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**Wednesday, March 25, 2026**

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# Beginning Farmer Equipment and Infrastructure Grants Open

Minnesota Department of Agriculture

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) is now accepting applications for the Beginning Farmer Equipment and Infrastructure Grant. The program was established by the Minnesota Legislature and supports farmers by helping them access essential equipment and invest in on-farm infrastructure needed to support the future of their farm businesses.

Eligible projects include the purchase of agriculture specific equipment used to grow crops, raise livestock, and store farm products. Projects may also include on-farm infrastructure investments such as wa-

ter access, irrigation systems, fencing, electricity, walk-in coolers, livestock handling systems, grain storage, and production-related structures like barns, livestock buildings, and greenhouses.

To be considered a “beginning” farmer and be eligible for the grant, a person must be in their first 10 years of farming. Priority will be given to farmers with under \$100,000 in recent farm sales, and limited access to land as defined in statute.

“This remains one of the most in-demand grant programs in the MDA’s portfolio,” said MDA Assistant Commissioner Patrice Bailey. “The strong interest we saw last year highlights

how important access to affordable equipment and infrastructure is for beginning farmers. Even small grants can make a meaningful difference as new farmers work to overcome early barriers and establish their operations.”

The MDA may award up to \$700,000 in total funding for this program through a competitive review process. Applicants may request between \$1,000 and \$10,000, with a 25% match required for requests over \$2,000. This is a reimbursement grant, meaning awardees must pay for the full cost of the project upfront and provide documentation of eligible expenses incurred after the grant con-

tract is fully executed to receive reimbursement.

Full grant eligibility requirements, application details, and information session registration are available on the MDA’s Beginning Farmer Equipment and Infrastructure Grant webpage. Applications are due by 4 p.m. on Thursday, March 26.




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CH-4218290

# MDA Launches Biofertilizer Innovation and Efficiency Program

Minnesota Department of Agriculture

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) is introducing the Biofertilizer Innovation and Efficiency Pilot Program, an initiative designed to help farmers improve nitrogen management and adopt innovative technologies that protect water quality and enhance soil health.

Applications for the 2026 growing season opened March 2 and will close on May 1. They are being accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. Farmers who participate can receive \$15 per acre for reducing their commercial nitrogen fertilizer application rate by the lesser of 15%

or 30 pounds per acre when using a qualifying biofertilizer product.

“This program is about supporting farmers who want to try new approaches to nutrient management while maintaining productivity,” said MDA Commissioner Thom Petersen. “By incentivizing the use of biofertilizers and precision technologies, we can reduce nitrogen loss and protect Minnesota’s water resources.”

## Program Details

Available for the 2026 and 2027 growing seasons.

Farmers can enroll 40 to 3,000 acres of eligible farmland in participating Minnesota counties. The

MDA reserves the right to limit the number of acres enrolled per applicant.

Eligible counties: Becker, Benton, Carver, Cass, Crow Wing, Dakota, Dodge, Douglas, Fillmore, Goodhue, Houston, Hubbard, Kandiyohi, Lincoln, Morrison, Mower, Murray, Nicollet, Nobles, Olmsted, Otter Tail, Pipestone, Pope, Rock, Scott, Sherburne, Stearns, Swift, Todd, Wabasha, Wadena, and Winona

Open to all crops with a University of Minnesota-recommended nitrogen fertilizer rate.

Qualifying biofertilizer products must be registered with MDA and provide nitrogen through microorganisms such as bacteria or fungi.

## How to Apply

Register in the State of Minnesota’s SWIFT system to obtain a vendor number

Submit the electronic application form

Applications will be accepted until 4 p.m. May 1 or earlier if program capacity is reached. Grant agreements must be signed by May 29. Farmers will receive payment after submitting documentation verifying nitrogen reduction and biofertilizer use by Nov. 30, 2026. Applications for the 2027 growing season will open next year. A total of \$500,000 will be split between the two growing seasons.

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# Corn Growers Enter New Season Facing Tight Margins Despite Strong Exports

By Jason Vance

As farmers move deeper into the winter planning season, U.S. corn growers are taking stock of the 2025 harvest and looking ahead to spring planting under continued financial pressure.

Jed Bower, president of the National Corn Growers Association (NCGA) and a farmer from southwest Ohio, said weather challenges and rising input costs defined the past growing season and continue to weigh heavily on farm profitability as growers prepare for the 2026 crop.

Bower said much of his region experienced a difficult spring with excessive moisture, followed by dry conditions after mid-July. Rain did not

return until September. While yields on his own farm ultimately held up better than expected, Bower said national results appear to have fallen short of early projections.

“USDA thought we were going to have a giant, huge crop, and they still think it’s going to be big,” Bower said. “But it seems like everybody I talk to is off a little bit. There aren’t those honey spots like they originally thought.”

As final production numbers continue to be refined early this year, Bower said growers are entering the 2026 planning season with extremely tight margins and little available cash flow.


“There’s just no cash flow out there





*Continued on next page*

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for growers,” he said. “As we’re looking to plant the 2026 crop, that’s a real concern.”

On the demand side, Bower pointed to record-setting U.S. corn exports. Last year closed with historic export volumes, and the current marketing year is already on pace to set new records. However, those strong demand signals have yet to be reflected in commodity prices.

“That’s what’s so frustrating,” Bower said. “We’re seeing record exports, but the markets aren’t reacting to it.”

NCGA continues to push for year-round approval of E15 ethanol blends as one potential outlet for excess corn supplies. Bower said expanded ethanol use could significantly reduce inventories and provide price support.

“For every 1% increase in corn grind for ethanol, you’re potentially talking about 450 million bushels,” he said. “With E15, we’re talking a couple billion bushels that could get used up.”

Bower said NCGA has been working closely with the administration

*“For every 1% increase in corn grind for ethanol, you’re potentially talking about 450 million bushels. With E15, we’re talking a couple billion bushels that could get used up.”*

**Jed Bower**  
President of the (NCGA)

and Congress, offering a short list of targeted trade opportunities designed to move large volumes of corn quickly. He credited the Secretary of Agriculture with engaging on those recommendations as part of broader efforts to strengthen export demand.

At the same time, NCGA is turning increased attention to the cost side of the farm economy. The organization

recently launched an input task force to examine fertilizer, seed and other input prices that remain elevated heading into the 2026 growing season.

“When I look at my fertilizer costs, my seed costs and what I brought in this year, the numbers don’t look good,” Bower said. “We’re hearing concerns that foreign markets may be buying some of these inputs cheaper

than we are here, and that’s an issue.”

The task force will work with USDA to analyze pricing dynamics and global competitiveness, with the goal of restoring profitability across rural America.

“When farmers are making money, everything’s good,” Bower said. “But nobody’s making any money right now, and that’s a true problem for ru-



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# USDA to Open Continuous and General Conservation Reserve Program Enrollment for 2026

Submitted

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced the enrollment periods for agricultural producers and landowners to submit offers for the Continuous and General Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is accepting offers for Continuous CRP starting Feb. 12, 2026, through March 20, 2026. Enrollment for General CRP will run from March 9, 2026, through April 17, 2026. FSA will announce dates for Grassland CRP signup in the near future.

CRP is USDA's flagship conservation program, providing financial and technical support to agricultural producers and landowners who place unproductive or marginal cropland under contract for 10-15 years and who agree to voluntarily convert the land to beneficial vegetative cover to improve water quality, prevent soil erosion and support wildlife habitat. The Continuing Appropriations, Agriculture, Legislative Branch, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Extensions Act, 2026, extends FSA's authority to administer CRP through Sept. 30, 2026.

"We're still very close to the 27-million-acre statutory cap with 1.9 million acres available for all CRP enrollments this fiscal year so enrollment is likely to be competitive," USDA's Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation Richard Fordyce said. "This isn't about the total number of acres enrolled, it's about producers and landowners offering and USDA accepting the acres that can best deliver real, lasting benefits to soil, water and wildlife."

## Continuous CRP (Signup 65)

FSA will batch Continuous CRP offers submitted by interested agricultural producers and landowners. Offers to re-enroll expiring CRP continuous acreage will be accepted on a first-come, first-serve basis. New acreage offered in continuous CRP practices will be considered for acceptance on a first-come, first-serve basis if they support USDA conservation priorities including but not limited to practices that address water quality, such as filter strips and grass waterways, and practices that restore native ecosystems or target specific resource concerns.

The first Continuous CRP batching

period ends on March 20, 2026. Offers submitted after this date will be considered for acceptance in subsequent batching periods if acreage remains available.

Continuous CRP participants voluntarily offer environmentally sensitive lands, typically smaller parcels than offered through General CRP including wetlands, riparian buffers, and varying wildlife habitats. In return, they receive annual rental payments and cost-share assistance to establish long-term, resource-conserving vegetative cover.

## Continuous CRP enrollment options include:

- Clean Lakes, Estuaries and Rivers (CLEAR) Initiative: Prioritizes water quality practices on the land that, if enrolled, will help reduce sediment loadings, nutrient loadings, and harmful algal blooms. The vegetative covers also contribute to increased wildlife populations.
- CLEAR30 (a component of the CLEAR Initiative): Offers additional incentives for water quality practice adoption and can be accessed in 30-year contracts.
- Highly Erodible Land Initiative

(HELI): Producers and landowners can enroll in CRP to establish long-term cover on highly erodible cropland that has a weighted erodibility index greater than or equal to 20.

- Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP): Addresses high priority conservation objectives of states and Tribal governments on agricultural lands in specific geographic areas.

- State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement Initiative (SAFE): Restores vital habitat in order to meet high-priority state wildlife conservation goals.

## General CRP (Signup 66)

General CRP offers are submitted through a competitive bid process. After the enrollment period closes, General CRP offers are ranked and scored by FSA, using nationally established environmental benefits criteria. USDA will announce accepted offers once ranking and scoring for all offers is completed. In addition to annual rental payments, approved General CRP participants may also be eligible for cost-share assistance to establish long-term, resource-conserving vegetative cover.

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# Renewable Fuels Association Pushes for Year-Round E15 Sales Amid Legislative Setback

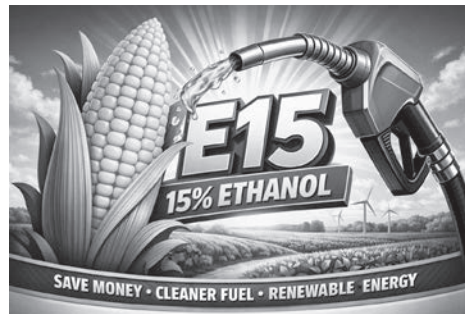
By Jason Vance

The Renewable Fuels Association (RFA) is pushing to make E15, a gasoline blend containing 15% ethanol, available year-round, a move the industry says would benefit both consumers and retailers.

Derrick Piney, chairman of the RFA, described the effort as a long-awaited milestone.

“It’s been a long battle over many years,” Piney said. “Last December, we thought we had it approved, and we were getting really close in 2025.”

However, efforts to advance legislation allowing year-round E15 sales recently faced a setback. An attempt to pass the E15 bill as part of a funding measure fell through. Instead, House leaders created a Rural Energy Council, which will study E15 expansion along with other issues affecting the renewable fuels industry, including U.S. refinery capacity, the Re-



newable Fuel Standard, EPA’s Renewable Identification Numbers, market access, and federal regulations that impact American energy production.

The council, appointed by House Speaker Mike Johnson, is expected to develop bills and submit them to Congress by February 15, with the House considering the legislation by February 25.

Piney said the industry remains optimistic despite the setback. “With the government shutdown behind us and

the creation of this council, there’s still a good path forward to move E15 expansion and renewable fuel policies through Congress,” he said.

If successful, the changes could bring a more stable market for ethanol, lower costs at the pump for consumers, and a boost to renewable energy production nationwide.

Currently, E15 can legally be sold during the winter months, roughly from mid-September to June 1. During the summer, it is restricted to use in flex-fuel vehicles due to provisions in the Clean Air Act, which Piney called “an archaic statute that needs to be changed.”

Retailers have been hesitant to offer E15 during summer months because reconfiguring pumps and storage tanks is costly and complicated. “If they don’t have the ability to sell it as flex fuel, they have to turn it off,” Piney said. “It

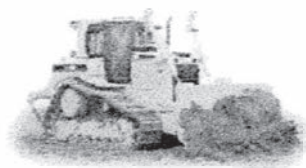
also inhibits consumers because they lose the opportunity to buy cheaper fuel. E15 is about 5 to 10 cents cheaper per gallon than standard E10.”

The RFA is also monitoring regulatory challenges related to the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS). Each year, the Environmental Protection Agency sets volume obligations for ethanol blending, but exemptions granted to small refineries have caused disruptions. Piney emphasized the need for the RFS program to reallocate waived obligations to maintain stable demand for renewable fuels.

Trade remains a critical focus for the industry. The United States exported several billion gallons of ethanol last year, Piney said, making international markets essential for the sector. “Our domestic demand isn’t as strong as what we can produce, so we’re counting on those exports,” he said.

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# New Minnesota Farm Advocate Joins Statewide Network

Minnesota Department of Agriculture

In the face of mounting financial pressures, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) has added a new Farm Advocate to its statewide network for producer assistance.

Located in northwest Minnesota, Ron Dvergsten joins 11 other Farm Advocates who offer one-on-one help and advice to farmers facing crises caused by financial problems or natural disasters. Their services are confidential and are free of charge.

Ron Dvergsten, newest MDA Farm Advocate, will be located in northwest Minnesota.

"I have worked in agriculture here in northwest Minnesota my entire life," said Ron. "I understand the area and its diversity, having spent the majority of my career as an ag lender and Farm Business Management instructor, so I'm eager to serve Minnesota producers through the Farm Advocate Program."

Farm Advocates like Ron provide help with financial planning, lender negotiations, and farm programs. They work with producers to prepare for and attend mediation sessions and help them strategize about bankruptcy and foreclosure. Farm Advocates also provide guidance on federal and state farm programs, and referrals for legal, so-

cial, and human services.

"Farmers are facing many financial pressures, from high input costs to low market prices and everyday living expenses, but they don't have to go it alone," said MDA Commissioner Thom Petersen. "If you feel your farm operation slipping underwater, it's good to call a Farm Advocate as soon as possible."

The Farm Advocate Program has

been supported by the MDA since 1984 and was born out of the 1980s farm crisis. Advocates have helped thousands of Minnesota farmers over the decades.

To learn more and find the closest Farm Advocate, visit the MDA website at [www.mda.state.mn.us/farmadvocates](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/farmadvocates). Minnesota farmers can directly contact a Farm Advocate closest to them.

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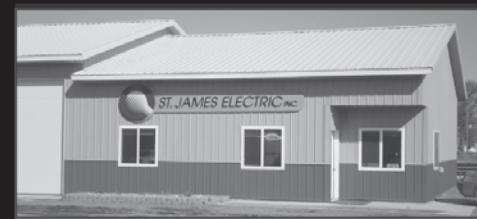
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# Propane Technologies Offer New Opportunities for Modern Agriculture

By Jason Vance

When most farmers think of propane, grain drying and heating livestock buildings usually come to mind. But according to Michael Newland with the Propane Education and Research Council (PERC), propane's role in agriculture is expanding well beyond those traditional uses.

Newland said the propane industry is actively highlighting new technologies that can help farmers improve efficiency, reliability and resilience on their operations.

"We run a lot of irrigation engines on propane," Newland said. "You see them across Kansas, Nebraska, California, down through the Mississippi Delta and into Florida. Those are some of the biggest areas for us."

Beyond irrigation, propane is also gaining traction in specialty and organic agriculture. Newland point-

ed to propane-powered weed control systems that use flame to manage weeds without chemicals. In California, propane-fueled systems are also being used to heat water and inject steam into soil to control nematodes and sterilize weed seeds before planting, particularly in lettuce production. Similar technology is expected to be tested in strawberries in the near future.

"It's an interesting space," Newland said. "We've got a lot of propane available, and we're always looking for new markets and new ways to use it instead of just exporting that product."

One area drawing increased attention is propane's potential to relieve pressure on the nation's electrical grid. Newland referenced a U.S. Department of Energy report released July 7 that warns of significantly increased outage risks over the next two to five years.



"They're talking about outages going up dramatically in a five-year span," he said. "We've got a lot of older power plants being retired, and all this new AI technology uses a tremendous amount of energy. That's going to be a major strain on the grid."

For agriculture, reliable power is critical. Farms operate on their own schedules, not when electricity is available, Newland noted. To address that challenge, PERC is promoting propane-powered generation systems ranging from small 15-kilowatt units suitable for homes or emergency backup to large systems producing one to one-and-a-half megawatts that can tie directly into the grid.

"These systems are already supplementing grid shortcomings in some areas," Newland said. "If you're putting in a new livestock confinement

building or expanding your operation, propane power can be the lifeblood that keeps things running when the grid goes down."

To encourage adoption, the Propane Education and Research Council is offering financial incentives through the Propane Farm Research Program (PFRP). Farmers who invest in propane-powered equipment may qualify for rebates of up to \$10,000 per piece of equipment, depending on the category.

"We want farmers to know the propane industry is interested in their success," Newland said. "If you're buying equipment around the farm that runs on our fuel, we encourage you to look into this program."

More information, including program rules and an online application, is available at [propane.com/pfrp](http://propane.com/pfrp)

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# Farm to Food Security Grants Open

Minnesota Department of Agriculture

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) is now accepting applications for the Farm to Food Security Grant program. Established by the Minnesota Legislature in 2025, the program is modeled after the former federal Local Food Purchase Assistance Program and supports local farmers and producers by funding projects that purchase local food and distribute it to Minnesotans experiencing food insecurity.

Individuals, nonprofit organizations, for-profit businesses, Tribal governments, government entities, agricultural cooperatives, economic development organizations, and

educational institutions are eligible to apply. The program supports purchases of Minnesota-grown and -raised foods including produce, meats, and other whole, minimally processed, and processed foods with at least one primary ingredient that is 80% grown or raised in Minnesota. Grant funds may only be used for food distributions that take place in Minnesota.

“This program connects Minnesota grown food with people who need it, while helping small farmers build new markets and stable income,” said MDA Commissioner Thom Petersen. “We modeled it after a federal program that demonstrated real impact, and I appreciate the bipartisan

work at the Legislature that made this program possible in Minnesota.”

The MDA may award up to \$1.3 million in total funding for this program through a competitive review process. Applicants may request between \$20,000 and \$100,000, with a dollar-for-dollar match required on all funds over \$50,000. This is a reimbursement grant, meaning awardees will need to pay for the project costs first, then submit receipts after the contract is signed in order to receive reimbursement.

Full grant eligibility requirements and application details are available on the MDA’s Farm to Food Security webpage. Applications are due by 4 p.m. on Tuesday, March 31, 2026.




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# Farmfest Organizers Plan for Large Crowds in 2026

Planning for Minnesota Farmfest is well underway for the 2026 season. The show is scheduled for August 4, 5, and 6. IDEAg Group, the event's planning team, is preparing for one of the largest events in several years.

In honor of America's 250th anniversary, Farmfest is going to celebrate the role ag has played throughout America's history. Attendees can expect a showcase and demonstration of modern farming equipment and a festival environment including special food and drinks. Members of the military are granted free entry to the show.

The annual Farmfest Forums will welcome candidates running in hotly-contested U.S. congressional and



Minnesota gubernatorial races. Forums are scheduled for Tuesday, Aug. 4 and Wednesday, Aug. 5. This year's Forum is sponsored by the Minnesota Farm Bureau Foundation.

2026.

Equipment for the event is provided by sponsors from Kibble Equipment, Sanco Equipment, Ziegler Ag Equipment and Prime Attachments.

Organizers are planning for family fun events as well. The Kids' Zone is returning with games and activities as well as the annual kids' pedal pull event – including a new competition for parents using adult-sized pedal tractors.

Attendees should visit Farmfest.com periodically throughout the spring and summer to find out more as plans take shape. Agribusinesses looking to secure space at the trade show can also visit Farmfest.com for more information

The skid steer rodeo is back for its second year. Attendees can sign up to drive a skid steer through an obstacle course to compete for the fastest time, prizes and bragging rights through

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# US Grains Council Director Highlights Trends in Corn, Soybean Markets

By Jason Vance

The U.S. corn and soybean markets continue to face challenges amid changing trade dynamics, according to Andrew Brandt, director of trade policy with the U.S. Grains and Bioproducts Council.

“Right now, there’s a lot of consternation about what’s going on with trade,” Brandt said. “Soy had a tough summer with the Chinese market, and sorghum faced similar challenges. Farmers are closely watching how these trade issues

develop.”

Brandt noted that long-term trends are shifting toward sustainability. Global customers increasingly seek information on the environmental impact of crops, including carbon footprints and nutrient management.

“To remain competitive with producers in South America and elsewhere, U.S. farmers not only need to grow high-yield corn but also demonstrate the lowest environmental impact,” Brandt explained. “Our Corn Sustainability Assurance Protocol (CSAP), now in its

third year, helps farmers provide this information to buyers worldwide.”

The CSAP program tracks and verifies sustainable practices, from field to market. It originated from a conversation among farmers within the council, Brandt said, and has since gained international adoption.

Brandt emphasized the role of traceability in meeting consumer demand. “Traceability for corn and soy isn’t difficult technically—it just requires keeping crops segregated—but the challenge is finding buyers willing to support the

costs,” he said.

The council works with both corporate grain companies and farmer members, including state corn grower associations and national sorghum groups, to address these market needs. Offices in Japan, Korea, Central and Latin America help develop demand and maintain U.S. competitiveness in the global marketplace.

“Many farmers may not see the work we do overseas, but it’s critical in representing U.S. corn and sorghum globally,” Brandt said.








Ben Stoterau Photography

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# Strategic Farming: Let's talk crops! Discussed news from the grain markets, FINBIN, USDA, and the Farm Bill

University of Minnesota Extension

Low commodity prices and high input costs have squeezed farm finances. We welcomed North Dakota State University Crop Economist Dr. Frayne Olson and Nathan Hulinsky, UMN Extension educator-ag business management. They discussed what they're seeing in the markets, data, and the Farm Bill and their implications for the ag economy.

Nathan Hulinsky began the program with a look at Minnesota's total agricultural row crop production. He shared 2023, 2024, and 2025 crop production data to demonstrate the scale of each crop produced within the state.

The national rankings for Minnesota crops are impressive: Minnesota grows the fourth-largest corn crop, third-largest soybean crop, tenth-largest hay crop, and third-largest wheat crop. Minnesota is the national leader in sugar beet and

oat production, while ranking second overall in dry edible bean production.

Minnesota corn producers broke the 200 bushel ceiling for the first time in 2025 with a yield of 201 bushels per acre on 8.9 million planted acres. The yields of all leading Minnesota acreage crops were strong in 2025 compared to 2023 and 2024 production levels.

While yields are trending up, overall farm profits have been trending down. Minnesota farm financials are closely tracked by the University of Minnesota's Farm Financial Database (FINBIN) "2024 Minnesota farm profits were the lowest on record going back twenty years," shared Nathan Hulinsky, "2025 data is not yet finalized. It may show the benefit of increased crop yields but it depends on where input and commodity prices end up".

Some avenues for financial relief were discussed. Farmer Bridge payments will

be made on a per acre amount based on 2025 planted acres, covering up to 35% of the expected loss for the planted crop. Some of the acre payment amounts were: Corn \$44.36, soybean \$30.88, spring wheat \$39.35, and oats \$81.75. It is noteworthy that MN is the number one state nationally in oat production.

The One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA) passed in July of 2025 had many important changes for crop producers that historically had been addressed in the Farm Bill. All crop commodity reference prices had a 10%-20% increase in the OBBBA over the 2018 Farm Bill.

Sign-up for the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs is expected to open at the end of the calendar year. However, Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) sign-up is currently open for risk management in dairy production.

The title of Dr. Frayne Olson's presen-

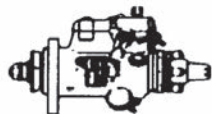
tation was: "Buckle Up! 2026 Crop Market and Trade Outlook." He expanded on Nathan Hulinsky's presentation with a look at domestic and international grain markets.

United States 2025 corn production established a new national record for total bushels, surpassing the previous record yield by 1.7 billion bushels. "To put this in perspective, this corn surplus is about the same as the total annual size of the United States wheat crop", shared Dr. Olson.

Luckily for corn producers, corn demand is up at least to the degree of increased stocks. Domestic feed uses of corn are strong, even above historical highs in the early 2000s. Ethanol uses show fairly stable corn consumption across recent years. The biggest positive news is from exports. Total U.S. corn

*Continued on next page*

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exports to the globe are 30% above last marketing year's pace, and last year was a record.

Mexico is the largest customer for U.S. corn and they have increased buying from the U.S. significantly year-over-year. More calves are being fed in Mexico due to the New World screwworm outbreak. Calves which were typically finished on feed in the United States will now need to be finished in Mexico due to the cattle biosecurity blockade.

Soybean market fundamentals were reviewed as well. The crush volume of soybeans in the United States continues to increase year-over-year with existing plants running at capacity and new plants in the Dakotas and other areas which are coming online. This domestic crush increase is good news for soybean producers.

However, the U.S. soybean export market has been soft compared to the last four years. A little more price volatility in soybean markets than in corn markets currently but the chances of a sustained rally for United States soybeans decrease as we enter into the Brazilian harvest season and a sideways trading pattern is predicted.

For more information from University of Minnesota Extension, visit [extension.umn.edu/crop-production](http://extension.umn.edu/crop-production).

# Efficiency, nutrient management key agronomy lessons from 2025 season

By Jason Vance

As producers look back on the 2025 growing season and prepare for 2026, agronomic efficiency — particularly nitrogen management — stands out as one of the most important lessons learned, according to Cody Hornaday of Koch Agronomic Services.

Hornaday said tighter farm economics have sharpened the focus on making every input count, especially fertilizer dollars.

“When you think about it from a fertility perspective, specifically nitrogen, making sure we’re using all of the pounds of nitrogen that we’re applying is one of the most critical

things,” Hornaday said.

In several regions during the 2025 season, excessive moisture led to significant nitrogen losses through leaching and denitrification. Hornaday said those losses resulted in yield limitations because nitrogen was no longer available to the crop through black layer.

To combat those losses moving forward, Hornaday emphasized the importance of stabilizing nitrogen with nitrification inhibitors.

“Ensuring nitrogen remains in the root zone all the way to black layer is critical,” Hornaday said, noting that wet conditions across much of the country made this especially import-

ant in 2025.

Hornaday also pointed to nitrogen losses tied to June weather conditions, when many growers applied topdress urea. Without timely rainfall, volatilization losses were common.

“In those situations, urease inhibitors can help slow volatilization losses until incorporating rainfall occurs,” he said.

Beyond nitrogen, Hornaday said growers should be cautious about cutting micronutrient applications as they manage input costs.

“When nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium are dialed in, you’re really

Continued on page 22

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# Minnesota Farmers Union members gather for Lobby Day

Submitted

More than 80 Minnesota Farmers Union (MFU) members traveled to St. Paul on March 3 for MFU's Lobby Day.

Members met with nearly 40 policymakers, including Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan, Secretary of State Steve Simon, Assistant Attorney General Elizabeth Odette, Agriculture Commissioner Thom Petersen, Department of Natural Resources Commissioner Sarah Strommen, Revenue Commissioner Paul Marquart, Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Aric Putnam and House Agriculture Committee Co-Chair Rick Hansen.

**Members spoke to policymakers about four key areas of concern:**

Supporting farmers during this difficult financial time by fully funding the Rural Finance Authority (RFA), and reauthorizing and strengthening the Farmer Lender Mediation program.

Lowering healthcare costs and improving access, including by expanding public healthcare programs to cover every Minnesotan, capping in-

surance costs, lowering drug prices, investing in rural Emergency Medical Services and opposing efforts to privatize healthcare programs.

Investing in the next generation of farmers by fully funding the Beginning Farmer Tax Credit.

Expanding programs that fight hunger and support new markets, including the Local Food Purchase Assistance program and Farm to School.

"Thank you to the more than 80 members who took time out of their schedule to come to St. Paul to meet with legislators and other state leaders," said MFU President Gary Wertish. "Lobby Day is a great opportunity for members to share their concerns with lawmakers and advocate for policies that will help them succeed."

"When members show up and share their experiences, they strengthen our democracy," said MFU Vice President Anne Schwagerl. "Lobby Day builds lasting, working relationships between Farmers Union members and the people who represent them. It ensures rural voices are heard where decisions are made and helps shape a state that works for families, farmers and their communities."



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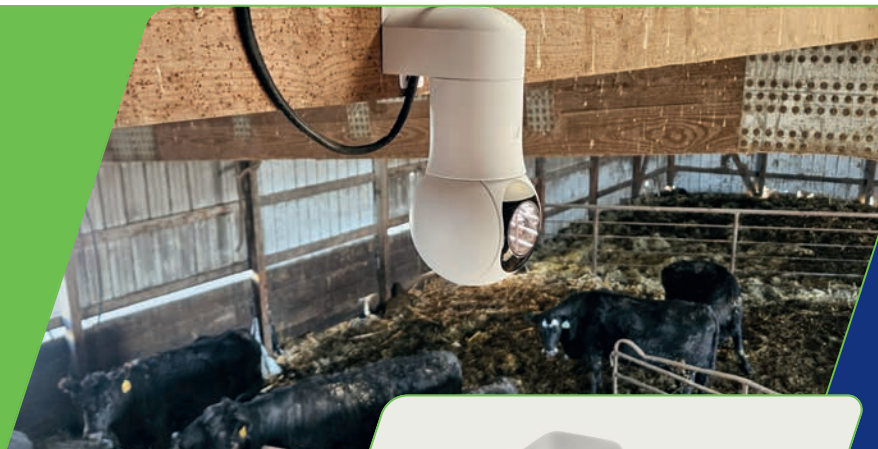
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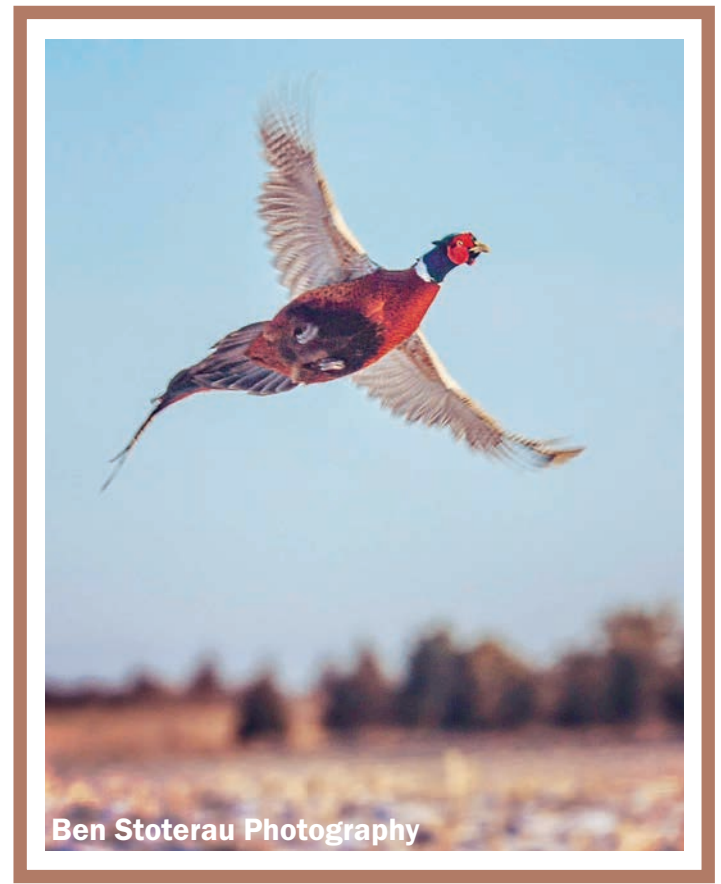
looking for the next limiting factor,” he said. “If micronutrients are that limiting factor and you skip them, you’re losing yield.”

Hornaday said properly managed micronutrient applications help ensure crops have access to essential nutrients needed to maximize yield potential.

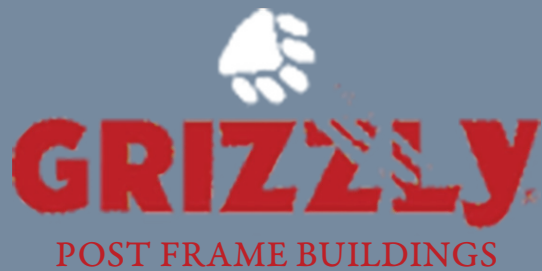
Looking ahead to 2026, Hornaday encouraged producers to rely on soil and tissue testing to guide nutrient decisions and ensure balanced fertility programs.

“Managing with soil tests and tissue tests helps ensure plants have everything they need,” he said. “That includes stabilizing nitrogen against all forms of loss and making sure micronutrients are covered as well.”

By focusing on nutrient efficiency and protecting fertilizer investments, Hornaday said growers can improve return on investment while positioning crops for maximum yield potential in the year ahead.



Ben Stoterau Photography



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