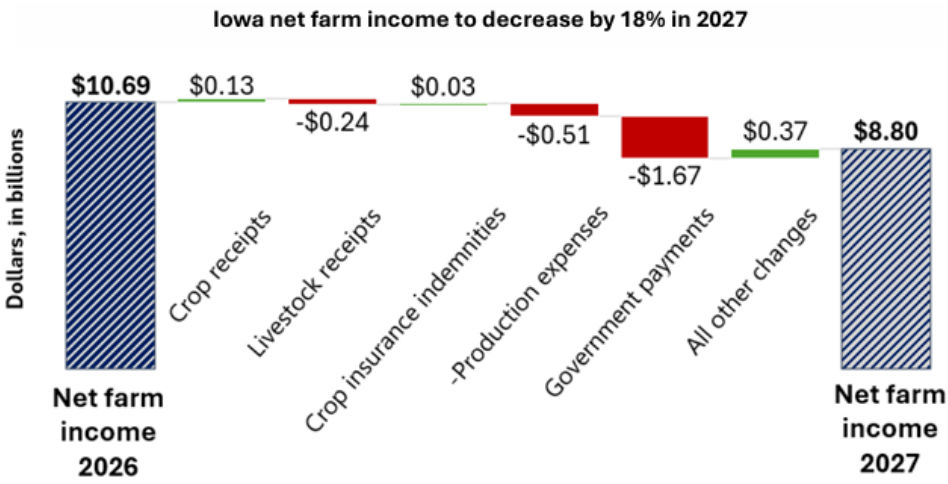
*A weekly Cornbelt digest of marketing, economic, agronomic, and management information.*

***Commodity market price drivers—***

- **The fundamentals in the corn market** are not friendly to a significant price increase. Jacob Burks, the chief growth officer for AgMarket.Net, described what's limiting a potential boost in corn prices, "The fundamental side of this marketplace really got no help from the acreage report. We talked about 98 mil. acres last year on the corn side and lower bean numbers. The bean acres going into last year were in an area of being okay, because we've had such a big crop coming from South America. This year, we were hoping to see a switchover where we were going to end up growing more. I think the RVOs, all the reasons why we put more crush capacity in the United States are there, and we've had some policy changes to increase the need for that. And we were all in hopes that maybe we would see that push of bigger bean acres and see that corn acre come down from 98 mil., even talks of something below 92 mil. or somewhere in there, at one point." The high price of fertilizers is also putting a damper on corn prices, "You talk about the fertilizer, and that becomes a pretty big problem for these guys wanting to go in there and put a larger amount of acres of corn in, and I think that that's something that, if you didn't have it locked in, that might have changed your mind a little bit. So, I would say right now, the fundamentals of the corn market are very, very reluctant to let this thing get up any type of big rally without any type of weather problem." Even the weather forecast isn't favorable for pushing corn prices higher, "We start talking about 95 to 96 mil. acres of corn going in, you start talking about the western part of the Cornbelt, you might be talking about a little bit of a drought. But across most of the central part of the Cornbelt and into the East, I mean, there's no weather issue yet. So, I think that, right now, there's no fear of problems. You got a 95-to-96-mil. -acre number, we've proved that we can grow big crops, and I don't see a lot of problems out there in the corn market." (Backroads of Illinois Podcast)

***Farm Economy---***

- **No, you don't farm in IA, but this might be a forecast.** The Spring 2026 Farm Income Outlook for IA projects net farm income falling 4% to $10.7B in 2026, with an even sharper 18% decline expected in 2027. Livestock receipts decline $1.0B (-4%), led by sharp drops in egg (-56%) and dairy (-10%) receipts, while government payments jump 62% to $4.1B, cushioning the loss. On the cost side, total production expenses are projected to increase by approximately $4.56 billion in 2026. Higher livestock and poultry purchase costs are a key driver of this increase, while feed costs are expected to decline modestly. At the same time, structural cost pressures persist. Labor expenses, net rent to landlords, and interest costs continue to rise, contributing to a cost environment that remains historically elevated even as some input prices stabilize. These cost increases partially offset the support provided by government payments and contribute to tighter operating margins across much of the sector. Overall, the 2026 farm income outlook reflects a shift away from broad-based market-driven gains toward increased reliance on policy support. While crop receipts show limited improvement and aggregate livestock receipts weaken, rising production costs continue to constrain profitability. In this context, direct government payments emerge as the central stabilizing force, offsetting declines in market income and sustaining NFI at levels that would otherwise be significantly lower. The implication is that, although aggregate farm income remains relatively strong in historical perspective, producers are likely to experience tighter margins and greater financial stress in 2026 than average income figures alone would suggest. And next year looks no better than 2026.

***The Business of Farming—***

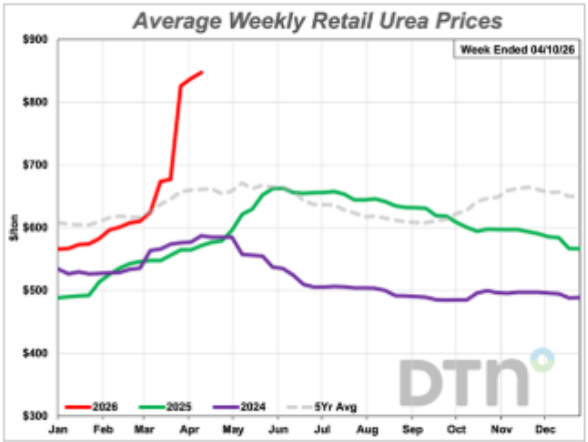
- **What does it cost to grow corn and soybeans?** It depends on where you farm, and IL Farm Business Farm Management has your neighbors' data for your comparison. "In 2025, the total of all economic costs per acre for growing corn in IL averaged $1,190 in the northern section, $1,216 in the central section for farmland with "high" soil ratings, $1,170 in the central section for farmland with "low" soil ratings, and $1,117 in the southern section. Soybean costs per acre were $874, $910, $857 and $820, respectively. Costs were lower in southern IL primarily because of lower land costs. The total of all economic costs per bu. in the different sections of the state ranged from $4.98 to $6.50 for corn and from $12.07 to $16.09 for soybeans. Variations in these costs were related to weather, yields, and land quality.
  - ✓ Costs per bu. of corn in 2025 as compared to 2024 were lower in all regions of the state, except southern IL. Costs per bu. were lower due to less nonland interest and land costs. Costs per bu. were 11¢ lower in northern IL, 10¢ lower in central IL with higher rated soils, 15¢ lower in central IL with lower rated soils and 64¢ higher in southern IL. Production costs per bu. of soybeans in 2025 in IL compared to 2024 decreased across the state except for southern IL due to lower yields. Costs per bu. decreased due to yields staying similar to 2024, but with the same cost decreasing as for corn. Soybean yields ranged from 5 bu. less to 3 bu. per acre higher in 2025 compared to 2024. Changes in costs per bu. ranged from 78¢ lower in northern IL to 68¢ higher in southern IL.
  - ✓ Forecasts for IL production costs in 2026 look to increase using the Univ. of IL 2026 crop budgets and the USDA's Cost-of-Production Forecasts as a guide. For corn, 2026 variable costs are projected to increase 1.5%, mainly due to higher soil fertility costs. For 2026, soybeans have a projected percentage increase of variable costs of 1.4%. This increase is also primarily due to higher soil fertility costs. These increases coupled with slightly higher overhead costs and lower land costs have the possibility to lead to higher costs with currently lower projected grain prices for 2026. These projections are prior to the Iran Conflict; however, many farmers had already paid for the majority of their inputs prior to this conflict, making it hard to project the impact on the 2026 crop costs.
  - ✓ Total costs to produce corn for all combined areas of the state were $1,187 per acre. This is $34 per acre lower than 2024. Variable costs decreased $10 per acre or 2%, other nonland costs decreased $20 per acre, and land costs decreased $4 per acre. In 2025, variable cash costs accounted for 47% of the total cost of production for corn, other nonland costs were 30%, and land costs were 23%. The average corn yield for all combined areas of the state was 230 bu. per acre resulting in a total cost of production of $5.16 per bu. The average corn yield in 2025 was the second highest on record, only 5 bu. lower than 2024, which was the highest on record. Total costs per acre were the third highest on record while total costs per bu were 4¢ less than 2024.

***Fertilizer issues and updates—***

- **Current fertilizer trends and dynamics** from Josh Linville, StoneX, Apr. 13, 2026. "The Trump blockade of Iran effectively doesn't change anything. We haven't seen a whole lot of anything that's been moving through the straight. Iran has been exporting very, very little. So, when you go from nothing to nothing, it doesn't really change. But with the India tender going on this week, the offers are due. This does put the market into a little bit of a bind. We could have seen a situation where there might have been more Iranian urea tons that have been offered to India because they thought they'd be able to slip these tons through without the blockade. So, it doesn't make a big difference for nitrogen, doesn't make a big difference for phosphate, but it does ensure that nothing else ships through until there's peace found."
  - ✓ **Nitrogen: "**The biggest thing that we're watching this week is India's urea purchase tender offers are due for 2.5 mil. tons, given the scope of the marketplace today, is a massive amount that we've really got to wonder where they are going to get these tons from. My nervous point is the fact that this is the entrance of government money from India, buying urea for farmers. How does everybody approach the price of it?"
  - ✓ **Phosphate:** "While everybody continues to focus on nitrogen, unfortunately, we continue to see phosphate still being more impacted in worse shape than nitrogen even though we haven't really seen prices move that much. And the reason being again if you look at the global phosphate market, we've got 5 countries that control most of the production and exports out there. China still is not exporting. They are typically the world's biggest supplier, and they just do not exist. US production continues to suffer, production rates continue to be very, very low. We're not seeing nearly as many tons produced here. So, tons are not as available as they would be. Saudi Arabia continuing to suffer with the closure of the strait of Hormuz. Now they have been leaking out some tons to their west coast facilities, shipping across the country and then shipping them out in that direction. Unfortunately, this is a more costly and a slower process."
  - ✓ **Re-Exports: "**Based on the amount of exports that we have already been seeing, there has been a lot of Saudi Arabia tons being reexported by the US. There's been some exports that have been reported from Florida. And so that is indicative of a marketplace that did not have a very big spring season. We should be empty at this time of year. There should be nothing left to export, especially with the low production rates. So, we do think the fall demand was down about 20%. Spring demand could be down significantly more and we're still exporting. If and when Brazil and India are forced to step forward and start buying the tons for their next looming season, that is where we start to get nervous. We're starting from a higher price point, but the supply situation is much worse. If they start that same buying pattern for phosphate, watch out. This thing could get a lot uglier than it already is. We have never seen this before. It does not matter how many years of experience."

- ✓ **Sulfur:** "But the next biggest thing is still that lack of sulfur and NH3 availability. With closure of the strait, 3 of the top 10 global anhydrous exporters are not available to the world. Half of the world's tradable sulfur supply comes from the Strait. Those are your 2 big variable cost inputs for phosphate production. So, we're seeing a big situation out there as far as supplies are concerned, but prices haven't moved. And a lot of it has to do a with the elastic demand. Farmers around the world have looked at the high price of phosphate and said, "I'm just going to skip this year." We're seeing that in the US."
- ✓ **Future:** "If you have been in this industry for 6 months or 60 years, you have never seen a situation like this. I'm absolutely in that camp. We are all making educated guesses. it's very hard to see values of nitrogen and phosphate getting back to those pre-war lows that we set 7 weeks ago. There's no way this market's ever going to correct and we're just going to deal with these all the way through." We could be surprised, but as of right now, with no end in sight with the Strait reopening short term, it's very hard to see a cratering of pricing. This thing is going to take a while for the market to heal. We do know that from a shipping standpoint, from a production, from a supply standpoint."

- **"5 of 8 major fertilizers had sizable retail price increases** compared to the prior month, 4 by double digits, according to sellers tracked by DTN for the first full week of April 2026. This is the 3rd week in row these 5 have been higher. Urea led the way higher again as the nitrogen fertilizer was 26% higher compared to last month. The nitrogen fertilizer had an average price of $847/ton. Anhydrous was 18% higher than a month ago and had an average price of $1,088/ton. UAN32 was 17% more expensive than last month and had an average price of $572/ton. UAN28 was 10% higher compared to last month with an average price of $513/ton. 10-34-0 was 7% more expensive with an average price of $717/ton. UAN28 is above the $500/ton level for the first time since the last week of January 2023. That week the price was $518/ton. The remaining 3 nutrients were just slightly higher in price compared to last month. DAP had an average price of $866/ton, MAP was $922/ton and potash $489/ton. On a price per pound of nitrogen basis, the average urea price was $0.92/lb. N, anhydrous $0.66/lb. N, UAN28 $0.92/lb. N and UAN32 $0.89/lb. N. All 8 fertilizers are now higher in price compared to 1 year earlier, by the following amounts: potash, 5%; 10-34-0, 10%; both MAP and DAP, 12%; UAN32, 30%; UAN28, 38%; anhydrous, 40%; and urea, 48%."

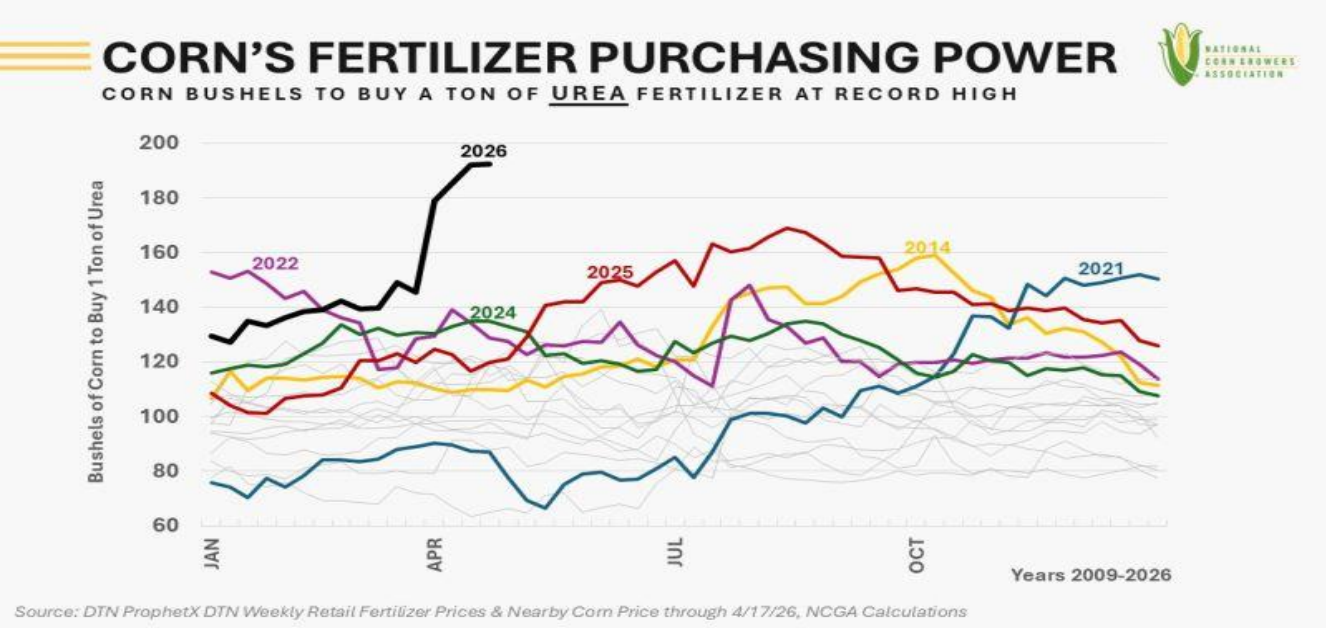


The urea retail price continues to rise dramatically and the other fertilizer prices DTN tracks also are increasing. The urea price is 26% higher than last month. (DTN chart)

- **Fertilizer prices don't have to revisit 2022 highs** to create real stress for farmers, says National Corn Growers chief economist Krista Swanson. The more important consideration right now is affordability—how many bushels of corn it takes for pay for key inputs—and that "cost in the currency of corn" just set new records. Since late February nitrogen prices are up 25–40% while front-month corn is up <2%. Farm affordability hit new lows (bushels of corn per ton, DTN weekly data back to 2009):

  ✓ Urea: 192 bu/ton (record)
  ✓ 32% UAN: 130 bu/ton (record)
  ✓ 28% UAN: 117 bu/ton (record)
  ✓ NH3: 250 bu/ton (near the 254 bu/ton record)

  This isn't a replay of 2022 sticker prices. It's an affordability squeeze that flows straight into working capital, credit decisions, and risk management this season. And it could matter even more for corn growers budgeting for their 2027 crop if halted production, supply chain constraints, and elevated global risk persist.

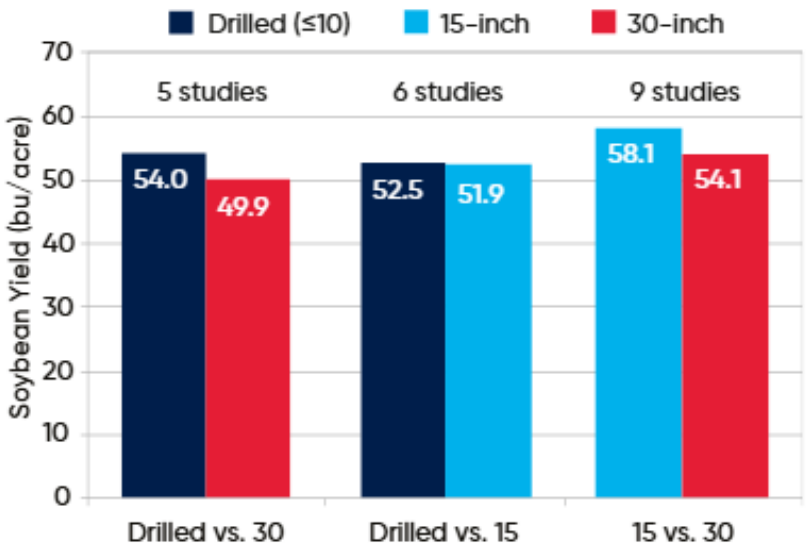



- **The conflict in the Middle East** is hitting farm fields in America. American Farm Bureau President Zippy Duvall says rising costs are putting fertilizer out of reach for most farmers, "An alarming number of America's farmers say they cannot afford to purchase enough fertilizer to get them through the year. Farm Bureau conducted a nationwide survey this month and found 70% of respondents say fertilizer is so expensive they won't be able to buy what they need. The conflict in the Middle East sent fertilizer and fuel prices soaring. Our survey showed that many farmers have not purchased all the fertilizer they'll need for this planting season, and they're now exposed to sharply higher fertilizer and fuel prices. Without necessary fertilizers we'll face lower yields and reduced planted acres. We've shared this information with leaders in Washington. They must find solutions, so farmers can continue to feed families across America. (American Farm Bureau)

***Agronomy—***

- **USDA is proposing to halt its funding** of agronomic research at the Univ. of IL. After surviving cut threats last year, Urbana's USDA labs are back in jeopardy. This includes the National Soybean Germplasm Collection and the Global Change and Photosynthesis Research unit. USDA is cutting back its funding for the Agriculture Research Service, where the funding originates for the Urbana facilities. That would set back research for years, says Don Ort one of the senior researchers. "If it were done, the hazards are real. For instance, it's certainly going to delay hybrid development. It's going to delay, for 6 or 8 to 10 years. And the possibility of losing genetic material is very, very real," said Ort, plant biology and crop sciences professor, said. He's heard the reasons to move them have been centered around cost. But he said in his professional opinion, this wouldn't result in savings. The decision of whether it will stay or go will likely be made at the end of the month. The cuts feared by Univ. of IL officials would be in the Trump budget for Fiscal year 2027 which begins in October and has to be approved by Congress. Many members of Congress are already lining up against much of the proposed spending plan. However, that does not prevent the White House from moving the research out of Illinois because of politics.
- **It's planting season with multiple uncertainties.** U.S. farmers are moving into the spring planting season amid questions about input costs, commodity prices and weather conditions. Producers are weighing crop decisions as prices for fertilizer, fuel and seed remain elevated compared with historical averages. Market volatility has added to the challenge, with shifting global demand and trade dynamics influencing outlooks for key commodities such as corn and soybeans. Agronomists say soil moisture conditions vary widely across regions, with some areas benefiting from recent rainfall while others remain dry. Farmers are adjusting planting strategies accordingly. Economists warn that tight margins could persist into the 2026 growing season, particularly for producers facing higher operating costs. Despite the uncertainty, planting progress is expected to follow typical seasonal patterns in many parts of the Midwest.
- **With rain patterns, or not,** Univ. of IL crop specialist Giovani Preza Fontes says, "Heavy rainfall following planting is the single greatest risk associated with early soybean planting. While warm temperatures accelerate the germination process, germinating seeds or seedlings in saturated soil die faster when the soil is warm because they run out of oxygen sooner. While temperatures are expected to drop early next week, they won't stay low for long, and the threat of cold, wet soils does not appear to be very high. University of Illinois research shows that planting soybeans anytime between April 10 and April 30 is likely to maximize yields. Yield losses begin to pick up as planting is delayed into May, declining to about 95% of the maximum yield by May 15, 88% May 31, 79% by June 15, and 76% by June 20. The maximum average yield was 70 bushels/acre, so each 1% change in yield is 0.7 bushels/acre. Of 38 trials conducted between 2010 and 2025, five had the first planting before April 10, but yields were no higher than those when planting was between April 10 and the end of April. While there may be exceptions, our data indicate that the "early planting" advantage was generally maximized if planting was done by the end of April."

- **A new Crop Insights article on soybean row spacing is out.** This is an interesting topic because practices have evolved considerably over the years and remain very diverse today, in sharp contrast to corn which has seen a convergence on 30 inches as the standard row spacing for most of the U.S. In the 60s and 70s, most soybeans were planted using the same planter used for corn in 30-inch or wider rows. In the 80s and 90s, there was a big shift to drilled soybeans – this didn't happen everywhere though; in many states west of the Mississippi, 30-inch row beans remained the norm. 15-inch rows largely replaced drilled beans in the 00s, but the geographic split between wide and narrow row beans has remained. One of the factors that drove adoption of drilled beans in the 80s was the greater weed suppression provided by earlier canopy closure with narrower row spacing. Today, with the spread of multiple-herbicide resistant weeds like waterhemp, weed control might need to come back into the row spacing equation. "A review of these studies by Purdue University researchers in 2003 showed an average 6.2 bu/acre yield advantage for drilled soybeans (Lambert and Lowenberg-DeBoer, 2003) As 15-inch row soybeans gained popularity, research studies began to include it in comparison to drilled and 30-inch rows, or just 30-inch rows. A 2016 Pioneer review of soybean row spacing studies conducted in the late 1990s and 2000s found that yields were similar between drilled and 15-inch row soybeans and that both averaged around a 4 bu/acre advantage over 30-inch row soybeans. More recent research has focused primarily on 30-inch and 15-inch rows, as drilled soybeans have become less common." What about waterhemp? "Field studies have shown that narrow row spacing in soybeans can significantly reduce waterhemp density and seed production. A recent Iowa State University study found a significant reduction in waterhemp density, aboveground biomass, and seed production in 15-inch rows compared to 30-inch rows (Yadav et al., 2023). Waterhemp biomass at soybean harvest was reduced by 17-31% and seed production was reduced by 36-61% in 15-inch rows. When narrow row spacing in soybeans was utilized in conjunction with a cover crop and highly effective waterhemp control in the rotational corn crop, waterhemp biomass and seed production were both reduced by over 80%. Given the difficulty in managing waterhemp and lack of any new herbicide options likely to provide a lasting solution in the foreseeable future, soybean growers need to exploit every possible advantage in reducing waterhemp populations."



***Conservation, Environment, and Carbon—***

- **The Assn. of IL Soil and Water Conservation Districts** is seeking nominees for the 2026 Farm Family of the Year Award to recognize an outstanding conservation farm family in each IL Soil and Water Conservation District that exemplifies Total Resource Management. The AISWCD Awards Committee will select a Governor's Award winner. Selection will be completed prior to and announced at the AISWCD Annual Meeting/BLWR Summer Conference. It is open to all landowners and/or operators who are soil and water conservation district cooperators. Previous LUC winners will be eligible to reapply in the fourth year following their selection as a winner. Former Governor's Award winners are permanently ineligible. Only districts in good standing with AISWCD are eligible to compete at the state level competition. Entry includes information on all land operated by the owner-operator or the tenant operator. $1500 to the Farm Family and $1500 to the district office who helps them fill out the application. The deadline is May 15. The application is here. AISWCD is also accepting nominations for Director of the Year, Conservation Woman of the year, and Conservation Teacher of the year. Details about those awards, along with other recognitions, can be found at www.aiswcd.org.
- **Saving Tomorrow's Agriculture Resources,** which you know as S.T.A.R., is developing a new conservation tool for urban agriculture. To expand the well-known 5-start rating benefiting farmers, STAR is developing an Urban Ag STAR Tool tailored to diversified systems such as community gardens and urban farms. To support this effort, STAR is seeking input from farmers, researchers, agronomists, and other stakeholders through a brief survey. The goal is to better understand the adoption and feasibility of conservation practices in urban agriculture settings. Insights gathered will help ensure the tool is grounded in both scientific research and real-world experience. Participation is voluntary, and the survey takes approximately 10 minutes to complete. Responses may be submitted anonymously, with an option to enter a gift card raffle if contact information is provided. This link will get you to the survey.

***USDA—***

- **The USDA is reminding farmers and landowners** to meet upcoming deadlines for key conservation and financial assistance programs, including a May 1 cutoff for certain Conservation Reserve Program enrollments. USDA's Farm Service Agency said producers can submit offers for the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program through May 1 after acreage remained available following an earlier signup period. Officials encouraged producers to contact local USDA offices to ensure they do not miss enrollment opportunities during the busy spring season. FSA will consider Continuous CRP offers submitted by interested agricultural producers and landowners until May 1, 2026. Offers to re-enroll expiring CRP continuous acreage will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. Continuous CRP participants voluntarily offer environmentally sensitive lands, typically smaller parcels than offered through General CRP including wetlands, riparian buffers, and varying wildlife habitats. In return, they receive annual rental payments and cost-share assistance to establish long-term, resource-conserving vegetative cover.

***Biofuels News--***

- **On April 1, the IL B20 Legislation moved into full effect,** meaning biodiesel blend requirements increased from B17 to B20, says the IL Soybean Assn. Subsequently, diesel fuel in IL is 20% biodiesel and 80% petroleum. Under the B20 incentive, retailers who blend diesel with at least 20% biodiesel are exempt from the state sales tax as well as any applicable local sales taxes. For companies purchasing fuel in bulk — including trucking fleets, railroads, construction firms and agricultural operations — these savings can accumulate quickly. According to the IL Department of Revenue, approximately $250 million in diesel taxes were exempted in 2025 alone. These savings ripple across the economy, lowering operating costs for industries that rely heavily on diesel and ultimately benefiting everyone from farmers to truckers to railroads to marine users. IL consumes roughly 1.5 bil. gal. of diesel fuel each year. With the B20 incentive fully implemented, the state's farmers could help supply up to 255 mil. gal. of biodiesel, a substantial increase from approximately 165 mil. gal. supported under the previous B11 incentive. This expansion represents a major opportunity for the agricultural economy. Producing 255 mil. gal. of biodiesel requires feedstock equivalent of roughly 170 mil. bu. of soybeans. According to the United Soybean Board, approximately 10% of the total value of a soybean is tied to the biodiesel industry, highlighting how closely renewable fuel demand is linked to farm profitability.