dr. Frayne Olson declared that the RVOs provided a supportive boost for the industry. Ultimately though, soybean processors have the option of supplying oil for the human food chain or for biodiesel and renewable diesel markets.

"Every processor is going to have a little different strategy and different industry connections on what they want to try and leverage, so they'll have to decide how they're going to position themselves," Olson maintained.

Olson added that the domestic soybean demand has, historically, been much more stable than the export demand. The export market is typically the only market that's big enough and can respond fast enough to absorb extra production.

"It is good to have a solid, stable base domestically so that we know what we need, even though, when prices get higher, they may cut the amount they produce and consume," Olson explained. "However, the export market is much more price sensitive, so we see a lot more uncertainty, a lot more anxiety about what's going to happen with the trade part of it. To have a strong, growing, vibrant domestic market is what the industry wants. That's our core."

Olson said that there is a financial incentive not only through the RVOs, but also from the pending 45 Z tax credit, to expand advanced biofuels such as biodiesel and renewable diesel.

To qualify for the 45 Z tax credit, fuel producers must demonstrate reduced carbon intensity (CI) scores compared to petroleum diesel. That process will likely circle back to the farm gate and reflect farm practices.

"Long term, over the next five plus years, this will be a policy that will have big impacts," Olson contended. "We're going to have some growing pains along the way to figure out exactly how do we do this and do it efficiently."

Sweeter Things to Come?

The RVOs released in March established volumes for 2026 and 2027, and Kovarik said that conversations are already happening to determine volumes for 2028 and beyond. Those discussions are important because of the role that policy plays in the biofuel industry.

"Over the long term, strong and stable renewable fuel policies can drive continued growth in demand for soybean oil," Hilker said. "The updated RVOs strengthen the ag sector and deliver meaningful support for rural America, domestic jobs and manufacturing, and U.S. energy security. However, the current rules only establish renewable fuel requirements through 2027. Longer-term certainty will depend on (the) EPA's standards for 2028 and beyond. We're hopeful that we will continue to see growth in the RFS that we can translate into additional value for the ag sector."

In other words, growers hope that a strong biofuel demand will be on the menu for years to come.

"Continued clarity and strong RVOs going forward are going to be important," Keller added. "Biofuel demand has helped power the growth we've seen in U.S. soybean crush, and continued policy certainty gives processors the confidence to keep investing to serve that market."

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