COTTON INDUSTRY RAISES MICROPLASTICS ALARM

INSIDE THE NCGA CORN YIELD CONTEST'S WINNING FIELDS

STRATEGIES TO BUILD NEXT-GEN JOB APPEAL

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JOEL REICHENBERGER

NATIONAL CORN GROWERS ASSOCIATION

2025 NCGA National Corn Yield Contest Winners
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PHOTO BY JENNIFER CARRICO

Meticulous management brings new names and familiar faces together atop the 2025 NCGA National Corn Yield Contest.

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WE'D LIKE TO MENTION

Katie Dehlinger
Editor In Chief

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Celebrating 140th ANNIVERSARY

Last month's issue of *Progressive Farmer* shocked Georgia cattleman Al Awbrey.

"Lord knows. That's my mother," the 76-year-old recounts saying as he looked at Cornerstones, a longtime reader-favorite collection of quotes and photos on a different topic each month.

The theme was "Youth," and the photo was four barefoot children in a freshly hoed field circa 1930.

Awbrey was not expecting to see a photo of his mother that day. She was around 7 years old when the photo was taken but lived into her early 90s. The other children in the photograph were her cousins, one of whom flew a B-24 bomber in World War II. He was shot down over Yugoslavia and spent 14 months as a prisoner of war in Germany.

Nearly 100 years later, the Heard County, Georgia, cotton field in which they were photographed remains in production, Awbrey told me, as the heifers he was working mooed in the background.

I don't know when we first ran the photo of Awbrey's family in a previous issue, but I'm grateful he shared the story with us. I never expected to hear such a story about a black-and-white photo from our archives.

While so much of today's media is consumed on a screen, Awbrey's story is a testament to the power of words and photos printed on paper and how they can catch your eye and draw connections across time and place. And, boy, does *Progressive Farmer* understand time.

Few magazines in circulation today have archives like we do. Leonidas L. Polk—a farmer, Confederate veteran, newspaperman and former North Carolina Commissioner of Agriculture—published our first issue on Feb. 10, 1886.

"*Progressive Farmer* is a chronicler of how agriculture rose to the challenges of Reconstruction, struggled through the Great Depression, provided the food and fiber needs of a country caught up in two world wars and worked through the postwar technology boom and the massive agriculture industry consolidation still happening today," explains Greg Horstmeier, Editor-in-Chief of DTN.

What started as a weekly newspaper for North Carolina farmers is now a national magazine published 11 times each year. *Progressive Farmer's* look, feel and geographic scope have changed with the times.

For any publication to survive 140 years, it must evolve; but to stand the test of time, it must also have an enduring purpose. For us, that purpose is to help farmers and ranchers identify and adapt to shifting agronomic, market and political environments.

At the time of our magazine's founding, calling something progressive implied a forward-thinking philosophy that favors modernization and emphasizes efficiency.

What's modern now will be outdated at some point in the future. A more efficient solution to today's problem du jour will inevitably come to pass. Change is constant, and in the present world, it feels like it's happening faster than ever.

Agriculture will keep changing; so will *Progressive Farmer*. I don't know what either will look like 10, 20 or 140 years from now, but what I do know is that our purpose—to help farmers navigate and adapt to our rapidly evolving world—will carry us through, together. ///

EDITOR IN CHIEF

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No Successor? Consider a Charitable Remainder Trust

GETTY IMAGES

It is the start of another year, and the farm community continues to grow older. Succession continues to be a hot topic, and many of my clients have become proactive with estate/succession planning. But, unfortunately, things happen, and even the best plans don't always work.

Last year, I had several clients dealing with an issue I rarely see. Here is the scenario: A father, who is in his 70s, plans to give the farm to his child. Before the succession plan can take place, the child passes away unexpectedly. Without the help of the child, the farmer needs to either sell the farm or downsize. The inevitable question is this: Now, what do I do?

One option is a charitable remainder trust (CRT). The farmer (donor) sets up a trust with a charity as the end beneficiary. The donor contributes assets—typically assets that, if sold, would result in ordinary or recapture income—to the trust. I should point out that bare land is typically not contributed to a CRT. In exchange, the trust pays the donor money for a period of between two to 20 years. After the trust receives the assets, it sells them, and because the trust is charitable, it pays no tax on the sale. The trust invests the income from the sale and makes payments to the donor as set in the agreement. After the last payment to the donor, the remaining assets in the trust go to charities of the donor's choosing.

There are two types of CRTs: unitrust and annuity trust. Under a unitrust, the donor gets paid a percentage of assets remaining in the trust. Under an annuity trust, the payments are fixed at the time of contribution and do not depend on the assets in the trust. Which is better? That all depends on your risk tolerance and desire to contribute assets in the future. A unitrust allows you to contribute additional assets after the start of the trust, which provides flexibility. The annuity trust only allows you to contribute assets at the inception of the trust. If you plan on contributing grain from multiple crop years, a unitrust is the way to go.

Why is the CRT so powerful? There are three major benefits of a CRT. First, you are using government money (i.e., the amount you would have otherwise paid in tax) to invest and get a rate of return. Second, if the donor has grain or livestock subject to self-employment tax, donating it to the CRT essentially wipes out the self-employment tax portion. That is, payments from the CRT are not subject to self-employment tax. The third benefit is that income can be spread between two to 20 years. This allows income recognition at lower tax brackets, which could save a substantial amount of tax.

As you look at estate/succession planning, CRTs should be discussed as a viable option. It's one tool to help farmers with a tax-efficient exit strategy. Although not the only option, it is simpler than spousal lifetime access trusts (SLATs) and cash balance plans. ///

Rod Mauszycki

Tax Columnist Rod Mauszycki, J.D., MBT, is a tax principal with CLA (CliftonLarsonAllen) in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

➤ Read Rod's "Ask the Taxman" column at **ABOUT.DTNPF.COM/TAX**

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TOOLS FROM THE PAST

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FIRST LOOK
INSIDE THE MARKET

Will the Market Encourage More U.S. Soybean Acres?

In the December issue of *Progressive Farmer*, I discussed a possible acreage scenario for the 2026–2027 marketing year and predicted based on very early circumstances that soybean acreage in the U.S. would grow in 2026 by roughly 3% from 2025, specifically to between 83 and 84 million planted acres. Since China agreed in principle to return to a "normal" degree of soybean purchases from the U.S. during the next three years, the market has been preoccupied with whether such demand is possible. However, with 17-month highs in soybean prices rapidly evaporating, and early profitability projections for 2026 continuing to paint a challenging landscape for producers, the better topic to discuss may in fact be whether the supply side of the U.S. market can even accommodate this "return to normalcy" in regard to export demand.

SOYBEAN SUPPLY AND DEMAND	2024–25 Jan. USDA	2025–26 Jan. USDA	2026–27 Return to "Normal" Exports, Same Area	2026–27 Acres That Need To Be Bought
Area Planted	87.3	81.2	81.2	84.9
Area Harvested	86.2	80.4	80.4	83.8
% Harvested	0.99	0.99	0.99	0.99
YIELD	50.7	53	53	53
Beginning Stocks	342	325	350	350
Production	4374	4262	4261	4444
Imports	29	20	20	20
Total Supply	4746	4607	4631	4814
Crush	2445	2570	2650	2650
Exports	1882	1575	1700	1700
Seed & Resid	93	112	110	110
Total Use	4421	4257	4460	4460
Ending Stocks	325	350	171	354
Stocks/Use Ratio	0.074	0.082	0.038	0.079

SOURCE: USDA ERS, FAS, NASS

Let's assume for a moment that USDA is correct in its most recent balance sheet, and that 2025–26 soybean ending stocks swing to a six-year high of 350 million bushels (mb) amid a 13-year low in export demand. During the past five years, China has accounted for roughly 53% of U.S. soybean exports, meaning the "promised" 900 mb of purchases by China could reasonably be expected to be part of a 1.7-billion-bushel (bb) export program in 2026–27, 125 mb higher than the latest USDA forecast for the current marketing year. As for domestic soybean demand, assuming the crush industry continues its recent rate of growth to 2.65 bb of usage by 2026–27, along with an average degree of seed and residual demand of 110 mb, would, together with exports, suggest 4.09 bb of soybeans will need to be produced to meet demand (assuming 350 mb of beginning stocks along with 20 mb of imported soybeans). Regarding supply, if soybean area in 2026 only grows marginally to 81 million harvested acres, and the national average yield equals 2025 at 53 bushels per acre (bpa), then carryout stocks for the 2026–27 season would fall to just above 200 mb, the lowest since 2015–16. Even if acreage were to land another 2 million higher, to 83 million harvested, the same equation still returns lower year-over-year stocks of 307 mb. By this math, it would take an increase of 3.4 million harvested acres with a 53-bpa average yield for U.S. soybean stockpiles to expand year over year, leaving little margin of error for production.

Now, bear in mind that the above exercise does include a few behind-the-scenes assumptions. Factors such as Brazil's crop size, biofuel policy, Chinese soybean demand as well as U.S.-China relations all play a significant role. As alluded, you'll also note the sensitivity of the balance sheet to soybean yield, as well, as just 1 bpa in either direction is north of 80 million bushels added or subtracted from the bottom line.

There is still a lot of time to go until harvest 2026 in the U.S. and many moving parts to consider. A major function of the futures market is to perceive and efficiently factor supply and demand risk into prices, and I can certainly understand the market's immediate attention going to factors such as potential for yet another record crop out of Brazil to go along with a painfully slow start for U.S. exports. However, as the U.S. planting season approaches, I am not sure current prices (at the time of writing this in mid-January) adequately incentivize producers to plant "normal" soybean acreage in 2026, if the plan is indeed for a return to "normal" export demand by 2027. ///

Rhett Montgomery
Lead Analyst
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Walk Off the Beaten Path

BY Meredith Bernard

MEREDITH BERNARD

In the midst of "40-something" life, growing children who don't need me as much as they once did and the everyday stresses of farm life (i.e., life in general), I've come to be more aware of the importance of both my physical and mental health. The truth is, they go hand in hand, or as I've found, step-by-step.

I've never been one to sit around if I can help it, except when I must be tied to my computer—and even then, I can't do it for long without a break. Working on a farm doesn't allow for grass to grow under my feet, either. But, it wasn't until I became intentional about taking daily walks that I realized the benefits for my mind, body and soul.

Science calls it grounding. I call it groundbreaking. Over time, I have walked hundreds of miles on our dirt road from home to barns and back again. Most days, I followed the same course, and even in the monotony, I found peace in the process. Working out my body, yes, but even more working out my faith, hopes, dreams, fears and failures.

Recently, I've taken a detour from the dirt road and made my way off the beaten path. I've started crossing pastures to trod up and down hills, ford creeks and watch my dog Dixie tree squirrels. I take time to listen and look for the elusive pileated woodpecker that intrigues me so much.

And, while I know the last few years of pounding the same path has been good for me in many ways, I now see that it was preparing me for this new road. With each hike, my endurance, and subsequently my faith, become stronger.

Sometimes, the road less traveled leads us to more meaning and strength, and an awareness of where we've been, in preparation for what's ahead. That's never a bad path to take. ///

Meredith Bernard walks, writes, photographs and tends to farm and family from North Carolina. Follow her on social media **@thisfarmwife**, and visit her website at **thisfarmwife.com**

The Quiet Magic Of Waiting on Calves

BY Jennifer Campbell

A watched pot never boils. It's true of birthing calves, too. Leave a cow you've watched for hours for five minutes, and you'll miss the whole performance.

Calving is possibly one of my all-time favorite seasons. But, in all honesty, according to my husband, I say that about all seasons as they approach.

Every February, I get overly excited and spend an awkward amount of time in the cattle barn staring at the back end of my cows. Cattle are my hobby, so I have the luxury of being a mother hen during calving—watching every flick of the tail, every shift of weight and every udder expand.

There are hours spent leaning on gates, quietly watching. Sometimes after bedding the stock, I find myself gazing down from the loft and convincing myself that this is it.

Then, inevitably, I get called away to do actual work, and when I sneak back again to check, there it is. A damp, wobbly calf is already on the ground with the mama cow licking it clean like she'd been waiting for her privacy all along.

Waiting on calves is a lesson in patience and trust, because cows don't follow schedules or care about our impatience or how many years of experience we have in the calving barn. It involves learning to watch without hovering, having enough courage to wait without the vet on speed dial and sometimes, following them around with calving chains and a jack.

JENNIFER CAMPBELL

Mostly, it is accepting that sometimes the best thing you can do is get out of the way. Knowing when to intervene and when not to is never an easy call.

I've pulled my fair share of calves out of necessity, but my favorite thing is to blend into the landscape so I can secretly watch those first moments happen naturally, as they were meant to. That's magic. ///

Jennifer (Jent) Campbell writes about agriculture and watches calves from a seven-generation Indiana family farm. Follow her on social platform X **@plowwife**. Find her Farm Wife Feeds blog at **farmwifefeeds.com**

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By Forrest Laws

DANGERS Of Microplastics

National Cotton Council campaign raises health concern about ingesting synthetic fibers from polyester apparel.

JOEL REICHENBERGER

In our throwaway society, plastic has become a global problem. Scientists estimate 5.25 trillion pieces of plastic are littering the world's oceans. In the Pacific Ocean, an "island" of plastics believed to be twice the size of Texas is interfering with ships' navigation and threatening marine life.

But, what may be even more sobering is the amount of microplastic and nanoplastic particles that researchers say are accumulating in the human body and the impact they may be having on people's health.

"We encounter microplastics everywhere: trash, dust, fabrics, cosmetics, cleaning products, rain, seafood, produce, table salt and more," according to *Harvard Medicine*, the magazine of Harvard Medical School. "Little wonder microplastics have been detected throughout our body. Investigators have been probing how they get into organs and tissues from the lungs and gastrointestinal tract," the magazine noted.

Despite similar reports from the National Institutes of Health, *Nature* magazine, the British Broadcasting Corp.

and other outlets, a 2025 survey of 974 consumers conducted for the National Cotton Council (NCC) by Cotton Inc. found only 33% of those surveyed were "very aware" of microplastics pollution. A smaller percentage of those respondents connected microplastic ingestion with clothing.

NEW AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

The National Cotton Council is trying to change those perceptions with its "Plant Not Plastic" campaign to make consumers more aware of growing health concerns about microplastics.

"Consumers need to understand the difference between synthetic and natural fibers, and make informed decisions about them," explains Marjory L. Walker, vice president of operations for the NCC. "We hear about microplastics in what you eat and drink, but the fact that apparel is part of the problem is something few people are aware of."

It's no secret cotton and polyester have been competing for market share since the introduction of "The Fabric of Our Lives" commercials produced by Cotton Inc. in the 1980s. For years, cotton was winning the battle, with many consumers looking for the Seal of Cotton trademark on clothing labels.

More recently, cotton's share of total fiber use has shrunk to 21%, as China increased its polyester output by about 15% per year after cotton prices exceeded $1 per pound in 2021. Consumers who still look for the U.S. cotton label are likely to be disappointed, as more T-shirts and other products contain from 50 to 100% polyester.

NATIONAL COTTON COUNCIL

Marjory L. Walker and Tas Smith, vice president for producer affairs at the National Cotton Council, compare cotton and polyester fabrics as part of the NCC's Plant Not Plastic campaign.

The increase in man-made fibers has left consumers in a quandary. "Our research clearly indicates that while consumers are concerned about microplastics pollution, they are largely unaware of the significant role their clothing can play, and they don't know what specific actions to take," Walker points out.

NCC members first became aware of plastics pollution when then-NCC Chairman Joe Nicosia addressed the topic in his annual cotton outlook ➤

GETTY IMAGES

PHOTOS: NATIONAL COTTON COUNCIL

Biodegradable cotton fibers in garments like these (above) do not produce microplastics particles, according to the NCC.

speech at the Mid-South Farm and Gin Show in 2024, in Memphis, Tennessee.

Nicosia, executive vice president and head of the cotton platform at Louis Dreyfus Co., has since made plastics and, particularly, microplastics a major part of the speech he gives at industry meetings around the cotton world.

At the 2025 Mid-South Farm and Gin Show, he discussed in podcasts with Jason Kelce, Taylor Swift's fiancé's brother and former NFL player, about the dangers of microplastics and how natural fibers such as cotton were a safe alternative to synthetic fibers. Jason Kelce also owns a line of cotton clothing called Underdog Garment.

"Jason Kelce has a 25-minute YouTube video called 'How to Make a T-Shirt' that promotes U.S. cotton," Nicosia says. "He visits a producer, ginner and the textile processors responsible for making his Underdog Garment brand. He promotes cotton, and his family is antiplastic."

He notes U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr. also has a 10-point plan against plastics. "So, we need to knock on his door, connect the dots and let him know what plastic is. It's polyester."

Walker says recent discoveries about microplastics in human bodies are startling. "People inhale or ingest on average 74,000 to 121,000 microplastic particles per year. Some research suggests that individuals can accumulate nearly 200 particles per day in their lungs from inhalation."

WEBSITE OFFERS FACTS

In September 2025, the NCC launched a new website: **https://plantnotplastic.org**. The first sentence at the top of the site reads, "You have inhaled 190 particles of microplastics today."

It also includes factoids such as, "Every time synthetic clothes are washed and worn, tiny fragments called microplastics break away. These microscopic particles never disappear—they enter waterways, our soil and become airborne, finding their way into our bodies." The website states that up to 700,000 acrylic fibers are released during a single wash cycle.

Last October, Walker traveled to Dubai to meet with the International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC), an organization representing 44 cotton-producing countries, about the Plant Not Plastic Program. "We are taking this global because it is that important to the cotton industry," Walker says.

Meanwhile, plant breeders at Auburn University and other land-grant universities are addressing another part of the cotton versus polyester battle.

What you wear matters

While researchers can develop more uniform and stronger varieties, they may never be on the level of polyester. However, cotton has other advantages over man-made fibers.

"For one, it's a breathable fiber, so there is an inherent comfort factor," explains Steve Hague, head of the University's Department of Crop, Soil and Environmental Sciences. "Polyester also emits microplastics that persist in the environment. The more consumers learn about microplastics, the less appealing polyester will be."

He says Auburn researchers are evaluating moderate- and low-stress conditions, and the effectiveness of SNP-based QTL markers in predicting the best cotton genotypes for advancement. SNP, or single nucleotide polymorphism markers, are specific locations in a DNA sequence where variations occur. QTL, or quantitative trait locus markers, are specific DNA sequences used to identify regions of the genome associated with quantitative traits like size.

"We aim to find SNP markers for QTLs related to fiber length distribution, elongation and fineness," Hague explains. "By focusing on these particular traits, we will enhance genetic rates of gain for traits that directly impact yarn quality." ///

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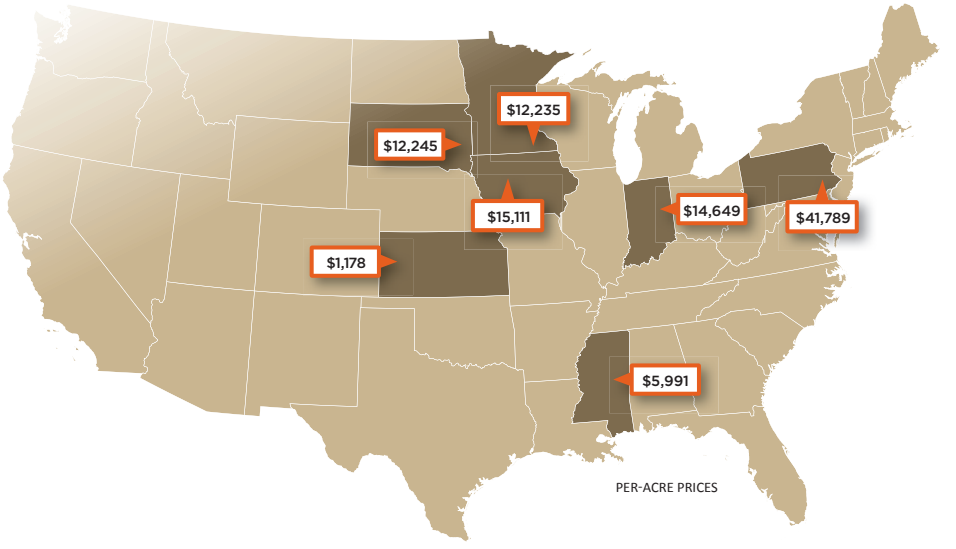

INDIANA, Blackford County. A 114-acre farm sold in an online auction for $1.67 million, or $14,649 per acre. The level to gently rolling property carries a Weighted Average Productivity Index of 138.6 for corn and 43.2 for soybeans. The farm is mostly tillable, with 6 acres of woods. The property is divided by a blacktop road and has a potential wind turbine site. **Contact:** Rick Johnloz, Halderman Real Estate and Farm Management; rickj@halderman.com, 260-827-8181
https://www.halderman.com

IOWA, Sac County. A 135-acre farm sold at auction for $2.04 million, or $15,111 per acre. The farm's two parcels, each just shy of 68 acres, sold to different bidders. The first farm had a Corn Suitability Rating 2 (CSR2) rating of 93.5 and sold for $15,800; the second had a CSR2 of 71.9 and sold for $14,400 per acre. **Contact:** Jim Green, Green Real Estate and Auction Co.; jim@greenauction.net, 712-662-4442
https://www.greenrealestate-auction.com

KANSAS, Wallace County. A contiguous 1,180-acre farm sold at auction for $1.39 million, or $1,178 per acre. Entirely grassland, the farm includes some crossfences, several sources of water, a living windbreak, two older barns and gathering pens. It is enrolled in the Grasslands Conservation Reserve Program through 2037. **Contact:** Corry Busse, Farm and Ranch Realty Inc.; frr@frrmail.com, 719-342-2997
https://www.frrmail.com

MINNESOTA, Mower County. A 349-acre farm sold in two parcels for $4.27 million, or an average of $12,235 per acre. The first farm, just shy of 119 acres and including mostly Readlyn, Ostrander and Floyd soil types, has a Productivity Index (PI) of 96 and sold for $14,000 per acre. The second tract, at 230 acres, includes mostly Racine, Floyd and Clyde soils, carries a PI of 88.4 and sold for $11,300 per acre. **Contact:** Jameson Anders, Hertz Real Estate Services; JamesonA@hertz.ag, 641-903-2109
https://www.hertz.ag

MISSISSIPPI, Noxubee County. A 222-acre farm with a mix of crop and timberland sold at auction for $1.33 million, or an average of $5,991 per acre. Sold in three tracts, the farm features about 120 acres of highly productive, tillable ground and 102 acres of mixed timber, with notable benefits for hunters. The farm's well-shaped fields are suited for cotton, soybean, corn or other row-crop production. Electric utility access on the property's eastern edge also adds flexibility for a future home site. **Contact:** Jake Meyer, Whitetail Properties Real Estate; jake.meyer@whitetailproperties.com, 662-605-3765
https://ranchandfarmauctions.com

PENNSYLVANIA, Lancaster County. A 123-acre farm sold at auction for $5.14 million, or $41,789 per acre. The mostly tillable farm also includes a two-story farmhouse, dairy barn with 44 stalls, two farm shops, a four-car detached garage and other outbuildings. It is enrolled in Pennsylvania's Clean and Green program, a tax-assessment program that lowers property tax rates for land in agricultural use but triggers stiff penalties if land use changes. **Contact:** John Hess, Hess Auction Group; contact@hessauctiongroup.com, 717-664-5238
https://www.hessauctiongroup.com

SOUTH DAKOTA, Lake County. A 245-acre farm sold in three tracts for $3 million, or an average of $12,245 per acre. The tracts are located within a mile of the Dakota Ethanol Plant, in Wentworth. They carry an average Price Loss Coverage corn yield of 144 bushels per acre (bpa) and soybean yield of 46 bpa. All farms are leased for 2026 at a rate of $350 per acre, which will be credited to the buyer at closing. **Contact:** Jared Sutton, Sutton Auction; jared@suttonauction.com, 605-864-8527
https://www.suttonauction.com

These sales figures are provided by the sources and may not be exact because of rounding.

Submit recent land sales to **landwatch@dtn.com**

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Protecting Soybean Yields **Under Southern Disease Pressure**

For Southern soybean farmers, disease presents a challenge nearly every season. Warm temperatures, high humidity and frequent rainfall often align to create ideal conditions for diseases like Cercospora leaf blight, Frogeye leaf spot and Septoria brown spot to take hold.

In the early stages of infection, the signs of disease are often not visible to the naked eye, meaning pathogens can take hold in your soybeans before you can notice. Once established, these diseases can move quickly through the canopy, putting yield at risk during key reproductive stages.

Resistance to certain fungicide chemistries, particularly FRAC Group 11 and FRAC Group 1, has become more common across the region. As a result, managing foliar disease today requires a more intentional approach, with increased emphasis on fungicide selection, multiple modes of action and season-long protection.

What to Look for in a Fungicide Program

Effective disease management begins with understanding how fungicides perform under Southern growing conditions. Products that combine multiple modes of action can provide more consistent control across varying levels of disease pressure and help manage resistant pathogens.

Revylok® fungicide combines two active ingredients, Revysol® (FRAC Group 3) and Xemium® (FRAC Group 7), and is formulated for rapid uptake into plant tissue. This combination provides activity across a broad range of foliar soybean diseases, including those with documented resistance to FRAC Group 11 and FRAC Group 1 fungicides.

"Revylok fungicide meets a critical need in the South by delivering strong, long-lasting disease control that holds up under hot, humid and unpredictable conditions," says Kim Tutor, Technical Marketing Manager for Row Crop Fungicides with BASF. "Its residual strength helps protect yield through the season."

Lock in ROI

Yield and return on investment drive every fungicide decision. Across multiple trials, Revylok fungicide has delivered consistent performance on both fronts.

"Revylok has shown a **yield advantage of 8.2 bushels per acre (bu/A) over the untreated check**[1] and outperformed the leading fungicide brand by **2.4 bu/A**[2]," Tutor says.

That performance stems from agronomic strengths that make a difference in Southern production systems:

- Rapid uptake for fast-acting protection
- Strong rainfastness for reliable performance under variable rainfall conditions
- Excellent residual activity during critical reproductive stages
- Preventative and curative activity

Plant Performance

Research shows that Revylok fungicide applications at the R2–R3 growth stages can support stronger root systems, helping soybeans better tolerate heat and moisture stress and maintain yield under challenging environmental conditions.

"Stronger root systems help soybeans maintain productivity under environmental stress," Tutor says. "Larger root systems can mean more to access to nutrients and water, which is especially important when heat and moisture variability occurs and can challenge yield potential."

Putting It All Together

As disease pressure intensifies and resistance continues to shift the management landscape in the South, fungicide programs need to do more than simply react to symptoms — they need to be part of a proactive plan to protect yields.

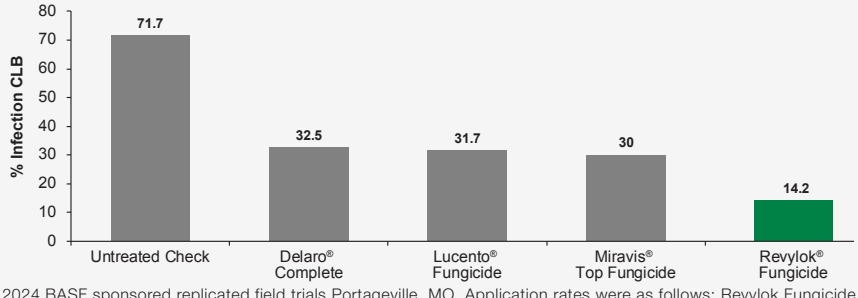
Products like Revylok fungicide that combine multiple modes of action, consistent disease control and plant performance benefits can play an important role in protecting soybeans under Southern growing conditions. This translates into stronger yield potential and reliable return on investment.

To develop your proactive fungicide plan for 2026 and learn more about the Real Results Yield Challenge, contact your local retailer or BASF representative.

Revylok® Fungicide Performance

Cercospora Leaf Blight (CLB) Control

42 Days After Treatment



2024 BASF sponsored replicated field trials Portageville, MO. Application rates were as follows: Revylok Fungicide 5.5 fl oz/A, Miravis Top 13.7 fl oz/a, Lucento 5.5 fl oz/a, Delaro Complete 8 fl oz/a. All treatments applied with NIS 0.25% v/v at R2 – R3 soybean growth stage. Cercospora leaf blight (CLB) severity was rated 42 days after treatment at R2 and 35 days after treatment at R3 on August 23rd.

Real Results Yield Challenge

The Real Results Yield Challenge helps farmers and retailers evaluate fungicide performance through on-farm, side-by-side comparisons. Farmers apply a BASF performance-driven fungicide, like Revylok fungicide, alongside an untreated or competitive treatment, then share in-season photos and harvest yield data.

"Whether you've used BASF products for years or are just considering them, the Real Results Yield Challenge invites growers to put performance to the test on their own acres," says Tutor.

See the results for yourself this season by joining the 2026 Real Results Yield Challenge.

1 2022-2024 BASF-sponsored small-plot replicated trials (n=16). Revylok® fungicide (5.5 fl oz/A) applied with 0.25% v/v NIS at the R2.5 - R3 soybean growth stage. Trials conducted in AR, GA, KY, TN, LA, MO, MS, NC, and AL.

2 2020–2023 RevX Fields on-farm demos and BASF-sponsored university and consultant-led small-plot, replicated research trials. N=56. Revylok fungicide applied at 5.5 fl oz/A. All other fungicides applied at labeled rates. Applications to R2–R4 soybeans.

Revylok® Fungicide

BASF
We create chemistry

Story and Photos By **Jennifer Carrico**, @JennCattleGal

An Opportunity To Thrive

Following a detailed health plan optimizes cattle performance and profits.

Cattle prices are at an all-time high because of low supply and high demand for beef. With the high value of cattle, herd health is even more important to keep all animals performing and thriving.

For Anderson, Missouri, cattle producers Vance and Jennifer Keaton, herd health starts at the birth of a calf. Making sure a calf gets a good start sets up how well it will perform throughout its life regardless of whether its purpose is as a breeding animal or a market animal.

"Herd health is vital to performance with our cattle no matter what the end point is for the calf," Vance says. "It starts at birth but really also is about how that calf's mother was cared for and

the immunity she passes down to the calf in utero." Vance and wife, Jennifer, who is a practicing veterinarian, will change their program if needed to get the results they want. If they hear of a vaccine or feed that is helping with gains, for example, they will try it.

Since Jennifer is a veterinarian, the Keatons have the advantage of her care for their own animals. Still, it's important for producers to have a good relationship with their vet. "If the herd veterinarian is familiar with what a producer has in their operation, then they can help manage the challenges much more easily," explains Pippa Gibbons, associate professor of food animal medicine and surgery at Texas Tech University School of Veterinary Medicine.

She suggests having a whole-herd written plan, which is a "living" document as to what to do with all classes of cattle on a cow/calf operation. This includes calving, calf management, breeding cows, bull management, weaning time, pregnancy-checking time, etc. Gibbons says this is considered a living document, as it may change from month to month or year to year according to changes in herd goals, disease protocols and updates of available medicines. It's something that should be reviewed every year.

KNOW YOUR VACCINES

Various vaccines are available to use in different situations to keep your herd health plan on track, according to Texas Tech veterinarians. A modified live vaccine is a weakened, living virus that can multiply in the animal without causing the disease. It provides strong immunity and quicker, broader and longer-lasting protection. It requires careful handling and, once mixed, has a short shelf life. Modified live vaccines are also not typically safe for pregnant cattle because of the risk of abortion.

A killed vaccine is inactivated and has dead pathogens or parts of them that are chemically or heat-inactivated and contains no live organism. These vaccines are primarily antibody-based, focusing on pathogens' outside cells, and are thought of as immune boosters. These are safe for any animal, including pregnant cows. Killed vaccines do have a slower time to build immunity and require a booster shot.

Gibbons says internasal vaccines have become more common. These are typically used to fight respiratory diseases and can stimulate quick immunity in the nose and throat while reducing injection sites and stress. These vaccines are commonly used in calves and can be administered at a very young age. Autogenous ➤

Missouri cattleman Vance Keaton checks herd health daily to ensure good performance in all of his family's cattle.

vaccines are custom-made and can be herd-specific—made from bacteria or viruses isolated from a sick animal. These are commonly made from pink eye in beef herds.

The Keatons have herd vaccination protocols for calves, cows, replacement heifers, steers and bulls. Their diversified operation consists of both spring and fall calving. They use artificial insemination before turning bulls out. "I guess we are both a seedstock operation and a commercial operation, because we have cows that would fit in both categories," Vance says. "We sell some bulls and show heifers, but we also feed out some of our calves and sell the beef. We raise replacement heifers for our herd, as well." The herd of just under 150 cows is mostly Angus and Simmental genetics.

The couple likes to get their calves processed within 24 hours after birth. Both spring and fall herds calve on pastures but can be brought to barns, if needed. Newborn calves are weighed, tagged and given shots. They weigh the calves for performance records, alerting them to any calving difficulties from either the sire or dam. The calf tag has its own identification number but also has the mother's number above it in case another family member is unsure of the matching pair. It also lists the calf's sire.

The Keatons give calves a rota-coronavirus vaccine; a respiratory vaccine that prevents diseases caused by bovine respiratory syncytial virus and aids in the prevention of infectious bovine rhinotracheitis and parainfluenza virus type 3; and a multivitamin shot.

"We hope the calves get immunity from their mothers in utero and from the colostrum, but these vaccines also get them started off right," Jennifer says. At approximately 4 months of age, the calves are vaccinated while still on the cow right before they decide what bull calves to castrate and all the calves receive respiratory vaccines. Calves receive a second round of the vaccines about two to three weeks before weaning, which is usually at 6 months of age.

REPRODUCTIVE MANAGEMENT

The Missouri cattle producers keep heifer calves to use as replacements in their herd if they meet quality and performance specs. Those females are treated the same as current breeding females. About 30 days prior to breeding, the females are given a bovine viral diarrhea vaccine, a Lepto Vibrio vaccine and a multiple mineral shot. These shots are also administered to breeding bulls. All cattle receive a clostridial vaccine that protects against pink eye caused by Moraxella bovis.

Vance and Jennifer Keaton work together on their herd-health program. As a veterinarian, Jennifer also works with cattle clients.

FOCUS ON DISEASE PREVENTION

The Keatons are adamant about keeping disease at bay. Disease can be spread by flies and ticks, as well as other internal parasites. They deworm cattle on a regular basis. Using dewormers not only reduces diseases and strengthens immune systems, but also helps improve profitability by boosting weight gain, feed efficiency and milk production.

Fly control is important, too. "We will use fly tags during the warming months when flies are biting, and we rotate which kind we use in order to prevent resistance," Jennifer explains. Flies can cause diseases like anaplasmosis or pink eye, both of which can lead to weight loss, sickness and death in serious cases.

When bringing new cattle into the herd, Texas Tech's Gibbons says it's important to quarantine those animals to be sure they aren't bringing diseases or health issues with them. This is a practice the >

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[1]Class defined as full-size/heavy-duty crossover UTVs with a sub-100-inch (sub-254-cm) wheelbase powered by a gas engine in the 750-900cc engine range. Comparisons made by calculating volume using published cargo box dimensions.

Keatons use in their own herd and Jennifer also recommends to her veterinary clients. "Isolating new animals for about 30 days before introducing them into the rest of the herd can prevent problems," she says.

Vance says even if the purchase was made from a reputable herd, it's still a good idea to quarantine the animals. "When we were first starting our herd, we purchased a few from several places. Having a core health program in place will prevent problems," he says.

GOOD NUTRITION MEANS GOOD HEALTH

Even with mineral injectables available, the Keatons have a good feed mineral accessible for consumption in each pasture. Quality grasses, hay and supplemental feed are used to keep cattle in a good body condition score.

An intensive-grazing system is used on their southern Missouri operation, and cattle can easily be rotated to a new paddock. The paddocks are configured in different sizes to accommodate different groups in different situations. They may keep a group smaller in number for closer management of yearlings or a particular group of cows at breeding time.

"Our cows are bucket-trained and will follow us just about anywhere when we have feed. It's a great way to be able to move them to different paddocks," Vance adds. Hay is cut in some of the paddocks to be stored for feeding during the winter months.

A BIOSECURITY PLAN

While the pork and poultry industries have very specific biosecurity plans, the beef industry hasn't historically had one. Gibbons says having a biosecurity plan can help prevent diseases from entering your herd. "It's important to know what you're looking for when it comes to diseases," she says. "The plan should include knowing what to do during a natural disaster or a foreign animal disease outbreak."

Along with a biosecurity plan is knowing how to manage animals with a health issue—whether they are downed or need to be euthanized—and to have a strategy for carcass disposal.

There are so many things to think about when looking at herd health, but the most important part is having a good health plan and following it to ensure your animals are given every opportunity to thrive. "We know we need to be responsible cattle producers and continually educate ourselves about new products and health requirements," Vance says. "In the end, if we take care of the cattle, they will thrive." ///

Beef Quality Assurance Program Increases Health And Consumer Confidence

Dating back nearly 50 years, veterinarians and producers set ideas for improving the quality and safety of beef for consumers. The industry identified challenges facing beef consumption and determined changes needed to rebuild consumer confidence in the product.

The Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) program was started in several states to address the challenges facing the beef industry. "Beef-quality assurance is a science-based program that provides continuing education to show producers what principles need to be implemented on their operation in the name of producing a nutritious, wholesome product," says Casey Anderson, director of industry relations with the Iowa Beef Industry Council.

All these production methodologies contribute to a safe product. BQA is a nationally coordinated, state-implemented program that provides systematic information to U.S. beef producers and beef consumers about how commonsense husbandry techniques can be coupled with accepted scientific knowledge to raise cattle under optimum management and environmental conditions.

As a veterinarian, Jennifer Keaton wants to prevent any potential carcass problems when vaccinating or treating cattle, stressing proper syringe and needle selection and use. "We want other producers to understand the importance of being BQA certified to know how to properly handle cattle to ensure a good end product," she says.

Lindsay Runft, director of producer communications for Certified Angus Beef (CAB), says recognizing the growing importance of animal welfare and sustainable practices to consumers is why CAB has a vested interest in cattle care and its role in continuing to build consumer trust in how beef cattle are raised. "BQA is a national program designed by leading animal welfare and cattle care experts, and is recognized for its credibility in educating farmers and ranchers on the best and most current beef-production practices," she says.

The National Beef Quality Audit is a tool used to measure just what success training has supplied producers in improving the overall commitment to producing high-quality beef.

"It's really about being responsible. If we are responsible on the farm, then consumers can be confident in the product they buy," Keaton says.

To learn more about CAB's commitment to cattle care and its Raised With Respect campaign, visit **https://cabcattle.com/RaisedwithRespect/**

For more information, visit **www.bqa.org**

Part 2: Set Your Farm Up For Long-Term Success

Successful family businesses sometimes attribute their success to luck, and luck is famously described as "the place where preparation meets opportunity." Each opportunity you face in your family farm or ranch is specific to your business or locale based on the people in your operation, the local market or the way your business creates value. However, the preparatory aspects of luck have consistencies across businesses, as well.

In other words, each business grows and is successful in its own way, but what businesses do to prepare for opportunities is remarkably similar.

Last month, I offered five elements of preparation to help you approach opportunities. **1)** Be clear about your own definition of success so you are not trapped trying to make others happy. **2)** Develop a vision for the future of your business so you can quickly say "yes" or "no" to opportunities. **3)** Identify the principles that guide your ownership and management decisions, making it easier to consider strategic options. **4)** Be intentional with your entity structure (the entities that own land, equipment and livestock) for tax, legal liability, estate and Farm Service Agency purposes. **5)** Finally, use a deliberate decision-making process, particularly as your family business expands to include the next generation and possibly their spouses and children. How you make decisions can be as important as the decision itself.

Here are five more elements of preparation and a bonus to round out the list.

Plan for transitions, including your own retirement and estate plan. Transitions happen to everyone. Part of being prepared for transitions is talking them through with your advisers and family members before they happen. Successful family businesses have up-to-date estate plans and are continually discussing management roles and transitions.

Use a sounding board. Successful family business owners tend to have strong relationships with people inside and outside of their businesses. A few have formal advisory boards. Many more have a personal group of confidants with whom they can vet ideas. Most have a key mentor or two who can help them think through issues. Who do you call on to help you navigate tough decisions?

Invest in personal development. Growing your business involves growing yourself. You can find many successful business owners studying important business concepts, learning new management and relational tools, attending conferences or classes, joining peer groups, serving on boards, reading or traveling to other geographies—all to keep learning and growing.

Have good exit strategies. It's easy to take on new opportunities when you are excited. It's hard to get out of them when you are frustrated. Successful business owners think through what an eventual exit might look like. Crafting good buy-sell agreements, developing strategies to eventually sell a business and planning for contingencies are important aspects when considering your next opportunity.

Find good advisers. A friend of mine likes to say, "If you think a good adviser is expensive, try a bad one." Your accountant, lender, attorney, insurance agent, wealth adviser—even your pastor—can make a significant difference in the trajectory of your business. If your current advisers are not helpful, innovative or collaborative, move on to others. Good advisers are an investment, not an expense, and should produce returns accordingly.

Bonus: Know your numbers, especially now. The most successful business owners dig into their numbers to understand what is making money. Their financial information is current. They can run scenarios on new opportunities to aid in their preparation and decision-making as new ventures emerge.

Being prepared for opportunities takes time, energy and focus. Use the strategies from this column and last month's column to be ready when luck strikes. ///

Email Lance Woodbury at
lance.woodbury@pinionglobal.com

GETTY IMAGES

ELAINE SHEIN

A SEASON of STANDOUTS

NCGA National Corn Yield Contest winners show how precise management and a near-perfect 2025 growing season combined to push corn yields higher.

NATIONAL CORN GROWERS ASSOCIATION

By **Jason Jenkins**, @JasonJenkinsDTN
Pamela Smith, @PamSmithDTN

PROVIDED BY JOSH WATSON

A: CONVENTIONAL NON-IRRIGATED CLASS

Josh Watson

Sweetwater, Tennessee
387.6074 bpa
Dekalb DKC68-35

THE FARM. Josh Watson farms in partnership with his brother, Caleb, in East Tennessee less than an hour from Knoxville. Prior to 2018, the operation was primarily a dairy farm, but the loss of a milk contract led them to focus on row crops including corn, soybeans and winter wheat.

"We farm about 1,600 acres," he says. "When we got rid of the cows, all the silage ground, alfalfa ground and pasture ground went into row crops."

THE FIELD. Sitting at the base of the Great Smoky Mountains, the 55-acre field of Emory silt loam was planted on April 16 with Dekalb DKC68-35 at a population of 36,000 seeds per acre. The corn followed soybeans in the rotation.

"You have to find the right hybrid for the right soil type," he says. "We also planted the field with the rows running north-south, which I think helped us hold moisture, especially in what was a drier year."

THE FORMULA. Watson believes a unique organic nitrogen fertilizer product is making a difference on his farm. For the past several seasons, he's applied spent microbial biomass (SMB), a nutrient-rich coproduct resulting from corn syrup manufacturing, to his fields.

"In the past, we've just applied the SMB on top, but on this field, we disked it under, and I really think that made the difference," he says.

THE FIGHT. Neither pests nor disease caused issues for Watson in 2025. Instead, moisture was the biggest obstacle. "It seemed like the rain kept taking the same path, and this field was in that path," he says. "I'd say it was a fair season."

THE FUTURE. Watson's first national win came in 2021, when he placed third in this class with a yield of 343.4807 bpa. This year's win sets a new high yield for the farm.

"I just want to thank God for the opportunity to be a steward of his land," Watson says.

B: CONVENTIONAL NON-IRRIGATED CLASS

(Corn Belt States: IL, IN, IA, MN, MO, OH, WI)

MARY ANN CARTER

Kevin Kalb

Dubois, Indiana
425.7728 bpa
Dekalb DKC68-35RIB

THE FARM. Kevin Kalb entered his first NCGA yield contest in 2007 and continues to use it as a learning tool. The Kalb family claimed three first-place national corn yield wins in 2025. The farm produces corn, soybeans and turkeys.

THE FIELD. Sandy-silt loam soils in this part of southern Indiana are not particularly high in organic matter, but Kalb considers soil biology more important. Near-perfect growing conditions played a big role in pushing this field of corn on corn. Continuous corn typically outyields those following soybeans on his farm.

THE FORMULA. A conventional entry, the field was deep ripped in the fall and received a generous serving of "microbial magic" in the form of turkey litter. In-furrow microbes and a 2 x 2 x 2 band of nutrients below the seed got it off to a quick start. Tissue samples starting around V3 continued through black layer and determined the subsequent diet. Commercial nitrogen totals fell into a modest range of 160 to 180 pounds per acre delivered in split applications through a high-clearance sprayer and drop nozzles. Kalb planted on May 10 in 30-inch rows at 36,000 harvest plant population. The 118-day hybrid, Dekalb DKC68-35RIB, is unique in Kalb's experience. "It is of mid-tall stature, and the leaves are narrower, which allows heat to escape at night better than other hybrids. I've never planted a hybrid that yields equally well on our best ground and hill ground," Kalb says.

THE FIGHT. Wind damage has been a past problem in this field, but not in 2025. The crop also dodged tar spot and southern rust, which hit many fields in this region. Kalb credits an at-planting application of a biological from NewLeaf Symbiotics for season-long protection. It was the only Kalb contest entry where the product was tested and the only one that didn't require fungicide.

THE FUTURE. Kalb had the second-highest yield (369.3424 bpa) in this class with Preceon PR113-60RIB. He sees big opportunity in short-stature hybrids.

NEARLY **7,800** ENTRIES IN THE *NCGA CORN YIELD CONTEST*

C: NO-TILL NON-IRRIGATED CLASS

JOEL REICHENBERGER

Robert Santini

Bloomsbury, New Jersey
383.5325 bpa
Pioneer P1136AM

THE FARM. Santini is no stranger to the NCGA yield contest. He's won both state and national awards in the past, including taking the top spot in this class in 2024. He and his wife, Sharon, raise corn, soybeans, sorghum and wheat in western New Jersey.

THE FIELD. For the second year, Santini selected Pioneer P1136AM, a 111-day hybrid with, notably, the shortest relative maturity among the hybrids that won each national class. He planted the corn into bean stubble in 30-inch rows using a John Deere 1795 planter.

"This clay loam field lays behind a dairy farm, and years ago, when they hauled manure, they didn't go too far from the barn," Santini says. "It really built up the organic matter."

THE FORMULA. While Santini didn't change hybrids from 2024 to 2025, he did change his seeding rate, dropping more than 10% to a harvest population of 34,000—the lowest among national first-place winners. He stayed with his typical fertility program, which included 200 units of nitrogen, 100 units each of phosphorus and potash per acre, and the application of chicken litter prior to planting.

THE FIGHT. Keeping the corn stand healthy, green and growing is always a top priority for Santini, and he accomplishes it with a combination of at-plant and postemergence fungicide applications. He also added a biological seed treatment in 2025. While disease pressure was low in western New Jersey, Santini did contend with some tar spot in his area late in the season.

THE FUTURE. Despite reducing his seeding rate, Santini increased his class-winning yield by nearly 47 bushels with the same hybrid. While he attributes part of the gains to his management decisions, Mother Nature still plays her part.

"When that rain comes at the right time, it'll give you 25 to 30 extra bushels," Santini says. "We still haven't hit our 400-bushel target, but we'll keep trying." ➤


KEVIN KALB

D: NO-TILL NON-IRRIGATED CLASS

(Corn Belt States: IL, IN, IA, MN, MO, OH, WI)

Rhylan Kalb

Dubois, Indiana
425.3257 bpa
Dekalb DKC68-35RIB

THE FARM. Rhylan Kalb grew up in the corn contest arena, but this is her first year entering as a full-time farmer. Her first-place entry fell only a few kernels shy of her father's (Kevin Kalb) winning entry. It yielded 15 bpa more than the second-place winner, Shawn Kalb, her mother, who also won this class last year.

THE FIELD. Rhylan's winning field was also near her father's entry in proximity. The river bottom soils represent some of the farm's more productive and best-drained acreage. Tile helps keep water off the fields, but the soils also have good water-holding capacity to carry the crop through dry conditions. The farm received about 36 inches of rain during the growing season, and the rain showers were spread almost like an irrigation schedule except for a short dry spell in August. Broadcasting turkey litter in the fall immediately after harvesting helps break down residue and feed soil biology.

THE FORMULA. Tillage (or lack of it) is the main difference in the Kalb entries. This no-till field received the same in-furrow microbes and a 2 x 2 x 2 band of nutrients placed with a Case IH 1250 planter fitted with no-till attachments. Tissue sampling identified what nutrients the plants needed with total nitrogen rates falling in the 160- to 180-pound-per-acre range. Rhylan planted Dekalb DKC68-35RIB in 30-inch rows on May 15 behind corn at a population of 38,000 plants per acre.

THE FIGHT. Keeping the plant green and protected is key to yield. Growing conditions were favorable for disease infection in the region, so the crop received a VT growth stage application of Delaro Complete fungicide. To guard against infection intensifying, a second fungicide application of Veltyma was applied in the early R growth stages.

THE FUTURE. With college in the rearview mirror, Rhylan is concentrating on farming and figuring out a way to beat Dad in the 2026 contest.

ENTRIES FROM **47** STATES

E: STRIP-TILL, MINIMUM-TILL, MULCH-TILL, RIDGE-TILL NON-IRRIGATED CLASS

Jabe Watson

Sweetwater, Tennessee
349.0543 bpa
Dekalb DKC68-35RIB


PROVIDED BY JOSH WATSON

THE FARM. After attending college for a few years, Jabe Watson returned to the family farm two seasons ago to work full time alongside his father, Josh, and uncle, Caleb.

THE FIELD. The 40-acre field, which was planted to soybeans the previous season, wasn't too far from Josh Watson's conventional nonirrigated class-winning field. It was planted on April 17 with Dekalb DKC-68-35RIB at a population of 34,000 plants per acre. Unlike his father's field, Jabe's corn was planted in rows running east to west.

"We farm at elevations from 850 feet to 1,200 feet on the tops of these ridges," he says. "It helps keep things a little cooler during the summer than a lot of the Southeast."

THE FORMULA. Spent microbial biomass (SMB) was also used on the field as organic fertilizer, but it was not incorporated into the soil, which Watson believes made a difference between the family's two winning fields, as all other inputs and management were the same.

THE FIGHT. Strong emergence helped the field get off to a great start, and timely rains fell when the crop needed a drink.

"Because the rows were running east-west, it didn't hold onto the moisture as well as Dad's did throughout the season," he says. "We probably could have increased the population, too."

THE FUTURE. In addition to the two national awards, the Watsons earned four state yield contest awards in 2025. Next season, they plan to continue using SMB for fertilizer, but they plan to inject it rather than dribbling it on top or disking it into the soil.

"I like doing the contest to try different things on the plots to see how I can help my production corn the next year," he says. "There's a pretty popular song down here that says, 'Corn won't grow at all on Rocky Top,' but our red limestone ground has a lot of growing power. Don't let the color fool you. We're always striving to do better." ➤

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F: STRIP-TILL, MINIMUM-TILL, MULCH-TILL, RIDGE-TILL NON-IRRIGATED CLASS

(Corn Belt States: IL, IN, IA, MN, MO, OH, WI)

Kogen Kalb

Dubois, Indiana
389.4384 bpa
Dekalb DKC68-35RIB

KEVIN KALB

THE FARM. At age 16, Kogen Kalb already has firm roots in NCGA yield contest history. He wins this class after placing second in 2024. In 2025, his sister, Emmersen, earned second-place national honors in the same class with 379.7248 bpa. Beyond corn and soybeans, the Kalb family raises turkeys, and litter is key to their high-yield practices.

THE FIELD. Strip-till on the Kalb farm is a spring operation. A SoilWarrior Edge three-point mounted strip-till system is the primary tillage with units adjusted to run with a single coulter. No shank is used to avoid deep spring tillage because, in this area, the soil surface might appear dry but still be wet enough below to cause enough soil smearing to influence root growth.

THE FORMULA. Turkey litter immediately following harvest the previous year also is central to the strategy in this field. Manure stimulates soil biology to break down residue and results in overall soil health that translates to reduced commercial fertilizer use. The strip-till field received in-furrow microbes and a 2 x 2 x 2 band of nutrients. Banding assists in avoiding carbon tie-up. Kogen planted in 30-inch rows on May 13 behind corn with a 37,000 harvest plant population. Additional fertility requirements are typically split between two over-the-top drop nozzle applications and total 160 to 180 pounds per acre. The Kalbs have found yields drop if they push nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium too hard. With no irrigation to cool the crop, hybrid selection becomes more important. They like this 118-day hybrid because it shows good ear flex when population rates are decreased slightly. The ears aren't super long but put on extreme kernel depth to compensate.

THE FIGHT. Yields in the strip-till entries were off from the family's conventional and no-till entries this year. The Kalbs think compaction in that field may have made the difference. Two fungicide applications helped fend off tar spot and southern rust.

THE FUTURE. Keep learning. Family competition is a motivator.

9 WINNING ENTRIES OVER 400 bpa

G: NO-TILL IRRIGATED CLASS

Corder Hobbs

Elkmont, Alabama
402.3345 bpa
Dekalb DKC68-35

PROVIDED BY CORDER HOBBS

THE FARM. Corder Hobbs is a 19-year-old farmer and college student who raises corn, cotton, soybeans, wheat and winter canola in north-central Alabama with his grandfather, Dickey, and brother, Curtis. Hobbs Farms has recorded several state and national NCGA placings over the years. The contest represents an important tradition for Corder, as his late father, Jesse, saw value in the effort.

THE FIELD. The rolling hills and red clay soils of northern Alabama hardly seem the stuff to support mega yields, but the Hobbs family uses crop rotation and management to keep pushing the envelope. Following a spring herbicide burndown, the 118-day hybrid treated with ReziRx was planted into cotton residue on April 17 in 30-inch rows at a harvest population of 40,000 plants per acre using a John Deere 1775 no-till planter outfitted with standard row cleaners and closing wheels.

THE FORMULA. Chicken poop is powerful stuff, and Hobbs credits ready availability of litter as a key to top corn yields. The farm has been building fertility for several decades by broadcasting manure in the fall based on soil tests. Red clay soils receive heavier applications of up to 4 tons per acre, and darker soils tend to receive 2 to 2.5 tons per acre. The winning field received an additional 200 pounds of nitrogen per acre with a few units delivered as an at-tassel aerial application that also included fungicide, boron and other nutrients.

THE FIGHT. An unusually wet spring made getting corn planted a big challenge in 2025. Fortunately, rains continued for most of the growing season with only a slight dry spell in August. That meant overhead pivots saw light duty this season with approximately 3.5 inches of water per acre applied to the crop.

THE FUTURE. Keep learning, and push economical yields. "I really love farming and learn a lot from my high-yield plots," Hobbs says.

H: STRIP-TILL, MINIMUM-TILL, MULCH-TILL, RIDGE-TILL IRRIGATED CLASS

David Hula

Charles City, Virginia
572.2589 bpa
Pioneer P18216PCUE

JOEL REICHENBERGER

THE FARM. David Hula's 2025 contest entry represents his 14th NCGA high-yield win. He remains the only farmer to break the 600-bushel mark in the contest (2019, 2021 and 2023). A third-generation farmer, he farms approximately 4,000 acres with brother, John, and son, Craig.

THE FIELD. Renwood Farms lies in the Chesapeake Bay watershed and uses surface water from the James River for irrigation. The 118-day hybrid, Pioneer P18216PCUE, was new to the farm. It followed soybeans, was planted May 3 in 30-inch rows and had a harvest population of 52,700 plants per acre. The crop received about 8 inches per acre of irrigation water during vegetative growth stages and another 4 inches during the reproductive stages.

THE FORMULA. All Renwood Farms corn acreage receives a proven in-furrow starter and seed-treatment program. Seed germination and quality are tested. Emergence scores and tissue testing begin around 325 GDU (growing degree units) to determine whether a field is worth pushing further. Veltyma fungicide is used to gain a wider application window, and its ethylene-blocking attributes keep the plant green longer. Biologicals, including acids and plant-growth-promoting compounds, are used to enhance vigor, root development and nutrient uptake. Hula also uses foliar treatments including nitrogen, phosphorus, zinc, iron, molybdenum and magnesium. The entry received a diet of both commercial fertilizers and chicken litter.

THE FIGHT. Hula says this year showed the importance of protecting the plant against disease and extending grain fill. This particular hybrid requires approximately 2,860 GDUs to reach black layer (maturity). "Based on our observations, we lengthened the time to reach black layer by another 120 to 150 GDUs. Plant health and stay green were remarkable, and it resulted in an impressive 66-plus (pound) test weight," he says.

THE FUTURE. Hula would love to see a genetic answer to problematic crown rot. Beyond that, he intends to keep exploring corn's potential and sharing what he learns.

SCAN FOR MORE

HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/MR2S8AAX

I: CONVENTIONAL IRRIGATED CLASS

Alex Harrell

Leesburg, Georgia
416.8270 bpa
Pioneer P17677

PROVIDED BY ALEX HARRELL

THE FARM. Harrell Farms was established in southwest Georgia by Alex's father, Rodney, in 1972. Last year, Rodney won this same class with a corn yield of 393.8045 bpa.

THE FIELD. Pioneer P17677 has been Harrell's choice for high-yielding environments. The 117-day conventional hybrid was planted on March 27 in 30-inch rows at a rate of 40,000 seeds per acre. "It's a hybrid that likes to be pushed," Harrell says. "It likes heavier clay soils and doesn't mind being planted thick. It just flat-out makes corn."

THE FORMULA. Preparation begins with 1-acre grid soil sampling the previous fall. Variable-rate application of lime and nutrients follows. Harrell says a lot of time is spent on planter setup, making sure that seed singulation and planting depth is as close to perfect as possible, leading to even emergence. He says he uses both an in-furrow system and a 3 x 3 system to put down a "big slug of fertility and humic and fulvic acids."

THE FIGHT. The season brought more rain than usual early on, but then conditions dried off toward season's end, requiring Harrell to really crank up the center pivot to finish out the crop.

"We had cooler nighttime temperatures, which helped grain fill," he says. "Anytime we hit these bigger yield numbers, we're trying to push the plant's physical maturity. If it's mature at 2,800 GDUs, we want to push it past 3,000. If we can keep it alive longer than it's supposed to be alive, that leads to heavier grain."

THE FUTURE. Harrell Farms first cleared the 300-bpa yield hurdle in 2012. It took 11 more years to eclipse 400 bpa. The 416.8270 bpa in 2025 is their highest yield ever. Harrell attributes the accomplishment to their on-farm strip-trial program, which included more than 140 trials in 2025. The goal is to identify inputs that deliver both additional yield and ROI to the farm. ///

Dreaded Dash Light

I have a John Deere 7800 that occasionally has two lights that come on in the dash, a red light and a yellow flashing light. It does not matter if the hydraulic oil is hot or cold. The red light shows that the hydraulic oil pressure is low, and the yellow light is a warning light. The hydraulic oil level is good, the hydraulics are strong, and the lights still come on—but only when the tractor is under a heavy load. It will stay off during the time I am just cruising through the field with the field cultivator, but after I make the turn and drop the field cultivator and instantly load the tractor, the lights come on with no hydraulic demands but go off after I move away from the turn. I have changed the hydraulic filter, but it made no change.

Steve: Most of the time if you feel that the hydraulics are strong in all areas of the tractor, and the hydraulic pressure light comes on, the problem will be found in the hydraulic pressure sensor. This sensor unit is located at the manifold of the hydraulic filter (see photo below). It's easy to change, and I would recommend giving that a try. (The farmer responded that the sensor fixed his tractor.)

STEVE THOMPSON

Have a mechanical problem you can't resolve? Email Steve Thompson at ***askthemechaniccolumn@gmail.com***

Please include your contact information and phone number.

Fuel the Fire

I am attempting to get the fuel gauges working on all my vehicles around the farm. I have always wondered why the electricity associated with a fuel gauge never sets the tank on fire. There are 12 available volts to the fuel gauge marked B on my tractor, and the wire from the fuel gauge marked S runs straight to the sending unit that is located on the outside of the fuel tank. However, my truck's fuel gauge is completely submerged in fuel in the tank, and it also has a fuel pump associated with it. What keeps all that electrical activity from setting the fuel on fire and burning up the tractor and truck? This is something that I have always wondered about. What is the answer?

STEVE THOMPSON

Steve: The answer is simple: An electric fuel pump or an electric fuel gauge (combination in photo above) will not start a fire because of two things in play here. One: The fuel acts as a coolant and fire retardant. Two: There is not enough oxygen for combustion. There is no oxygen in the liquid gas. Liquid gasoline will not burn. The fuel pump is immersed in fuel, and what is running through the pump and the fuel around it are in a nonflammable state. To start a fire, you must have fuel, oxygen and a heat source. Even if the fuel tank on the vehicle is almost empty or is empty of fuel, the small amount of liquid and vapor creates an environment that is too rich (lack of oxygen) for any ignition. The fuel pump on your truck is running on 12 volts, but more than likely the fuel gauge has only around 5 to 10 volts. Most fuel gauges have an internal or external resistor that helps keep the voltage down. Again, lack of oxygen or a heat source equals no fire. I guess the next question is, "Why can an empty fuel tank blow up when hit with a torch?" I guess the answer can also be this month's "**Safety Tip of the Month**." CAUTION: Even a fuel tank that has been out of service can explode when a torch is applied, because the torch provides the ignition source for existing vapor that has had time to mix with oxygen in the tank. Time will not allow all the vapor to exit the tank and can create the proper fuel-to-air ratio to ignite, creating a huge explosion. Working on fuel tanks that seem empty of a vapor/oxygen mix by welding or cutting has killed and severely injured many people, including one of my best friends who was remodeling an old fuel tank to fit his truck bed. Your life is worth more than the cost of a new tank. ///


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By Forrest Laws

TOUGH LESSONS For Cotton Growers

Faced with a challenging year in 2025, farmers take steps to prepare for 2026.

UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE

Last season was a year cotton producers will remember, but not for the reasons many would prefer.

From central Texas to Centre, Alabama, cotton growers saw heavy rains in May and June cause lengthy planting delays or, in some cases, prevent them from planting large percentages of their acres.

Rich Lindsey, who manages Cherokee Gin & Cotton Co., in Centre, was expecting farmers in the 11 counties the gin serves to increase acres last spring when other regions were reducing theirs.

"Talking to my ginner friends from all over the Southeast, almost everyone was looking at decreased acres [due to prices]," he says. "We had the opposite situation here. Cotton is our most consistent—and for most growers, my farm included—our best insurable crop." Lindsey, his father, Richard Lindsey, and Brent Tidwell own Coosa River Land Co., a 4,000-acre operation where cotton is the primary crop.

"When the chips were down and economics were tough, we were going to grow more cotton," he explains. "I was expecting a 5 to 10% increase until the weather hit, and we had higher rainfall in May and June than any living farmer in this part of the world remembers."

CASSANDRA LINDSEY

Too much water plagued farmers in Alabama, where gin operator Rich Lindsey says much of the crop was washed out or unplanted.

As a result, acreage dropped 60 to 65% from 2024. Some growers couldn't get all the crop in.

"We planted as much cotton as we could, but we had lots of low land that just didn't dry out in time," he adds. "We got about two-thirds planted. Of that, 10 to 15% is a total loss because it rained again, and water stood on it. We converted about a third to soybeans."

REPLANT PROBLEMS

In west Tennessee, growers planted more acres but had to replant because of excessive rain, says Tyson Raper, Extension cotton and small grains specialist with the University of Tennessee Institute

UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE

University of Tennessee cotton specialist Tyson Raper says cotton farmers are changing production practices to adapt to wetter planting conditions.

of Agriculture. "Our intentions were 265,000 acres; we actually planted around 150,000 acres.

"The lesson we learned in 2025 is similar to 2024, 2022 and 2021: west Tennessee and much of the Mid-South was excessively wet at planting time," he notes. "And that's been a real challenge, trying to get the crop established on time.

"We always have challenges associated with planting, but, lately, we've had to deal with very large rainfall events," Raper continues. "Not just small cotton showers, .2 of an inch, we're getting an inch or an inch and a half. It is not uncommon to be looking at two-, three-, four- and five-inch rainfall events."

That increased the number of acres farmers had to replant, making the crop more difficult to manage. "Farmers that have been growing cotton all their lives didn't get a single seed planted in May," he notes.

In central Texas, growers had a cool, wet start because of rains in May and early June, according to Mark Nemec, a consultant who advises cotton and corn growers from the Texas Blacklands down to the Brazos River Bottoms.

"We had a late cold snap right after we planted that slowed things up," he says. "When it warmed up, it started raining again." The crop took off, and yields largely came in better than expected.

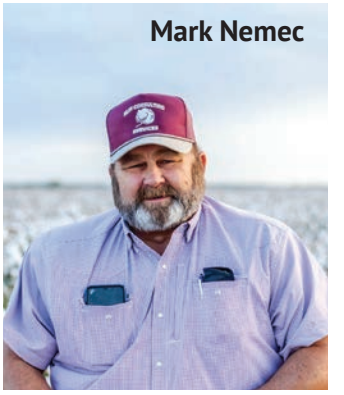
WEED CONTROL PROBLEMS

Another challenge was that no dicamba-based herbicides could be used on Xtend cotton varieties after EPA withdrew their registration in 2024.

"So we've had some [weed] escapes, and we're having to go old school," points out Nemec. "Some of these farmers nowadays have never farmed without over-the-top herbicides on [herbicide-] resistant crops."

That meant applying residual herbicides to try to prevent glyphosate-resistant waterhemp from emerging.

"A lot of farmers put out a preemergence herbicide, which was a good thing," he says. "And, we applied over-the-top [residuals] where we could. Where we got into trouble was it rained so much we couldn't get in with over-the-top postemergence



CASSIDY NEMEC

herbicides, and weeds took off."

That required multiple applications of glufosinate or Liberty herbicide on resistant varieties. "About half of my cotton is Phytogen 2,4-D-resistant cotton, and we cleaned up a lot of problems with the Enlist herbicides," explains Nemec.

Growers had a mass migration of cotton fleahoppers as natural host plants began to dry down. Stink bugs also began moving in, and helicoverpa zea, or corn earworms, had their annual egg lay in cotton. Centric and Transform controlled the former, and the insect-resistance trait in the Bollgard 3 and Widestrike cotton worked well.

Given the wet conditions, Nemec was shocked growers didn't have more seedling disease. "There was an occasional field that had to be replanted, but, for the most part, the fungicide seed treatments seemed to hold."

Plant growth regulators were another issue. "With all the moisture in May and June, the new varieties are requiring more PGRs," he explains. "We also had one of our wettest Julys ever, and we had to spray even more."

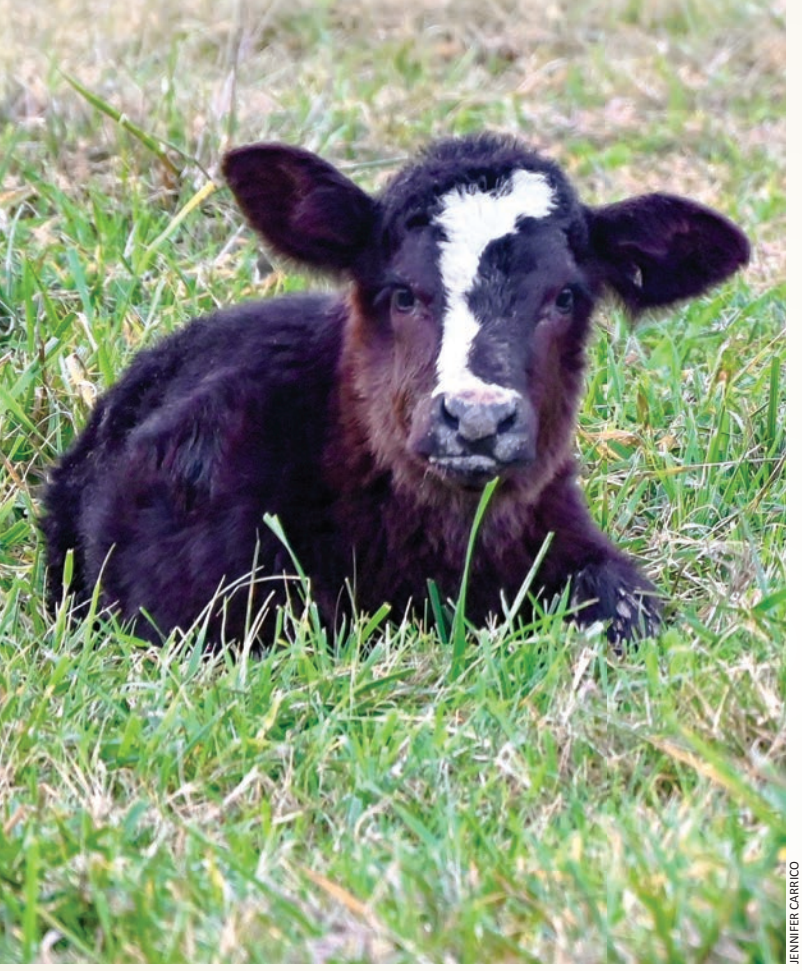
CHANGES FOR 2026

Raper says some west Tennessee farmers are considering drastic measures. "We've been known for pioneering planting no-till for decades, but some growers are considering bedding up their low-lying fields to help move water away from seedlings. Our farmers know that doesn't mean on our rolling hills; it's these bottom soils that take longer to dry out."

He's also recommending reduced seeding rates—to as low as two plants per foot of row or 28,000 to 32,000 plants per acre. "In these types of springs, increasing seeding rates won't help. We need to optimize inputs. I have yet to have a grower who, after making a slight or even substantial cut in seeding rates, who was disappointed. If you start with the optimum seeding rate, it's easier to manage insects, to control diseases and to defoliate."

In Alabama, Lindsey says farmers are praying the rains don't happen again. "We have a trial we're conducting with Auburn University to look at managing late planted cotton to see if we can adjust planting dates. Some of the newer varieties respond differently than the legacy varieties, and that might give us more flexibility." ///

Is Cryptorchid A Genetic Problem?



JENNIFER CARRICO

Email Dr. Ken McMillan at ***vet@dtn.com***

Q ***We have seen several cryptorchid calves over the last few years. I can't remember ever having them in the past. Is this genetic? What can we do to reduce this problem?***

A **DR. McMILLAN:** Cryptorchidism is defined as the failure of one or both testicles to descend into the scrotum. The testicle(s) is located somewhere along the normal fetal development path of descent from around the kidney to the inguinal canal.

As I have stated before, I think to some degree almost everything is heritable. The only peer-reviewed study I could find dates back to 1992. The authors looked at affected bulls admitted to 23 North American veterinary schools. They found a very low incidence of 1.7 cases per 1,000 bulls admitted to the schools. In any case, the incidence seems to be very low.

Since you have seen an uptick in cryptorchids, I would suspect you used a bull or bulls with a genetic predilection to the condition, but there is little data to support my assumption.

I would look back to see if there are common sires or cow families involved. This could be a factor in culling decisions for cows, but it would not be at the top of my list. Now, if a cow produced more than one cryptorchid, she might move up my cull list, and I might not want to retain her heifer calves.

And as I stated previously and want to repeat, please do not use a cryptorchid bull for breeding because of the genetic potential, but more so that even if he is fertile, his serving capacity could be greatly reduced. Also, you could end up with fewer calves and calves born later in your calving season.

Q ***Following up on the question about cryptorchids, should they be sold "as is" or castrated?***

A **DR. McMILLAN:** The 1992 study I previously referenced found that 66% of retained testicles are located in the inguinal canal. Your veterinarian can usually remove these with mild sedation and local anesthesia.

Testicles retained in the abdomen are another story. These testicles, if left in place, can produce male hormones that can lead to masculine behavior and libido, which can present management issues at all stages of production and potentially decrease the quality of meat.

I will have to defer to other veterinarians who have removed abdominal testicles in cattle, but my experience in cats and dogs tells me that this could be an expensive and, in some cases, futile attempt. We have failed to locate testicles on several occasions even after a lengthy search with more than one veterinarian involved.

I will say I would not want to retain ownership with any uncorrected cryptorchid. Let the big boys roll those dice. ///

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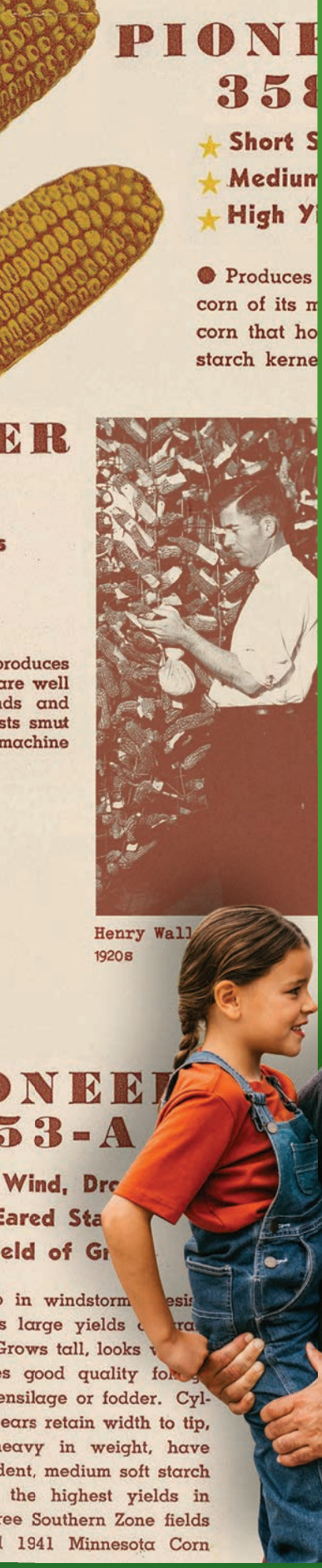

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CATTLE LINK

Story and Photos By **Becky Mills**

Set Priorities for Bull Selection

Economically important traits are more important than ever, but this cattleman says the basics still come first.

The next time you go to a bull sale, look at the potential buyers. More than likely, they're walking through the pens with marked catalogs or spreadsheets, checking out their picks based on expected progeny differences (EPDs) and indexes.

Not Matt Barnes. "I walk through and find what I consider my top 10 or 15 bulls. Good feet. Big tops and stout skulls, good bone. Good disposition. A bull needs to look like a bull. If he doesn't look the part, I'm not going to look at him twice. I think if we start giving up the basics on these bulls, we're creating more problems than we're going to help with the numbers."

Not that he ignores the data. "Once I pick out my top bulls, I start going through the indexes and try to put as many numbers on them as I can. But, no matter what those numbers tell me, if he doesn't pass my test of being a good bull, I don't have any use for him."

Fortunately, Barnes, farm manager for Simmons Farms, Sale City, Georgia, says the owners give him a healthy bull budget. That means he isn't shy about bidding on bulls in the upper percent of their breed for the economically important traits. "I like to be in the top 30% or above on weaning weights, yearling weights and on the carcass traits. If I can't do that, I at least want them to be above average."

A PLACE TO START

He starts his numbers search with weaning weight. The calves from Simmons Farms are preconditioned for around 60 days and hit 700 to 800 pounds before they sell in truckload lots through a video sale. "Then again, I also look at yearling weights, because I want the cattle to perform for whoever's buying them. I look at carcass traits, and in the last couple of years, I've really been pushing the marbling side on our cattle, so whoever buys them gets those real elite carcasses."

While he'd love to get feedlot and carcass data back, he says, "The only data I get is a check when they sell. We know our cattle go out and perform for whoever buys them, though, because we have the same people wanting to buy them every year."

Elk City, Kansas, feeder Flinton McCabe buys both commodity-type cattle as well as calves sired by his family's bull customers. He appreciates it when producers select for pounds and positive carcass traits. Specifically, he says, "Quality is a huge part of the grids, but in today's market, a lot of what drives grid profit is carcass weight."

THINK ABOUT FEMALES

Back to Barnes and his bull shopping, he also pays close attention to the EPDs and indexes that affect longevity. "I think that is one of the most important traits in cattle today. We're getting the highest price we've ever had for cull cows, but there's still such a

Scotty Lovett and Matt Barnes go over their bull picks.

variance between selling a cull cow and buying a heifer or retaining a heifer. We need these cattle to stay here. If you've got a cow, and you have to cull her at 4 or 5 years old, and you have one that's 10 or 12 but still doing her job, how much more money have you made off the 10- or 12-year-old cow?"

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension beef cattle specialist Jason Cleere agrees. He says replacement heifers cost an estimated $3,500 to produce and $3,500 to $4,000 to buy, if not more. "We want to try to stretch those heifers out and make them productive as long as we can. So, longevity, or stayability within that herd, is extremely important." He adds, "It's the useful age or life of that cow. Is she going to have a calf every year, or are we going to have to cull her after five years because she missed a calf?"


Matt Barnes

Barnes says her ability to function on forage is part of that longevity. "She needs to raise a good calf every year. They can all look good when we have knee-deep grass, but just like right now, when we're in a major drought, and she's only eating hay, she still needs to stay in shape and breed back."

There is one trait the cattleman doesn't emphasize unless he is specifically looking for bulls to use on his heifers, and that's calving ease. "With my mature cows, I want a bull that's gonna throw a bigger calf. Any mature cow should be able to have an 80-pound ➤

calf. If she can't, she's not very much of a cow. Why would I want her to have a 60-pound calf? That's 20 pounds that I've got to pay for when it hits the ground."

Even with his commercial Angus, Red Angus and baldy heifers, he says, "I don't buy extreme heifer bulls. If I've got a bull with a birthweight of 70 pounds, and he has a decent calving ease direct (CED) on him, I'm fine."

Elk City, Kansas, purebred breeder Randy McCabe, Flinton McCabe's father, agrees. "A low-birthweight bull is a necessity when you're breeding heifers, but I try to steer our customers to the fact that if they're breeding cows, they need to have some birthweight. Just using a low-birthweight bull on all your cows is not an economically valid trait."

McCabe says he had a customer whose cows, mostly sired by McCabe bulls, started having calving problems. "For years, he would always buy the lowest calving weight bull in the sale. I went and looked at his cows, and they looked like black Jerseys. He had totally taken the internal dimension out of those cows."

LOOK AT BIG PICTURE

Cleere agrees there can be dangers to single-trait selection. "If we do that, we can get into wrecks," he says. However, he urges producers not to go to extremes either way, because genetic correlations can cause unintended consequences. "As we select for more growth, higher weaning weights, higher yearling weights, we can expect the potential for calf size or birthweight to increase, as well. There are curve benders, but in general, we have to be careful."

While there is no end to the data available, Cleere explains, "Economically important traits should always be a priority, especially in today's cattle market.

"We have high cattle prices, but we've got high input costs, and that's going to be more important as prices come down, because we know input costs are not going to come down," he adds. "Use genetic selection for these traits, and take advantage of heterosis."

Barnes is all about those traits, but he'll still look at the bulls before the numbers. "If that bull doesn't have good feet and legs, and can't get out there and get cows bred, nothing else matters, does it? It takes the basics to make the whole thing work. I think you can take any peg out of that, and you start getting really in trouble." ///

Fertility First

Researchers and producers agree when it comes to economically important traits that fertility is at the top of the list. No calf, no income. The challenge is that fertility is a lowly heritable trait, and it takes generations—and patience—to get very far with selection.

The good news is hybrid vigor. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension beef cattle specialist Jason Cleere explains that "the traits that really impact our bottom line, the fertility-type traits, as well as the survivability traits, are low in heritability, but we have to remember they also respond to crossbreeding."

He says research shows a bull of one breed bred to a cow of another will typically result in an increase of 8.5% in calf survival and calf growth. Breed him to a crossbred cow, and there is an average of a 23.3% increase not only in calf survival and calf growth, but in reproductive efficiency and hardiness.

In farm manager Matt Barnes' case, crossbreeding adds to the bottom line with marketing. He breeds Hereford bulls to part of his commercial Angus and Red Angus cows. The Sale City, Georgia, cattleman says, "That is the ultimate cow to me, a good baldy. I think they do so many things right. You can send the steers anywhere. And, if you ever want to sell the heifers for replacements, people are knocking on the door. They'll bring $50 to $100 a head more over a straight red or black."

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Ageism In Agriculture

Fertilizer business sales manager and a leading researcher offer advice on how to close generational gaps.

At Meherrin Fertilizer in Four Oaks, North Carolina, 90% of the business done today is by text, phone or email. That wasn't the case 25 years ago, when its president, Mike Carroll, started the business. Sales were conducted in face-to-face meetings or over the phone.

"My Dad is an in-person salesman, and his relationship (with his customers) is amazing," says Mike's son, Andrew Carroll, who is also the business sales manager for Meherrin. "He (Dad) believes that's the way it should be done. He always challenges the younger salesmen to 'get out on the road and go see your customers.'"

Meherrin has embraced the change that often comes with employing a younger generation. Carroll, a millennial, says his team of salespeople still makes relationships a priority, though they use modern technology to communicate. A quarter of Meherrin's staff are from Generation Z (ages 29 and under). He says the company goes out of its way to hire high school seniors or find new recruits by working with the local community college.

At a time when the agriculture industry is struggling to fill open positions, it's important for employers to understand the different factors that motivate people from different generations—from job stability and benefits, to flexibility and purpose-driven work. By recognizing these differences, employers can tailor their recruitment and retention strategies to better meet the needs of the workforce, ultimately improving employee satisfaction and reducing turnover, experts say.

When it comes to employees of different generations working together, Meherrin uses an open-minded approach that involves employees watching and learning from each other, Carroll says. Doing so, a business can shift how its entire workforce connects and works together.

"I've learned Gen Z likes camaraderie," he explains. "They like to be able to get up and talk to others, and not be shut off in an office. They also like to be given multiple tasks, because they don't like to do the same thing every day."

Luckily, in agriculture, change is constant, Carroll acknowledges.

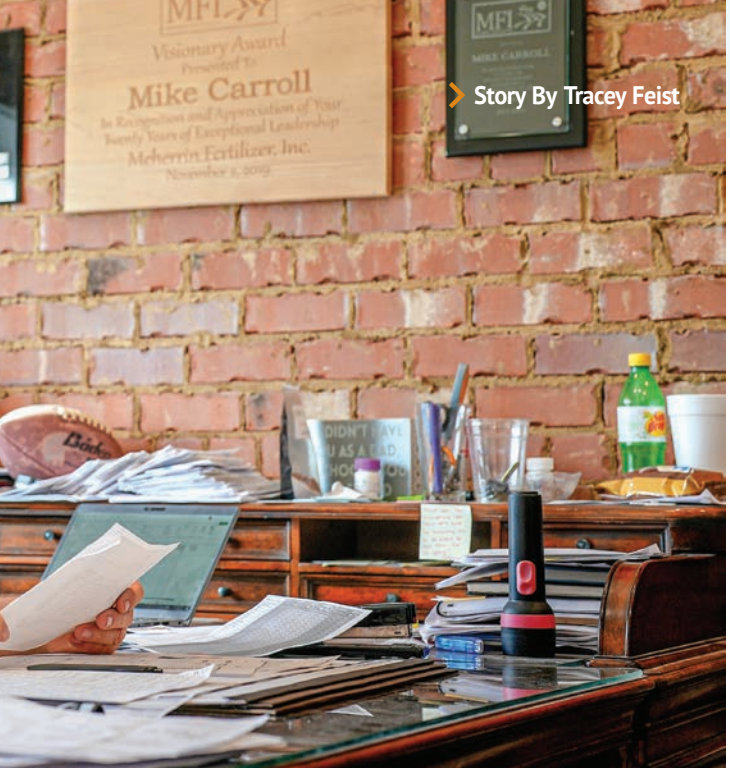
INDUSTRY HURDLES

Jason Dorsey, president of the Center for Generational Kinetics (CGK) and a leading behavioral researcher, told delegates at The Fertilizer Institute (TFI) annual business conference in February 2025 in Palm Desert, California, that the agriculture industry needs to adopt a new approach if it wants to attract and retain new employees.

Dorsey is passionate about dispelling fiction from fact when it comes to understanding generational barriers and ageism in agriculture. "I'm a country kid,

PROVIDED BY MEHERRIN FERTILIZER

Story By Tracey Feist



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY MEHERRIN FERTILIZER

Mike Carroll (above), owner of Meherrin Fertilizer, sees firsthand the benefits of hiring across generations as he works with his son, Andrew (above right), and fertilizer loadout operator Danielle Morgan.

not a city kid," he says of his upbringing on a ranch in Brenham, Texas. "We had well water, two dirt roads to get to my house, two cattle guards to get to my driveway and no neighbors. I love this industry. But, this industry is not well-known among the emerging workforce.

"Most leaders immediately benefit from accurately understanding, connecting with and influencing different generations," Dorsey continues. "If they do, they can decide what will work best to unlock their performance."

He says the agriculture industry needs to take a different approach to understanding and closing generational gaps. This means taking the time to understand similarities and differences, along with what has shaped each generation.

TFI President and CEO Corey Rosenbusch acknowledges that nearly half of its association members will retire in the coming decade. "That's a huge brain drain, and it's incumbent on all of us to ensure that we're facilitating knowledge transfer between the generations," he says. "Millennials, Gen Xers and baby boomers can learn so much from Generation Z, which is the fastest-growing segment in the workforce."

Dorsey's research shows it's essential to an organization's success that its leaders understand Gen Z and its views, as many of today's leaders are baby boomers or are from Generation X. An example might be learning how Gen Z uses new technology or approaches the day's workload.

It's also important to recognize the relationship with technology, says Dorsey, because most Gen Zers don't remember a time before the internet, smartphones or social media.

Other research from CGK cites that today's college graduate typically has six years less work experience than previous generations.

"Everyone is measuring the market wrong," Dorsey explains. "We are not attracting or keeping the people we need (in agriculture), because we're usually only approaching it from one direction.

"If your business is asking, 'How do we get more people to apply, to see (agriculture) as a career, to stay longer?'—that's a limited view," he says. "The more powerful view is (asking yourself), 'Why are people not applying, not staying longer? Or not seeing this as a career?'"

CHANGING THE APPROACH

TFI conducted an industry trends survey where 82% of the respondents said they expect to face challenges in recruiting and retaining talent. "That data alone tells us that communicating with workers from different generations will be key to the industry's future success," Rosenbusch says.

Meherrin seems to have tapped into that success, from the high school seniors they employ to the impending college graduate who will be joining their business full time in May 2025. That young man started with the business at age 16, worked each summer throughout college and will join Meherrin with a degree in supply chain management from the University of North Carolina.

"We're going to have him manage our vessels and work on logistics," Carroll says. "I feel like he's a ➤

veteran, because he has been with us for six years. When he graduates, he will be ready to roll."

He agrees with Rosenbusch's perspective that the agriculture industry needs to do a better job welcoming a younger generation.

"I think one of the stigmas in our industry is that you've got to be older to work here. I'll tell you this: One of my best operations people I have right now is a Gen Zer. She's 18 years old. And, she's in the back blending fertilizer," he says.

For now, Meherrin's integrated approach to employing all generations is working: The business has a very low turnover rate.

"We've got some people who are very senior in our industry. And, I've got some Gen Zers who will outwork anybody I know," Carroll says. "When we see how our young people operate, whether they're in sales or supply chain, it helps us to be better salesmen. You've just got to give them a chance.

"Agriculture is such a big part of our lives," he says of sharing that love with employees. "It's also an industry where our word still matters, and million-dollar deals are done on a handshake."

After all, the success of the business is built on relationships—no matter the age. ///

GENERATIONAL TRAITS

Understanding the differences between workers from different generations is key to the ag industry's future success, explains Jason Dorsey, president of The Center for Generational Kinetics, in Austin, Texas.

Here is a snapshot of the differences between generations:

(Note: *Research is limited to the latest generation, which is Alpha, born 2013–2024, ages 1 through 12.*)

Jason Dorsey

COURTESY OF JASON DORSEY

Generation Z (Born 1996–2012, Ages 13–29)

- Fastest-growing, most diverse generation of employees and consumers globally
- Savers, want stability in life and in work; social causes are important
- Expect all to use technology well; don't remember a time before the internet, social media or smartphones
- COVID-19 was a generation-defining experience.

Millennials (Born 1978–1995, ages 30–47)

- The largest generation in the U.S. workforce, moving increasingly into management and leadership roles
- Drive significant consumer trends, with spending growing rapidly
- Have experienced a delayed adulthood, affecting everything from marriage and buying a home, to employee retention and where they choose to live
- Tech dependent, affecting communication, buying style, relationships and learning.

Generation X (Born 1965–1977, Ages 48–60)

- Often overlooked but the most important generation to retain because they're in the phase where they are deciding where to finish their career
- Extremely loyal but naturally skeptical; make great managers and leaders because they dive into the details
- Are often being pulled in three directions: kids, work and aging parents.

Baby Boomers (Born 1946–64, Ages 61–79)

- Have the most work and life experiences
- Are the most influential generation because they control the wealth, are in senior leadership roles and are often most likely to vote in elections
- Believe you're not working unless they can see you working, a challenge during the pandemic that led to new work realities and expectations
- Currently in a life stage where they're often considering legacy and how they spend their time.

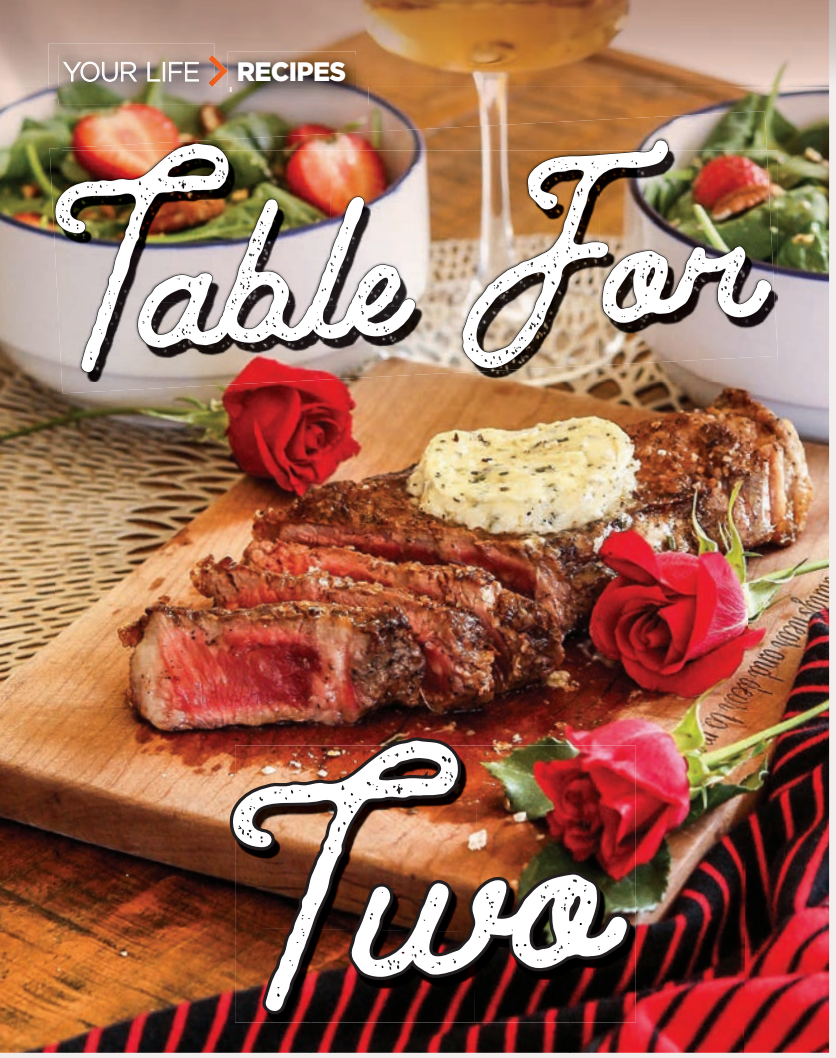


Table For Two

STRIP STEAKS WITH COWBOY BUTTER

Great steak doesn't require a reservation—just a hot pan, a good cut of beef and a moment of confidence.

TOTAL TIME: 18 MINUTES
MAKES: 2 SERVINGS

2 (5-ounce) New York strip steaks or 1 (10-ounce) steak (to share)
Salt and pepper
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
¼ cup Cowboy Butter, divided

1. Pat steak dry with paper towels; season generously on both sides with salt and pepper.
2. Heat a cast-iron skillet over high heat until very hot. Add vegetable oil; swirl to coat pan.
3. Place steak in skillet; cook without moving for 3 to 4 minutes or until a deep brown crust forms.
4. Flip steak; add half of the Cowboy Butter to the pan. Carefully and gently tilt the pan slightly so butter pools to one side; use a spoon to pour it back over steak as it cooks another 3 to 4 minutes (depending on steak's thickness and desired doneness).
5. Transfer steak to a plate; let it rest about 5 minutes (this step is very important to lock in the flavors). Slice steak against the grain, then spoon remaining Cowboy Butter over the top just before serving.

COWBOY BUTTER

Herby, buttery goodness kicks your steak up an extra notch.

TOTAL TIME: 30 MINUTES
MAKES: ⅔ CUP COMPOUND BUTTER

½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened
1 tablespoon coarse Dijon mustard
1 teaspoon freeze-dried chives
1 teaspoon dried parsley
½ teaspoon dried thyme
½ teaspoon paprika
2 teaspoons minced garlic
½ teaspoon kosher salt
⅛ teaspoon pepper
⅛ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes (optional)

1. In a medium bowl, combine softened butter, Dijon mustard, chives and remaining seasonings. Mix together until combined.
2. Lay a piece of plastic wrap flat on the counter; drop butter into center. Fold plastic wrap up and over butter; shape butter into a log. Twist ends of butter wrapper; refrigerate at least 2 hours.
3. Store in fridge for up to a week.

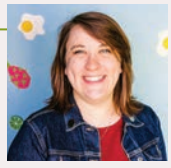
STRAWBERRY-SPINACH SALAD

Serve this sweet yet tangy salad alongside your meal.

TOTAL TIME: 10 MINUTES
MAKES: 2 SERVINGS

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
3 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
1 teaspoon honey
1 teaspoon kosher salt
½ teaspoon Italian seasoning blend
½ teaspoon freshly cracked black pepper
2 cups baby spinach
¼ cup thinly sliced red onions
1 cup sliced strawberries
½ cup whole pecans, broken into pieces

1. To make the dressing: In a small jar, combine olive oil, balsamic vinegar, honey, salt, Italian seasoning and pepper; shake well.
2. To toss the salad: Dress the greens with salad dressing; divide into two bowls and toss. Top with red onions, strawberries and pecans; serve. ///



Recipes and Photos By
Rachel Johnson
On Instagram
@rachelltherecipe

Obstacles

GETTY IMAGES

Patience and perseverance have a magical effect before which difficulties disappear and obstacles vanish.
JOHN QUINCY ADAMS

Don't take yourself too seriously. Know when to laugh at yourself, and find a way to laugh at obstacles that inevitably present themselves.
HALLE BERRY

A man does what he must—in spite of personal consequences, in spite of obstacles and dangers and pressures—and that is the basis of all human morality.
JOHN F. KENNEDY

All the adversity I've had in my life, all my troubles and obstacles, have strengthened me ... You may not realize it when it happens, but a kick in the teeth may be the best thing in the world for you.
WALT DISNEY

For by thee have I run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall.
PSALM 18:29 (KJV)

Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome.
BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

Man is capable of every great heroism; it was man who found a means of conquering the formidable obstacles of his environment, establishing himself lord of the earth, and laying the foundations of civilization.
MARIA MONTESSORI

There will be obstacles. There will be doubters. There will be mistakes. But with hard work, there are no limits.
MICHAEL PHELPS

Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goal.
HENRY FORD

Obstacles don't have to stop you. If you run into a wall, don't turn around and give up. Figure out how to climb it, go through it, or work around it.
MICHAEL JORDAN

Stand up to your obstacles and do something about them. You will find that they haven't half the strength you think they have.
NORMAN VINCENT PEALE

A hero is an ordinary individual who finds the strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles.
CHRISTOPHER REEVE

THERE IS A BETTER WAY.

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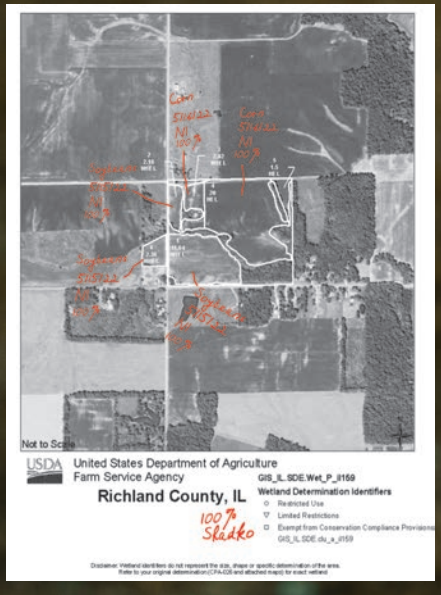

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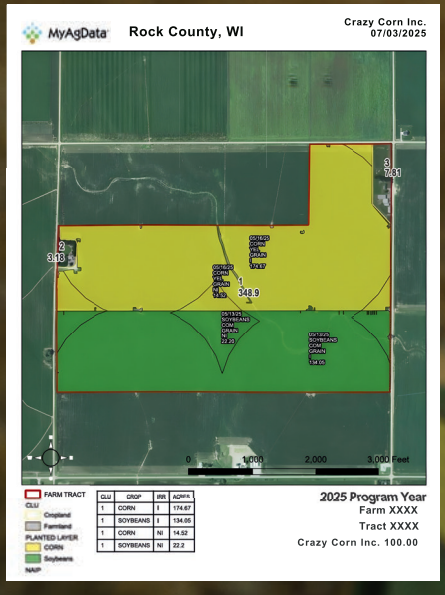

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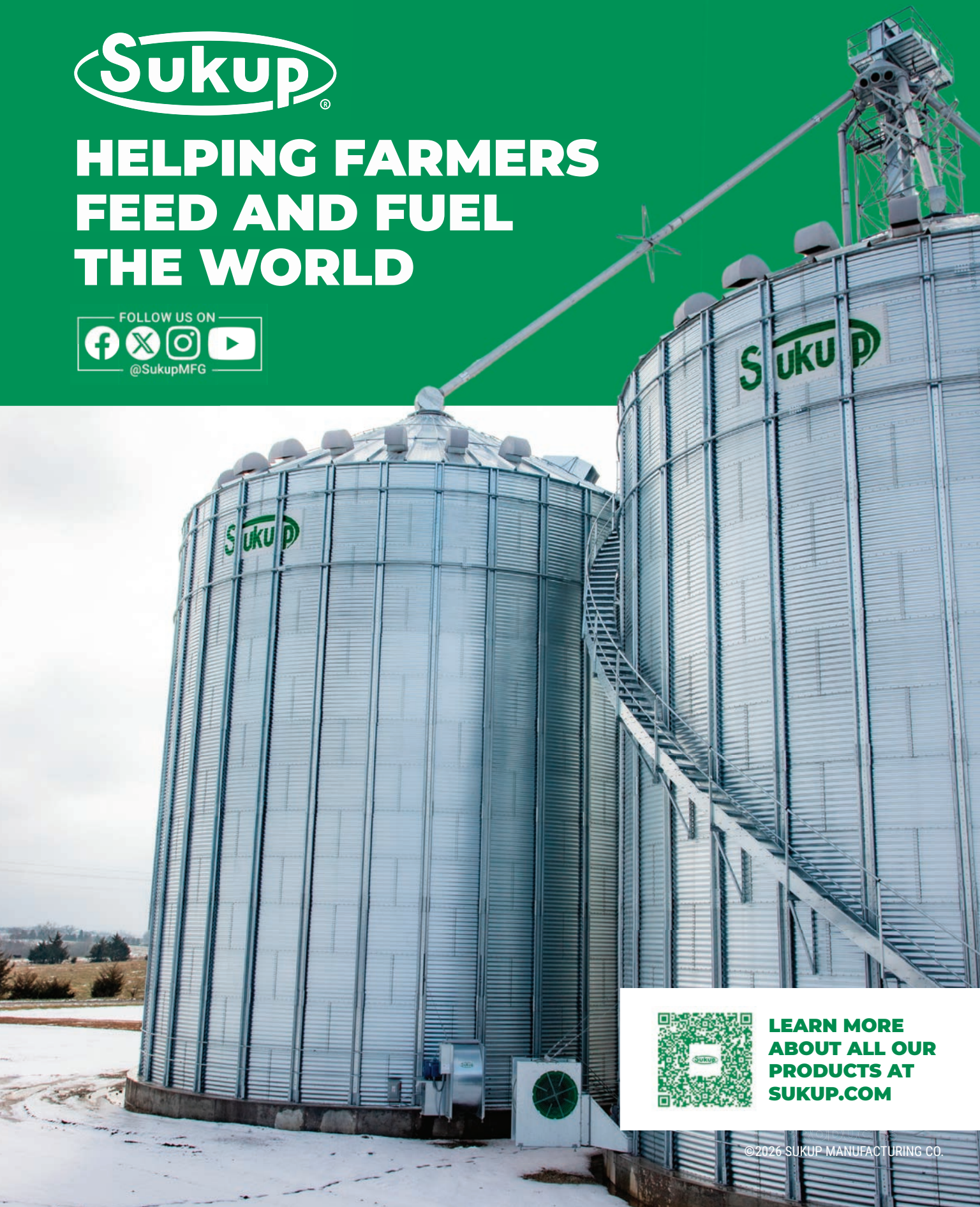

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