

Lobbying necessary to counter laws harmful to agriculture

Agriculture continued at what seems like a slow pace in Douglas County in February. The days are noticeably longer but it is more winter-like than January. The two-day snow early in the month was a catchup day for me. I sorted files and found the top of the desk for the first time in a while.

Inflation is in the news with confirmation of higher prices coming every month. Food is leading the way as I am sure everyone notices with each trip for groceries.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimated in 2019 that the farm share of the total retail cost of food in the country is 14.3%. The other 85.7% is processing, transportation, and packaging.

There have already been stories in the news about farm prices driving up food prices. The cost of the raw materials we provide is not enough to influence the price of the food you eat.

A recent story written in part by a journalism group based in Champaign was critical of the American Farm Bureau Federation for its policies and especially the amount of money AFBF spends to lobby the government. As I noted last month, policy for both AFBF and Illinois Farm Bureau is a yearly process that is examined and voted on

regularly. The consensus of the delegates drives policy. The solution for one farmer in the story was to quit Farm Bureau and join another organization. That is his prerogative.

I personally wish farm organizations did not have to spend so much time and money lobbying the government. A great amount of the legislation in both Washington and Springfield has a very direct impact on our livelihoods. It would be suicide to stand back and watch some of the bills offered by our legislators become law. Sometimes the sponsors of a bill don't understand the consequences of a new law. All too often the effects are intentionally harmful to agriculture.

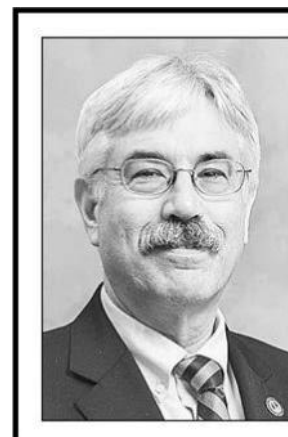
The Illinois Government committee of Illinois Farm Bureau looks at all the bills that are entered into the Springfield hopper. We don't take positions on all bills but those that affect agriculture are carefully examined. Our position is not arbitrary, however. A bill is always matched to the relevant portions of our policy book. Our position on a bill is relayed to the state legislators.

On the federal scene, many farm groups are preparing to re-fight the battle over what jurisdiction the federal government will have over water. Four years ago, a very sensible policy that limits government control of

surface water was made into law, overturning a statute that appeared to give the Feds control of that water right up to the downspouts on your house. This administration wants to go back to that type of restrictive control. Farm Bureau will fight this rule because of the huge effect it could have on our businesses.

It was in the news this week that cases of highly contagious avian flu have been found in Indiana turkeys, Kentucky broiler chickens, and to show it is not in just confinement operations, a backyard mixed poultry farm in Virginia, and a wild bird in South Carolina. The sources of these outbreaks are usually wild birds, which can carry the disease without symptoms. This flu can be devastating to farms that raise poultry. The farms without outbreaks will have to be depopulated to control the disease.

Illinois Farm Bureau is asking our state legislators to add money into the Department of Agriculture budget to combat outbreaks like this. The state has one field veterinarian on staff at present. The added funding would be used to hire 5 more vets and support staff. This would enable the state to deal with a mass outbreak of the animal disease in a timely fashion. Immediate response to animal disease outbreaks is of utmost importance for control.



Douglas County Agriculture

Larry W. Dallas
Illinois Farm Bureau
District 12 Director

China continues to fight the African swine fever that has devastated its hog production. Their pork industry is moving from backyard hogs-fed garbage to high-rise buildings with thousands of pigs in them, fed a corn and soybean meal diet. They are hoping to better control ASF in closed buildings with no garbage feeding. That is good for our grain prices since China cannot produce enough feed for their hog herd.

I attended a meeting at the University of Illinois that recapped the research being done by the Nutrient Research and Stewardship Council. This research is funded from a 75-cent assessment on each ton of fertilizer sold in the state. A committee of farmers, industry representatives, and researchers allocate funding for projects that research ways to

keep plant nutrients in place in the field. The presentations were very interesting. A dozen researchers spoke and there were posters with the results of many more projects around the room.

One of the researchers is working with modern soils and a store of soil samples taken in the late 1800s at the beginning of soil science work in the state. The samples have exact locations with them, so scientists can look at the same location today. The jars of soils were forgotten in a building on the U of I South Farms. This is an invaluable research asset for modern scientists.

Not all the research shows the results we would like. It is proving very difficult to reduce nitrates in Illinois surface water. Research is showing that the dark high organic mat-

ter soils of central Illinois naturally produce a lot of nitrogen when the organic matter mineralizes and releases nutrients. Similarly, we are still trying to understand how another important nutrient, phosphorus, acts in the soil. For years it was thought phosphorus only left a field when the soil was eroded off the land. There is now evidence that dissolved phosphorus moves in groundwater. Stayed tuned.

Some of this research is taking place in Douglas County. A farm on Filson Road is the site of many tests of various cropping and fertilization techniques. Another farm in Piatt County is also involved in the research. One project there looks at the nutrient loss out of a three-year rotation of corn, soybeans, and wheat compared to the more common Corn Belt rotation of corn and soybeans.

We got our beans hauled to Decatur in between the two winter storms and continue to work on equipment in our shop. With the new year, we have started to haul hay to the Arthur sale each Monday to sell there. The market varies widely but we get an average if we take some each Monday. Thank you for reading about Douglas County and Illinois agriculture this month.

Ukraine farmer shows resolve amid Russian invasion

By DANIEL GRANT
FarmWeek

Ukrainian farmer Kohchtahtuh Xomehko showed the kind of determination and fortitude currently on display by his fellow countrymen and women during an online meeting with farmers in the Midwest.

Kohchtahtuh (pronounced Konstantine) said his "heart is in great pain" but he's extremely confident the Ukrainian army can defeat the invading Russians. He also showed the same resolve when asked if farmers in Ukraine will still be able to plant this year's crops amid the war.

"I'm 100% sure we can win because it's about people, not just weapons," Xomehko said

from his farm during a Zoom call hosted at the Macon County Farm Bureau in Decatur attended by several board members and media.

"We're together working – all the people in Ukraine," he said. "I understand our army is not that big, but we're very motivated. There are people you know who are dying. We'll never forgive the Russians."

Ukraine farmers are helping their army by providing and transporting diesel fuel and fabricating metal objects for the army to flatten tires on Russian vehicles.

Ukrainian farmers also plow a majority of their fields, which has made it difficult for some

Russian tanks to cross without getting stuck.

When asked how other nations, including the U.S., can help resolve the conflict, Xomehko called for air support.

"We need support to close the air. We don't need soldiers," he said.

But thus far the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has rejected Ukraine's demand to implement no-fly zones.

Meanwhile, reports suggest roughly 2 million Ukrainian refugees had fled the country in recent weeks. But Ukrainian farmers remain determined to produce their crops this year.

"Yes. 100% we'll be planting, spraying and fertilizing,"

Xomehko said when asked about his spring plans to grow crops including corn, soybeans and wheat. "But, there is no area in Ukraine that is 100% safe. We have areas with more bombs, and areas with less bombs."

The online meeting with Xomehko was made possible in part by Loran Steinlage, an Iowa farmer and field engineer for DAWN Equipment, and Macon County Farm Bureau Board member Paul Butler, who is in an international grain marketing group.

DAWN provides ag equipment parts to farmers in Ukraine but pulled its employees out of the country just weeks before the war broke out.

"I'm worried about \$5 diesel and how high our fertilizer prices will go," Butler said. "But our problems are pretty small in comparison."

Scott Irwin, University of Illinois ag economics professor, said war in Ukraine will also continue to have a widespread effect on world markets for some time.

"There are really two issues," Irwin said in a recent U of I farmdoc video. "One is with old crop. Trade estimates suggest there's 600 million bushels of corn already contracted (from Ukraine). It's trapped and I don't see any way that will get out of there very easily for weeks and maybe months."

"There's even bigger problems with what will end up getting planted (in the Black Sea region) this spring," he noted. "It could potentially put a huge hole in global grain balance sheets."

Irwin suggested the U.S. needs to think "outside the box" in these extraordinary times and consider measures such as possibly opening up acres in the Conservation Reserve Program for a year to increase domestic crop output.

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

Cover crops protect soil between growing seasons

By JOANIE STIERS
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Partners Contributor

After farmer Lucas Roney spends the fall season gathering crops, he likes seeing his fields greening with new growth as he parks harvesting equipment in the shed.

"As farmers, we always like to see things growing," said Roney, who grows corn and soybeans with his family in Moultrie County. "Whenever you can look out there in the winter and see there are plants growing in the field, it makes you feel good about what you are doing. You feel like you're keeping the soil alive."

They've got it covered

Throughout the Illinois landscape, more and more farmers have adopted the use of cover

crops, a ground cover planted but not harvested in the traditional sense. Instead, a cover crop's job is to hold soil in place, keep the soil active, store nutrients, retain moisture and improve the soil structure. (Some cover crops are harvested for forage, such as oats and turnips used for feeding cattle.)

Environmental benefits abound, including reduction of both soil erosion and nutrient loss into rivers and streams. By spring, farmers terminate the cover crop and plant corn and soybeans directly into the residual blanket that naturally gives yield-robbing weeds less space to grow.

An unharvested benefit

An early adopter of cover crops, Livingston County farmer Matt Boucher remembers neigh-

bors asking if he was growing hay or planned to harvest a field of rye before planting it to soybeans.

Instead, he planted right into the green cover on his field, contrary to the most popular practice of planting into a field considered "clean," or free of growth. Today, his farm primarily uses a drill to sow cover crops on about 70% of the family's farmland. He also has hired aerial application, which involves showering cover crop seed above standing corn or soybeans just before fall harvest to grow by late fall. Sometimes, fertilizer-spreading trucks have broadcasted cover crop seed across a harvested field.

Boucher's most common cover crop choices include annual rye, cereal rye, buckwheat or radish (not the type for eating, rather a deep-rooted variety that breaks up compacted soil).

"We've gone from a straight single product to 12- to 15-way mixes of cover crop varieties, and we've seen good results in both their various situations," said Boucher, who grows corn, soybeans and wheat with his family.

Boucher doesn't measure the results of cover crops in bushels or the boost to his corn and soybean production. Instead, his family sets environmental goals for the cover crops to accomplish, such as reduced erosion, weed control, nitrogen naturally produced from a legume cover crop or even "tillage." He finds that cover crops and their various root systems loosen the soil and produce a suitable seedbed without relying solely on means of mechanical tillage.

Barriers to adoption

Cover crop adopters recognize the investment in management, time and expense creates the largest barrier to wider adoption.

Namely, cover crops do not generate income for farmers. Cash crops like corn and soybeans do, and farmers fear risking the profitability that puts food on their tables.

"We are putting something out in the field that isn't going to be harvested, that we are not necessarily going to get a direct financial result from year one," Boucher said. "It can be a challenge for some farmers to see the return on their investment."

After about seven years of cover crops, his family now sees improvements in the soil structure. Boucher shares these results and cover crop tips on the farm's Facebook page and through the family's seed company, Potential Ag. In addition to

corn and soybean seed, Boucher also sells seed for cover crops and works with farmer customers who want to learn more about this trending conservation practice.

Roney's cover crop practices are enrolled in the Conservation Stewardship Program, a U.S. Department of Agriculture initiative that helps with its costs. He also provides updates on his cover crops in reports for the Illinois Farm Bureau CropWatchers@ 2.0 program on FarmWeekNow.com, which provides farmers statewide with internet-based regional crop updates during the growing season.

"I really think there is going to be increased adoption in cover crops," Roney said.

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

HOROSCOPES

ARIES – Mar 21/Apr 20

This week you will have an opportunity to see things how they are and not necessarily as you imagine them to be, Aries. This clarity could require some restructuring.

TAURUS – Apr 21/May 21
Long-term goals are nearing completion, Taurus. You have gained so much from your pursuits and you have made plenty of friends along the way. Take time to appreciate that.

GEMINI – May 22/June 21
Communication difficulties arise this week, Gemini. Someone can coach you into getting your point across with sufficient finesse. Seek a communication

CANCER – Jun 22/Jul 22

Cancer, there may be some passionate discussions coming up this week with family members. Everyone wants his or her point of view to be heard.

LEO – Jul 23/Aug 23
Leo, you need to be flexible, especially over the next few days. People may put you to the test with a perceived unwillingness to compromise, but cooperate when possible.

VIRGO – Aug 24/Sept 22
Virgo, in order to reach a destination you have in mind, you may have to re-think the route you're taking. A direct course just may not be the way to go in

LIBRA – Sept 23/Oct 23

Always be honest with yourself and others, Libra. That means being true to you and never putting on masks just to hide others from how you are truly feeling.

SCORPIO – Oct 24/Nov 22
Scorpio, you want to do things for others out of the goodness of your heart, and you will not need anything in return. Good deeds are their own reward.

SAGITTARIUS – Nov 23/Dec 21
Sagittarius, dining out too many days in a row may leave you feeling sluggish. Reassess your eating habits and commit to making more meals at home for a bit.

CAPRICORN – Dec 22/Jan 20

Capricorn, recognize that not everyone has your best interests at heart. Others' intentions may not be sinister, but your own interest and the interest of others may not align.

AQUARIUS – Jan 21/Feb 18
Sometimes you are a bit proud and do not like asking for or accepting others' help, Aquarius. You deserve the breaks that others are willing to offer you, though.

PISCES – Feb 19/Mar 20
This is a good time of the month to nurture loved ones, Pisces. Play with your kids or sit and chat with an elderly relative who needs you.

FAMOUS BIRTHDAYS

MARCH 13
William H. Macy, Actor (72)
MARCH 14
Simone Biles, Athlete (25)
MARCH 15
will.i.am, Rapper (47)
MARCH 16
Alexandra Daddario, Actress (36)
MARCH 17
Hozier, Singer (32)
MARCH 18
Lily Collins, Actress (33)
MARCH 19
Glenn Close, Actress (75)