

Farm Bureau head sees need for strong domestic supply of food, fuel

EDITOR'S NOTE: Illinois Farm Bureau President Richard Guebert Jr. grows corn, soybeans and wheat on his family farm in Randolph County. With high prices at groceries and fuel pumps across the nation, he says farmers in the state are focused on getting their crops in the ground and on continuing to produce the ag products people need most. Here is a timely Q&A.

By **KATIE ZELECHOWSKI**
Illinois Farm Bureau

Lofty consumer prices and low crop production estimates could mean the cost of food, fuel and other agriculture goods will continue to rise in the coming months.



Guebert

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' most recent Consumer Price Index indicates overall consumer prices in April were 8.3 percent higher than a year ago.

The increase comes as an ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine significantly stifles global trade. The U.S. Department of Agriculture May crop report also shows lower corn and wheat production estimates could compound inflation further.

An unseasonably wet spring in Illinois pushed back planting for many farmers across the state. Randolph County farmer Richard Guebert Jr. said he's

hopeful crops will catch up to where they need to be this summer and yields will bounce back from USDA estimates.

Guebert serves as president of the Illinois Farm Bureau, the largest farming organization in the state. He shared his thoughts on how American farmers plan to maximize domestic production.

Q: With Ukrainian wheat supplies in question, how are Illinois farmers responding?

A: First and foremost, our hearts go out to the Ukrainian people whose communities have been devastated by the ongoing war. Farmers in the Midwest are in the fields planting, but their minds are also with their brothers in Ukraine who face an uphill battle to get their own crops into the ground.

Ukraine is one of the largest wheat exporters in the world. If the number of acres typically planted is cut in half, as some analysts suggest, we'll see wheat supplies tighten around the world. Farmers consider many factors in making decisions on what to plant. Illinois farmers will do what we can to help fill this gap but the growing conditions for wheat in our state aren't as ideal as those in the Northern Plains.

Q: Food prices have risen considerably in the past couple of years. Is there relief in sight?

A: A common misconception about food prices is that they fluctuate with commodity markets. While it's true these inputs do play a part in higher grocery prices, transportation, packaging and distribution are significant factors.

Farmers receive approximately 8 percent of every food marketing dollar.

I can't say for certain that prices will plateau or decrease in the coming months. Like everyone out there, the farming community is at the mercy of inflation and supply chain disruptions that leave us feeling uncertain about what's ahead.

What I can say with certainty is that American farmers will continue to produce a strong supply of food and ag products for families across our country. Though the challenges we've faced in recent years have raised food prices, we're blessed that the U.S. has a wealth of resources when other countries do not.

Q: Fuel prices have also continued to rise with inflation. Can biofuels help keep costs lower?

A: Biofuel production is a priority for Illinois farmers because ethanol and biodiesel are cleaner-burning and more cost-friendly options than non-blended fuels.

President Biden's recent expansion of E15 sales to include summer 2022 is a big win for both farmers and consumers. While it's a step in the right direction, the change is only temporary. The administration's support of higher ethanol blends and a permanent expansion to include summer sales is needed to make a greater impact.

Q: With limited supplies of agriculture goods in the market, are farmers choosing between food and fuel production?

A: Since the war started in Ukraine, and even before then, farmers have been asked about whether they'll focus on food or fuel production. But there's really no

way to prioritize one without the other.

In farming, every new generation must produce more with fewer resources. To accomplish this, we look for ways to repurpose as much as we can, and that includes how crops are grown and livestock is raised.

For example, increasing ethanol use lowers the cost of gas at the pump. At the same time, livestock farmers use a byproduct of the biofuel distillation process, called distillers dried grains and solubles (DDGS), as an inexpensive feed additive for their animals. Using DDGS saves money for the farmer and brings the cost of meat production down.

Keep in mind that most of the corn you see as you drive by a farmer's field is used for animal feed and ethanol production and small percentage is sweet corn grown for human consumption. While that ratio may seem imbalanced, biofuel production is essential to the transportation industry's ability to deliver food to communities across our state, nation and world.

Ultimately, many factors led to the high prices we're experiencing now and there won't be a simple or quick fix. In the meantime, farmers remain committed to supporting a constant supplying of food and fuel to American families that rely on it.

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Flour millers anticipate an ample supply of wheat in Illinois

By **DANIEL GRANT**
FarmWeek

Flour millers should have an ample supply of quality wheat in the state this season, based on findings of the Southern Illinois Wheat Tour.

The annual tour, hosted by the Illinois Wheat Association, projected an average yield of 68.56 bushels per acre, but more importantly, generally low insect and disease pressure at this point.

"The yield is obviously important for the farmers," said Mark Miller, plant manager of Mennel Milling in Mount Olive and IWA board member. "As a flour miller, we're looking for quality, good test weights, milling yield, low vomitoxin and good falling numbers (which reflect the starch content)."

Miller started working in the industry



Mark Miller, plant manager of Mennel Milling in Mount Olive, celebrated his 40th anniversary in the business and expects an adequate supply of wheat this season. (Photo by Daniel Grant of FarmWeek)

in 1982 and recently reached a 40-year milestone. Mennel Milling, one of five wheat mills in the state, opened in 1876.

He anticipates an ample supply of wheat in Illinois this year.

"There's a lot of competition in this market," Miller said. "But there's enough wheat grown that we can all get what we need. We've got a good draw."

Soft red wheat processed at Mennel goes into everything from pancake flour, Aldi's toaster pastries and French's fried onions to Pillsbury biscuits and cookie dough.

"We've got a wide variety of products that we're in," Miller said. "That's probably one of the things not well known about us is all the different products we're in."

Dave DeVore, grain merchandiser for Siemer Milling in Teutopolis, established in 1882, also looks for an

adequate supply of wheat this harvest.

USDA projects Illinois farmers will harvest 50,000 more acres this year compared to 2021, with total production in the state pegged at 49.5 million bushels, up about 1.3 million from a year ago.

"I think (the tour) kind of went as expected from talking to farmers," DeVore said. "Everybody thought wheat looked pretty good, and I'd agree with that."

"I don't know that it's a record-breaker. But it's a pretty good crop."

The key between now and harvest hinges on the weather to avoid any type of major disease outbreak in the crop.

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Farmers work on water, soil health solutions during summer field days

By **RICHARD GUEBERT JR.**
Illinois Farm Bureau President

The heat and humidity may be cranked up during the summer, but Illinois farmers are still hard at work making management decisions on their farms.

With corn and soybeans planted across the state each spring, many farmers take time in the hotter months of the year to learn about new, innovative ways they can maximize crop yields while protecting the environment. Illinois Farm Bureau supports these efforts through a series of Nutrient Stewardship Field Days each year.

Farmers care about conserving our natural resources. Preserving the soil and water quality on Illinois farms minimizes costly inputs and maximizes crop yields. Balancing production costs allows us to grow the food American families rely on,

while also creating opportunities for future generations to return to the family farm.

IFB's 2022 Nutrient Stewardship Field Days are funded through the organization's Nutrient Stewardship Grant Program. The program, now in its seventh year, committed more than \$150,000 to 2022 projects and is working with 25 counties on 21 projects, including field days, throughout the state. To date, IFB has partnered with County Farm Bureaus and others on more than 100 projects across 70 Illinois counties.

So, what happens during these field days?

Field day events offer farmers the chance to share environmentally friendly tools that work well on their farms. Through research shared with their peers, researchers, universities, ag retailers and industry professionals, different types of

on-farm projects can be developed to test the use of cover crops, livestock manure management, woodchip bioreactors and other technologies that improve the land. These efforts benefit surrounding communities and ultimately support our state's Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRs).

The Illinois NLRs, which was released by the Illinois Department of Agriculture and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency in July 2015, calls for wastewater treatment plants, urban areas and agricultural areas to reduce the state's phosphorous load by 25 percent and its nitrate-nitrogen load by 15 percent by 2025. The eventual target is a 45 percent reduction in the loss of these nutrients to the Mississippi River.

Field days, on-farm research and collaborative projects are all integral

parts of Illinois agriculture's role in working toward the state's NLRs. IFB supports these voluntary farmer efforts by focusing on education and outreach, supporting research and implementation of best management practices, and reporting progress as it's made.

I am proud of our farmers' efforts to minimize environmental impacts in Illinois. You can learn more about the progress Illinois farmers continue to make toward NLRs goals and see a full list of 2022 Nutrient Stewardship Field Days at www.ilfb.org/FieldDays.

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