

# Yearslong ethanol policy standoff could cost Illinois drivers at the pump yet again

Illinois retailers say they need to know soon whether to purchase ethanol-infused E15 gasoline for summer use

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Article Summary:

Midwestern governors, including Illinois' JB Pritzker, are seeking a permanent solution to being able to use the ethanol blend E15 gasoline that's cheaper but some say more polluting at a time when gasoline prices are rising.

For three years, routine federal waivers temporarily lifted EPA restrictions that would otherwise bar retailers from selling E15 fuel during the summer months. But in 2025, that relief was delayed and gasoline retailers lost millions.

Illinois corn and ethanol producers warn that the uncertainty behind what will happen each summer goes beyond the gas pump. It also hits their pocketbooks.

This summary was written by the reporters and editors who worked on this story.

SPRINGFIELD — With gas prices surging to a national average of just under \$4 per gallon due to the U.S. bombing of Iran, a yearslong policy standoff over ethanol-blended fuel threatens to push prices even higher in Illinois for a second straight year.

At issue is the use of E15 gasoline — a blend of 15% ethanol and 85% gasoline that's cheaper than regular fuel and increases demand for corn. But federal rules have blocked its use during the summer in recent years because the warmer months create conditions where vapors from ethanol-infused gasoline could contribute to unhealthy levels of smog.

The Trump administration soon could announce that it will temporarily lift the restrictions on E15 sales during the

summer amid pressure surrounding rising costs due to the conflict in Iran, according to sources familiar with the matter cited by Reuters. But a White House official said no final decision has yet been made and called the reporting premature.

The sale of ethanol, which is made from corn, began to get more complicated in 2022 when eight Midwestern states — Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Wisconsin and Minnesota — surrendered a federal waiver that allowed the usage of E10 (10% ethanol) during the summer months. The governors framed their petition as a state-level solution, but industry advocates said the broader goal was to pressure Congress into a nationwide permanent fix for E15 fuel use.

The federal government reacted by issuing summer emergency waivers from 2022-24, temporarily lifting Environmental Protection Agency restrictions that would otherwise bar retailers from selling E15 fuel during the summer.

#### Delays in 2025

However, during the first months of the Trump administration in early 2025, there was a delay in issuing the emergency waiver. It took until late April, resulting in higher prices for a longer period because retailers had already bought the more-expensive product.

The feds have not issued a waiver yet this year. In hopes of avoiding a repeat of 2025, Gov. JB Pritzker joined six of his counterparts earlier this month in a letter to EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin urging an emergency waiver announcement by March 15. That didn't happen.

The letter, which was signed by Pritzker as well as the governors of Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, Wisconsin, Minnesota and South Dakota, also requested that any E15 waiver that is provided includes an identical one for E10 — the most common fuel distributed in the U.S. — to ensure fuel standards stay the same across the board.

"Given that Congress has yet to deliver regulatory relief to expedite nationwide, year-round E15 sales, we join with many others to call on the EPA to provide a nationwide emergency waiver for E15 during the coming months to ensure ample, low-cost fuel options for consumers," the letter said.

When the EPA granted last year's emergency waiver on April 28, Zeldin cited President Donald Trump's commitment to lower energy costs and to farmers who grow the corn for ethanol.

"In my confirmation hearing, I pledged to establish certainty when it came to the sale of E15 year-round," Zeldin said in a news release.

The EPA did not respond to questions sent by Capitol News Illinois about what it plans to do for this summer, and for a permanent solution.

#### Illinois retailers' uncertainty

Nate Harris, CEO of the Illinois Fuel and Retail Association, which represents over 500 members in the state's gas station and convenience store industry, said he remains concerned, recalling what happened a year ago.

"The problem with waiting until late April is that my members that have already purchased this more-expensive product are going to be stuck

holding it," Harris said. "The industry last year lost tens of millions of dollars and will likely do so again, which is unnecessary because the ability to just opt back into the waiver exists."

In addition to the financial losses incurred by retailers, consumers temporarily dealt with higher prices — as much as 30 cents per gallon more, according to Harris.

Illinois-Indiana embed Harris said he hopes that because of global oil market volatility due to the war in Iran, there is more urgency to get an emergency waiver announced sooner in 2026 than 2025, a sentiment echoed in the letter sent by Pritzker and the other governors to the EPA.

An earlier announcement could significantly blunt the logistical damage for retailers who must navigate a complicated system to secure their products in advance but may not entirely eliminate it.

Harris and others would like to see a permanent fix to the problem, and to them the easiest solution would be for Illinois to opt back into the original E10 waiver.

A spokesperson for Pritzker's office could not be reached to ask whether the governor intends to ask that the state opt back into the E10 waiver.

"Every year waiting on emergency waivers from the federal government is no way to generate stability and certainty for businesses," said Harris. "All the state needs to do is opt back into the regular waivers and we can avoid all those headaches from last year."

#### Corn growers have concerns

Fuel retailers are not the

only group of people pushing for a decision on E15. Illinois corn and ethanol producers warn that the uncertainty behind what will happen each summer goes beyond the gas pump. It also hits their pocketbooks.

"One in every four to five bushels of grain corn raised in Illinois is going into biofuels, and this is creating jobs and tax dollars," said Illinois State Rep. Charles Meier, R-Okawville. "So by (not selling E15), it is going to hurt the Illinois economy."

He and other Illinois lawmakers have a dual interest in the issue — they are concerned about what their constituents will be paying for fuel, and they want to help the corn farmers who have a financial interest in the success of ethanol.

Meier, who represents a rural district in southwestern Illinois, also took aim at the waiver process itself. "We need a permanent fix to this," Meier said. "Just looking at it every summer and trying to move forward with emergency rules shouldn't be what we're doing."

#### Timeline of E15 crisis embed

If action is delayed like it was in 2025, the impact will not be the same across every part of Illinois. According to Harris, the Chicago and St. Louis metro areas already use a different ethanol blend during the summer due to air quality requirements in larger and more urban areas. The cost of producing the specific blend wouldn't rise, but the cost of getting it to consumers would because of how it would compete for space in the same pipeline network.

Meanwhile, downstate markets such as Peoria, Champaign and other communities across

southern Illinois outside the Metro East region would face a double hit: the higher transportation and production costs for the specialty blend, according to Harris.

An Illinois Department of Agriculture news release calling for a quick decision on the waiver quotes several Democratic members of Congress who want a permanent federal solution. Among them was Rep. Eric Sorensen, D-Moline, who serves on the House Agriculture Committee and represents rural communities stretching from Rockford to Decatur.

Earlier in March, Sorensen had attempted to amend the Farm Bill currently under consideration by the Agriculture Committee in Congress to include language enabling the year-round sale of E15. But the amendment was blocked over questions of jurisdiction.

Sorensen, in a news release, said he hopes Congress eventually will act.

"We need certainty for farmers and lower prices at the gas pump," he said.

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## April 8 is anniversary of Aaron's 715th home run

### Illinois State's Capra earned the save in the historic game

By Tom Emery

Hank Aaron's 715th home run remains a seminal moment in American sports history. An Illinois State University alum was a pitcher of record in the game.

April 8 marks the anniversary of the moment, when Aaron smashed Babe Ruth's career home run mark. But there was still a game to be played, amid the spectacle.

Buzz Capra, a righthander who had played on the 1969 Illinois State squad that captured the NCAA Division II national title, came on in relief for Atlanta to start the seventh inning with the Braves leading the Dodgers 7-4. Capra was at his sharpest, tossing three scoreless innings with six strikeouts to earn the save.

Aaron's home run chase had captured the nation in late 1973 and early 1974. He hit number 713 in the second-to-last game of the 1973 season, and had to wait for another chance at the record.

It was years later, however, before the public knew

the horrors of the chase for Aaron. He received 930,000 pieces of mail in 1973, more than any non-politician in the United States. While many were supportive, there was plenty of racist hate mail with chilling threats.

Even supporters of Aaron were blasted with hate mail. In 1973, cartoonist Charles Schultz drew the home run chase into the Peanuts comic strip, only to be deluged with negative mail. The executive editor of the Atlanta Journal received countless phone calls with racial epithets for the sportswriters.

Aaron, who is remembered today for his dignified nature, wrote years later that "I resented it, and I still resent it. It should have been the most enjoyable time of my life, and instead it was hell. I'm proud of the home run record, but I don't talk about it because it brings back too many unpleasant memories."

That same season of 1973 was the third in the majors for Capra, who had been a high school star at Lane Tech

in Chicago before his stardom at Illinois State. Capra made his big league debut with three appearances for the Mets in 1971.

He split the 1972 and 1973 seasons between the majors and the Mets' Class AAA farm team at Tidewater. Capra pitched in a combined 38 games over those two seasons, with a 5-9 record and four saves. New York won the National League pennant in 1973, but Capra did not see action in the postseason.

Capra was sold to the Braves during spring training in 1974, and was expected to pitch in relief that year. His first two appearances just happened to be in the games when Aaron tied, and then broke, Ruth's record. And Capra was a pitcher of record in both.

In the season opener at Cincinnati on April 4, Capra came out of the bullpen and took the loss as the Braves fell 7-6 in eleven innings. Earlier in that game, Aaron tied Ruth's record with his 714th home run.

The suspense of the home

run chase continued for two more games (Aaron was not in the lineup on April 6). On April 8, Atlanta hosted the Los Angeles Dodgers in the Braves' home opener, and Aaron drew a walk in his first at-bat in the second inning.

With one on and no out in the fourth, Aaron blasted a 1-0 pitch over the left field wall for the 715th home run of his career. Aaron's parents came onto the field after the homer, and his mother gave him a long embrace, not letting go — because she feared someone would try to shoot him.

Atlanta led 7-4 after six innings when Capra came on in relief. The ISU grad was at his sharpest, as he shut down the Dodgers for the rest of the night. Capra struck out five of the first six batters he faced, including three in the seventh. A two-out walk in the seventh was Capra's only baserunner of the night.

He proceeded to send the Dodgers down 1-2-3 in both the eighth and ninth innings to earn the save in a 7-4 Atlanta win. Capra finished

with six strikeouts in three innings of work.

It was the first of many highlights for Capra in the 1974 season, who moved to the Atlanta starting rotation in May. That spring, he set a franchise record by going 26 innings without allowing an earned run.

In June, Capra went 6-0 with a 1.05 ERA and three shutouts, earning National League Player of the Month honors. The Braves sent three members to the All-Star game in July; Aaron, right fielder Ralph Garr, and Capra.

Capra finished the season with a 16-8 record while leading the majors with a 2.28 earned-run average. Unfortunately, his career was derailed by injuries from there, and he appeared in just seventeen games for the Braves over the 1975 and 1976 seasons. He pitched in 45 games, mostly in relief, for Atlanta in 1977, his last in the majors.

After Capra's career ended, he came back to Illinois State as the Redbirds' pitch-

ing coach before a lengthy run as a minor league coach and manager. In 1986, Capra was inducted into the Illinois State Athletics Percy Hall of Fame as part of the Redbirds' 1969 national title squad.

Henry Aaron left Atlanta after the 1974 season and returned to Milwaukee, the Braves' home until 1965. There, he spent his last two seasons in the majors with the Brewers, retiring in 1976.

He still holds the all-time MLB records for career RBI, extra-base hits, and total bases. A 25-time All-Star, Aaron ranks third on the all-time hit list with 3,771, trailing only Ty Cobb and Pete Rose.

Incredibly, he would have still had over 3,000 hits without counting a single one of his home runs. Aaron died in January 2021.

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