THE NORTH DAKOTA
# Soybean
GROWER MAGAZINE

VOLUME 15 • ISSUE 6
DECEMBER 2026



# Soy to the World

Connecting our growers with global partners: Inbound and Outbound missions of 2026

BUILDING A BUDGET FOR 2027

PRIORITIZING FARMERS' MENTAL HEALTH

NDSU'S NEW SOYBEAN VARIETY

NDSC 2026 Annual Report Enclosed




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Administrator
Piscicola Tumburagua Pez
in Huila, Colombia.

**Feeding tilapia at Piscicola Tumburagua Pez in Huila, Colombia.**

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# Cover Story

In 2026, soybean farmer representatives from across North Dakota visited nine different countries, building strong partnerships with every mission. Find out who they were, where they went and what they discussed.

Read the cover story on page 16.





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## A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# At North Dakota Soybean, Everything Starts with Farmers

By Stephanie **Sinner**
*NDSGA and NDSC Executive Director*



The strong partnership between the North Dakota Soybean Council and the North Dakota Soybean Growers Association allows us to better serve you, North Dakota farmers, with relevant and timely information, research, advocacy and resources for stronger operations.

That working relationship is why *The North Dakota Soybean Grower Magazine* lands in your mailbox six times a year. We bring you the stories, insights and information that affect your operation.

In the months to come, we'll be refreshing design elements and approaching the content which we cover with renewed focus. As always, we're committed to delivering timely, relevant news; views; and features in order to help you understand what's happening, why it matters, and how it affects you.

We know that this year has been challenging for agriculture. Your resilience, dedication and hard work continue to drive our industry forward. Thank you for everything you do on your farms, in your communities and for North Dakota agriculture.

**P.S. We'd love to hear your ideas and the topics about which you'd like to learn more: publisher@ndsoybean.org. Thank you for being a valued reader of *The North Dakota Soybean Grower Magazine.***

## NDSGA PRESIDENT'S LETTER

# Grateful for Another Year in Agriculture

By Chris **McDonald**
*NDSGA Board President*



As we reach the end of another year, I find myself thinking less about the challenges we faced and more about the people, opportunities and blessings that helped us work through them.

Farming is never easy, and every growing season brings uncertainty. Still, there is much to be grateful for as North Dakota soybean farmers.

First, I am grateful for the opportunity to farm. There is something special about working the same land that has supported families and communities for generations. Each spring, we put seed in the ground with hope and faith. By harvest, we are reminded, once again, that farming is about more than bushels. It is about responsibility, perseverance and caring for the land with which we have been entrusted.

I am grateful to our families and neighbors. Farming can be demanding, and no one gets through a season alone. Whether it is helping with planting, sharing equipment, checking on a neighbor or simply taking time to visit at the end of a long day, those relationships matter. Rural communities continue to show what can be accomplished when people work together.

I am also thankful for the people who support agriculture beyond the farm. Truck drivers, grain handlers, elevator employees, agronomists, equipment dealers, lenders, researchers and many others all play an important role in moving our crop from the field to customers around the world.

I am thankful for Senators Hoeven and Cramer as well as Representative Fedorchak. It is easy to see that they are passionate about representing North Dakota agriculture. We are fortunate to have them fighting for us.

As president of the North Dakota Soybean Growers Association (NDSGA), I am grateful for the opportunity to represent soybean farmers. Our organization gives producers a voice on issues that affect our farms, and that voice is especially important when policy decisions are being made. I am thankful that the members of our board are so dedicated to get our message and opinions to the people who are making decisions about our livelihood. We are backed by the most professional and knowledgeable staff, who make our board run like a well-oiled machine.

I am thankful that North Dakota soybean farmers understand the importance of being involved. When farmers share their experiences with elected officials and policymakers, the growers help explain how decisions made in Washington, D.C., affect farms and families. Becoming a member of the NDSGA helps make all our voices stronger and more unified. Call or go online to join today.

Finally, I am thankful for the opportunity to look ahead. There will always be challenges, but North Dakota agriculture has a strong foundation. We have capable farmers, supportive communities and an industry with people who are willing to work together.

As the holidays approach, I hope everyone has time to rest, enjoy family and appreciate the people who make this life possible.

From all of us at the North Dakota Soybean Growers Association, thank you for your support.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

# NDSGA Scholarship Invests in the Next Generation of Agricultural Leaders

—By Suzanne **Wolf**, NDSGA Director of Communications

Agriculture's future depends on more than what happens in the field. Strong leadership, effective advocacy and informed policy decisions also play an important role in supporting North Dakota's soybean producers and rural communities.

For Grace Olin of New Salem, North Dakota, a passion for agriculture and leadership is shaping her future. Olin is studying agricultural education at North Dakota State University (NDSU) and is actively involved with several student organizations and leadership roles.

She serves as a College of Agriculture, Food Systems and Natural Resources (CAFSNR) Ambassador and as a Student Engagement Ambassador for the Collegiate Farm Bureau. She is the vice president of the Saddle & Sirloin Club and is a member of Blue Key National Honor Society.

Through her studies and campus involvement, Olin hopes to have a positive influence on agriculture by helping students develop the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the industry.

"I'm passionate about helping students learn about agriculture and develop the skills they need to succeed," Olin said. "I'm grateful for this scholarship and the support it provides as I work toward my goals in agricultural education and making a positive impact on the future of agriculture."



Grace Olin, New Salem, ND, is studying Agriculture Education at North Dakota State University.

Olin is a 2026 recipient of the North Dakota Soybean Growers Association (NDSGA) scholarship. In 2026, the NDSGA transitioned its scholarship to a new Agricultural Policy and Leadership Scholarship, reflecting an expanded focus on developing future agricultural advocates and leaders.

Established in partnership with the North Dakota State University Foundation, the scholarship supports sophomores, juniors and seniors enrolled at NDSU who participate in the Agricultural Policy and Leadership Program. The preferred annual award is $5,000, which is distributed in payments of $2,500 each semester.

"The future of agriculture depends on strong leaders who understand the challenges soybean farmers face and are prepared to advocate for their needs," stated Stephanie Cook, the NDSGA vice president and a farmer from Davenport. "Through this scholarship, we're investing in students like Grace who are building the knowledge and leadership skills to make a difference. We want to help develop the next generation of agricultural advocates who will support our soybean producers, strengthen rural communities and help shape the future of agriculture in North Dakota."

As part of the scholarship, recipients are asked to present to the NDSGA board, explaining how their studies, research or work experience benefits soybean producers. The presentation gives students an opportunity to connect their academic experiences with the issues and opportunities facing North Dakota agriculture.

Through this investment, the NDSGA is helping cultivate the next generation of leaders who will support soybean farmers, strengthen rural communities and contribute to the future of North Dakota's agriculture.


# Earn $100 off your next seed purchase!




North Dakota Soybean Growers Association

**The rewards NDSGA members have become accustomed to.**

The $100 Seed Voucher Program is another benefit that you receive when you renew your three-year membership to the North Dakota Soybean Growers Association. This voucher program is sponsored by a number of leading seed companies.



—By Daniel **Lemke**, Editor-in-Chief

# Covering the Issues in 80 Days

## NDSGA Gears up for the 2027 Session

When North Dakota lawmakers kick off the 2027 legislative session in Bismarck on January 5, 2027, they'll have a maximum of 80 days to cover a myriad of topics affecting the state's residents.

For the entirety of that session, the North Dakota Soybean Growers Association (NDSGA) will be monitoring bills and advocating for farmers on issues that are important to agriculture and rural communities.

Senators and representatives have until late January to introduce bills, but some of the key issues the lawmakers will address are already well-known because interim committees have been at work for months.

NDSGA Legislative Director Parrell Grossman said that funding for rural roads, bridges and infrastructure will be a priority for the NDSGA because nearly every bushel of soybeans in the state begins its journey to market on a rural road.

"We recognize funding requests may be limited depending on the state's budget, but we want to keep a unified voice across agriculture," Grossman stated.

# Caucus Focuses on Rural Issues

When the 2027 North Dakota Legislature convenes on January 5, a group of dedicated legislators will work together to address issues affecting rural North Dakota, including agriculture, rural communities and local economies.

Formed in 2025 by Senator Janne Myrdal, the rural caucus provides a forum for legislators committed to ensuring rural perspectives are represented in state policy discussions.

"It's rural, which means everything from healthcare, to schools, to quality of living, to roads for sugarbeet farmers," Senator Myrdal said.

About 50 members of the legislature are part of the rural caucus, and it has quickly gained clout.

"About a month into session, people were asking, 'What does the rural caucus think?' And I'm amazed because it usually takes a decade to build a caucus," Myrdal explained. "It became a fearsome group pretty quickly, certainly on taxes and other issues."



Sen. Janne Myrdal

Myrdal explained that the caucus provides lawmakers with a platform to talk with each other about bills that are being discussed as well as the bills' potential influence on rural North Dakota, even if the members don't always agree.

"We need to just have the windows open and feel the breeze and know what's going on," Myrdal added. "It's a delightfully organic group, but with 50 of us, there's some political power there for sure. We are individual lawmakers. We have our own bills and push our own thing for our districts and the state, but there are areas where we can join forces. And as the saying goes, power belongs to those who show up."

Myrdal described how rural North Dakota faces a wide range of challenges, including infrastructure, healthcare, childcare and tax relief. Even issues such as rural grocery stores can't be overlooked.

Myrdal and other members of the caucus are vocal about the need for fertilizer independence because the region is in what she calls a "fertilizer desert."

Myrdal said the caucus will likely work on ways to intelligently address concerns and opportunities related to data centers.

## SBARE Funding

Funding for the State Board of Agricultural Research and Education (SBARE) is an area of concern for the NDSGA during the 2027 session.

A critical priority for SBARE is restoring Governor Armstrong's proposed 10% reduction in operating expenses for the North Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station (NDAES).

Grossman explained that SBARE identified operating support as its sole 2027 legislative priority for the NDAES.

SBARE also has requests for:

- $5.7 million in ongoing support
- $3 million for the Bolley Agricultural Laboratory
- $1.8 million for the main research center
- $900,000 for the branch research centers.

## Property Tax Relief

Property tax relief for farmers will be on the NDSGA's legislative radar. Potential zoning changes related to animal agriculture are always a concern, and funding for value-added ag ventures could also be on the docket. Water issues will likely be an important part of this session.

"North Dakota farmers are coordinating between Bismarck and Washington, D.C., trying to get some resolution or further clarity on drainage and water management," declared Kulm, North Dakota, farmer, American Soybean Association director, and NDSGA industry and government relations committee chair Josh Gackle.

## Fertilizer

Input costs are another front-burner issue for farmers because diesel prices have climbed in recent months while fertilizer costs have also escalated.

"I think the main push in Bismarck is going to be around what can we do to manage the input side of what farmers are facing," Gackle asserted.

Grossman anticipates that the NDSGA will closely follow the possibility, stating, "There is a hugely critical need for fertilizer for producers."

Although the Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) movement is a national effort, the NDSGA will be on alert for state developments that could affect agriculture.

"It's important that we keep our eyes and ears on any developments, as most rural states are anticipating continued efforts in topics related to food, pesticides, animal agriculture, et cetera," Grossman contended. "Anything that diminishes the use of oil seeds and soybeans in that process is going to be a concern."

## Staying Connected

In addition to issue-related advocacy, NDSGA leaders will spend time meeting and connecting with both new and incumbent lawmakers in order to build rapport.

"One thing that we talk about quite a bit is there's fewer and fewer farmers in the legislature," Gackle stated. "So, one of our main things is going to be meeting and talking with current and new members of the North Dakota legislature and reaffirming that, even if they represent an urban district in Grand Forks, Minot, Jamestown or wherever, the entire state is dependent upon the agriculture economy."

# Why Farmer Advocates Work Year-Round

By Parrell **Grossman**
*NDSGA Legislative Director*



As the lobbyist representing North Dakota soybean growers, one of the questions I hear is as follows: What does a lobbyist actually do for me?

My answer is simple: I work to make sure that your voice is heard when decisions are being made.

When the North Dakota Legislature convenes in January 2027, I will be at the capitol representing the interests of soybean growers.

My work, however, does not begin when the session starts, and the job certainly does not end when legislators go home. Effective advocacy is a year-round responsibility.

Prior to the legislative session, I engage with legislators, state officials, other agricultural organizations and stakeholders about issues that could affect soybean growers. I monitor emerging proposals, learn what policymakers are thinking and work to identify potential problems before they become legislative battles.

That early involvement is important. Once a bill has been introduced and is moving through the legislative process, there may be limited opportunities to make significant changes. Building relationships and communicating with legislators before the session gives me an opportunity to explain how an issue could affect farmers and to make sure that agriculture's perspective is considered from the beginning.

> **"Legislation can change quickly, and having someone there every day allows soybean growers to have a consistent presence throughout that process."**

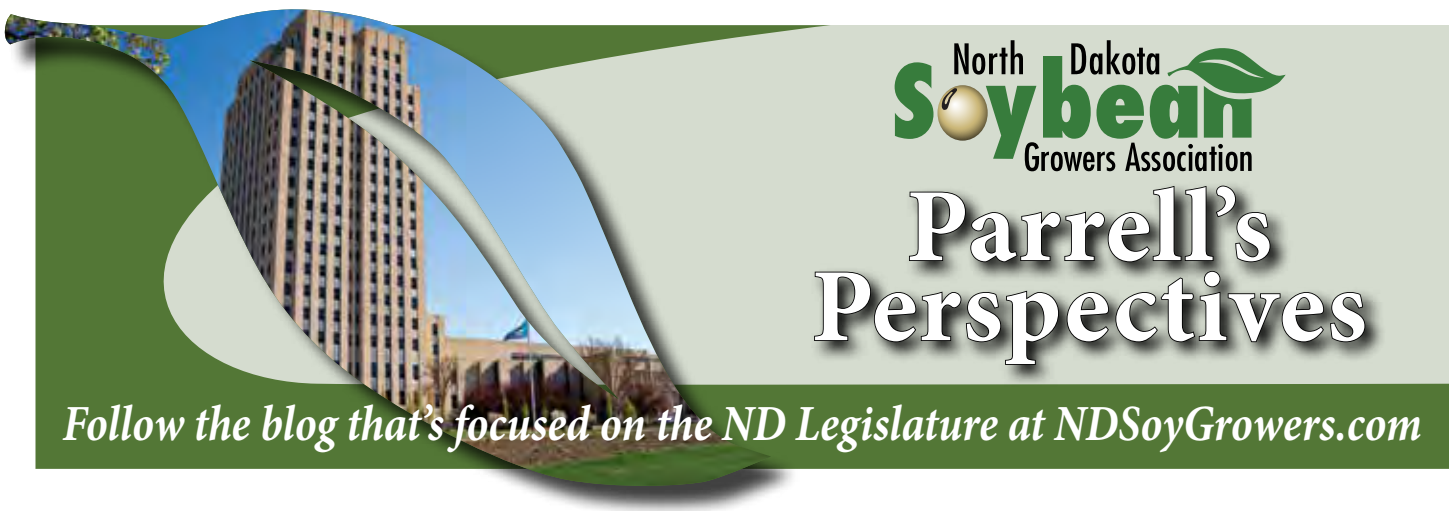
During the session, my role becomes even more active. I monitor legislation, attend committee hearings, meet with legislators and staff, provide information, communicate with members and work to keep the association informed about what is happening at the capitol. Legislation can change quickly, and having someone there every day allows soybean growers to have a consistent presence throughout that process.

Perhaps the most important part of my job is bringing the farmers' perspective to the capitol. Legislators deal with hundreds of issues during a legislative session. They cannot be expected to understand the practical effect that every proposal might have on a soybean farm. Here is where your experiences matter. When I talk with policymakers, I can explain not only what a bill says, but also how a particular provision could affect the way you farm, manage your land, transport your crops or make business decisions.

Effective lobbying is about relationships and credibility. You have to be willing to listen to legislators, to understand their concerns, to work with people who may have different perspectives and to provide accurate information. Not every issue has an easy answer, and not every discussion results in complete agreement. However, having a seat at the table gives us an opportunity to participate in those discussions.

I cannot do my job effectively without you. The strongest agricultural advocacy happens when the association's voice is reinforced by the voices of individual farmers. When growers contact their legislators, share their experiences and stay engaged, policymakers hear directly from the people affected by their decisions.

As we approach the legislative session, I encourage you to stay involved. Let the North Dakota Soybean Growers Association know what issues concern you. Talk with your legislators. Share your experiences. I will be at the capitol working on your behalf, but your voice is what gives that work its strength. Effective advocacy does not start when the legislature convenes. Helpful advocacy begins with relationships, communication and engagement long before the first bill reaches the floor.



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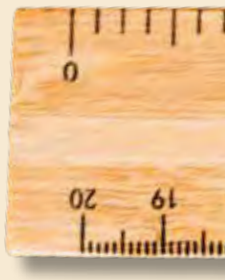
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# New Farm Bill Inches Closer to Reality

## Last Farm Bill Passed in 2018

—By Daniel **Lemke**, Editor-in-Chief



**Attempts to get a new farm bill passed in the past several years have remained as elusive as Bigfoot. Just when it seemed like lawmakers were getting close to a deal, it disappeared.**

**The last full, five-year farm bill was passed in 2018. The 2018 Farm Bill expired in 2023, but it has been extended several times. H.R.1, also called the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, passed in 2025; it contained some provisions normally included with the farm legislation. H.R.1 was not a complete substitute for a full farm bill reauthorization because it was drafted through the reconciliation process. The bill had budget and jurisdictional limits that excluded some important areas of farm and rural policy.**

After the Senate Agriculture Committee passed its version of a farm bill in September 2026, the prospects of a new bill have some farmers thinking positive.

"That is certainly something the American Soybean Association (ASA) and our state partners, working with elected officials from all the states, have been pushing for quite a while now," said Josh Gackle, an ASA director from Kulm, North Dakota. "To get it through the committee process on the Senate side was the next important step, but it's still one step at a time."

> **"My hope is that, going forward after this farm bill, we can find a way to return to a bipartisan farm-bill process and fold the nutrition community back into the farm bill."**
>
> *—Justin Sherlock, Dazey, ND, farmer and ASA director*

"It is an important step forward, and this is the closest we've been in many, many years," agreed Dazey farmer and ASA Director Justin Sherlock. "I hope the full Senate will take it up for consideration and passage. It's an important tool that farmers need. There are a lot of programs that still weren't addressed in One Big Beautiful Bill that need to be finalized by passage of the farm bill."

The Senate Agriculture Committee's version, known as the Agricultural Act of 2026, updates policies from the 2018 bill. The new bill updates the Agriculture Risk (ARC) and

# A Trying Timeline

If it feels like the farm bill has been an ongoing topic of discussion for years, it has been. Since the 2018 Farm Bill was passed, Congress has extended or partially amended the law several times rather than passing a full five-year reauthorization. The original legislation expired three years ago.

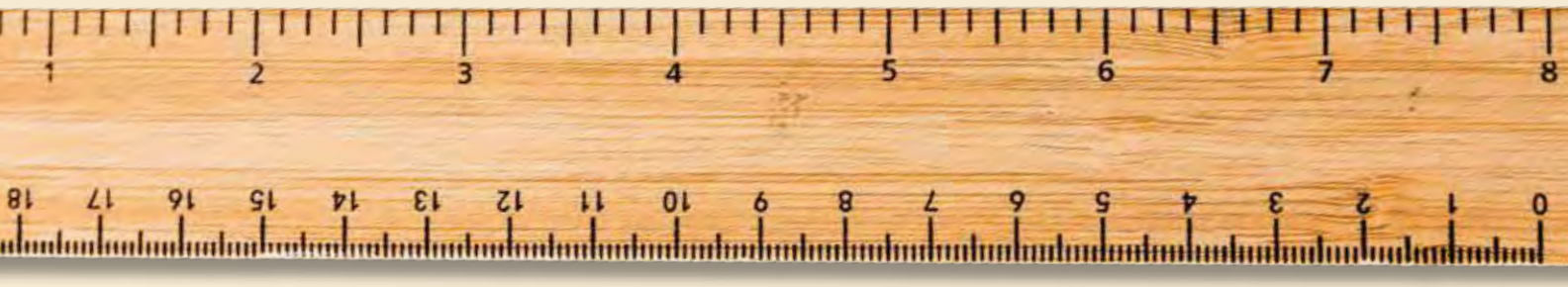
This timeline gives a glimpse for how long and challenging it has been to craft new legislation.

**December 2018**

The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 was signed into law, setting federal farm, food and conservation policy for five years.

**August 2022**

Congress passed a budget reconciliation law that added extra funding for specific conservation and forestry programs.



Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs. It also

- Provides updates and improvements for the Conservation Reserve Program.
- Doubles funding for export-promotion programs, including the Market Access and Foreign Market Development programs.

The House's farm bill shares many of the core provisions included in the Senate Ag Committee's text, but notable differences are as follows:

- The House bill has more significant changes to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) eligibility and spending than its Senate counterpart.
- The House bill addresses livestock production standards associated with California's Proposition 12 while the Senate bill does not.
- Year-round E15 sales are authorized by the Senate but not by the House.

Now, the Senate must consider the measure on the floor. If the bill passes the full Senate, the House and Senate versions need to be reconciled by conferees before being voted on by both chambers.

"There's actual language and a farm bill that both the House and the Senate can now discuss and try to reconcile," Gackle stated. "We're going to push for them to get something conferenced between the House and the Senate that can pass both chambers and be signed into law before the end of the year."

Gackle asserted that both versions address a number of priorities identified by the ASA and other farm groups. However, he figured that the nutrition title will be the area where the most discussion will be focused when lawmakers return. Gackle maintained that he and other directors will be engaged with House and Senate members to make sure the ASA's priorities remain in the farm bill as lawmakers work toward a compromise bill.

"The message has been sent that this is important. It's a priority," Gackle explained. "The certainty of a farm bill as something farmers can use to plan for 2027 and beyond remains a priority. Hopefully, lawmakers see the need, and once they get back in D.C., they'll move something forward quickly before the Congress wraps up."

Sherlock is hopeful that a five-year authorization takes place before the end of 2026. He's also calling for a return to a more bipartisan process.

"My hope is that, going forward after this farm bill, we can find a way to return to a bipartisan farm-bill process and fold the nutrition community back into the farm bill," Sherlock said. "I still think it's absolutely detrimental if we take the nutrition piece out of the farm bill. Long term, that will be detrimental to success. But in the meantime, let's get this farm bill done."

**September 2023**
The 2018 Farm Bill expired.

**November 2023**
Congress extended the bill for one year.

**December 2024**
The American Relief Act extended the bill through September 30, 2025.

**November 2025**
Congress, again, extended the bill to cover Fiscal Year 2026.

**April 2026**
The House advanced and passed the Farm, Food and National Security Act of 2026, marking the first time a full farm bill cleared the House floor since 2018.

**September 2026**
The Senate Agriculture Committee advanced the Agricultural Act of 2026 out of committee.

# Building a Budget for 2027

—By Daniel **Lemke**, Editor-in-Chief

After harvest, most farmers pore over records and financial information to determine how profitable that year was for their operation.

Growers do their best to manage the cost of production, but sometimes, outside factors have an oversized effect on prices.

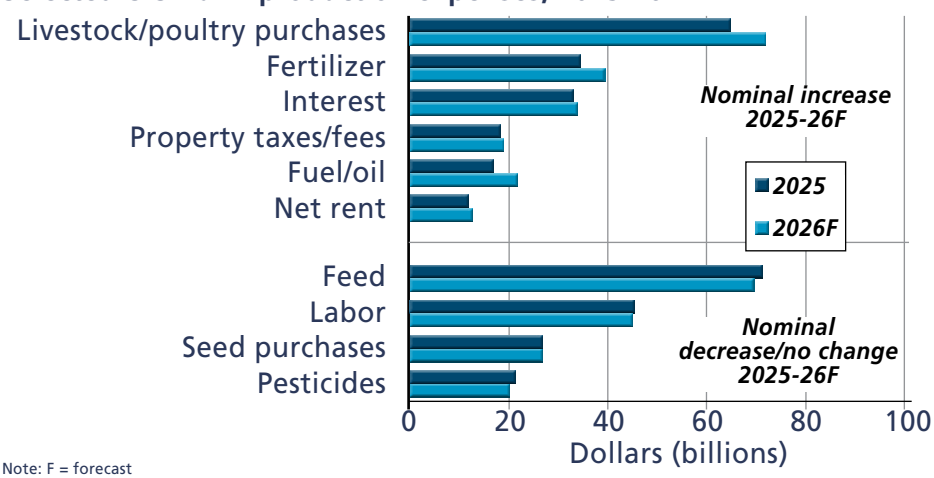
In September 2026, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Economic Research Service (ERS) forecast that, with inflation-adjusted 2026 dollars, net farm income would decline by $9.1 billion (5.5%) from 2025 to 2026. Net cash farm income was forecast to decrease by $4.6 billion (2.5%) compared with the previous year.

Dr. Matthew Gammans, assistant professor in ag policy at North Dakota State University (NDSU), said that income forecasts for 2026 were quite similar to 2025, but there were different underlying circumstances. Commodity prices were low in 2025, and there was significant trade uncertainty. Commodity prices pushed higher in 2026, but so did input costs such as fertilizer and fuel.

Gammans explained that, based on data collected by USDA-ERS, fertilizer prices were about 15% higher in 2026 than in 2025. Fuel costs were about 25% to 30% higher.

For North Dakota farmers, "A lot of the challenges are really on the production side this year with the drought because, for many folks, the crop is just not that big," Gammans asserted. "Farmers may get some income back with better basis because it is substantially better than it was a year ago, but it's not enough to offset from a revenue standpoint."

**Selected U.S. farm production expenses, 2025-26F**




Note: F = forecast
Source: USDA Economic Research Service, Farm Income and Wealth Statistics. Data as of September 3, 2026

Gammans contended that his assumption, which was made in early October, is preliminary because the total crop size was still unknown as of press time.

## Eyes Forward

Gammans stated that there were a number of developments in 2026 that would have been difficult to forecast.

For example, the rapidly increasing cost of fertilizer due to conflict in the Middle East was a negative for farm income, but China's increased soybean purchases were a positive.

The volatility of global policy and world events makes it challenging to fully envision what 2027 might hold.

"I'm hesitant to say that 2027 will be a terrible year or a banner year, but we have a lot of reasons to think that input prices will remain high, and that will continue to be a challenge for farmers," Gammans said.

According to NDSU's 2026 projected crop budgets, fuel expenses typically account for 5% to 8% of operating costs. Costs are higher for intensely farmed crops, such as corn and soybeans, versus small grains. Percentages fluctuate annually based on fuel prices and commodity revenue.

On September 29, 2026, diesel prices averaged $6.17 per gallon across North Dakota, according to AAA. A year ago, the average was $3.45 per gallon.

American Farm Bureau Federation Economist Faith Parum contended that



diesel prices are squeezing already tight farm margins even further, and it is difficult to predict when or if prices will come down.

"If everything calmed down tomorrow, we would see some of those fuel prices come back down," Parum said. "But of course, there's a whole lot that is out of control of farmers and ranchers right now. So, we're continuing to watch the market, see what happens into the next year. We could see some signs of easing, but again, because this is all a global conflict issue, there's a lot that we just don't know right now."

Soybeans require less supplemental fertilizer than crops such as corn or wheat, so fertilizer costs often have a smaller financial effect on soybean acres. However, most North Dakota farmers plant multiple crops, so rising fertilizer costs affect overall farm profitability.

"I think we'll see a potentially increased spend on fertilizer in 2027 relative to 2026, which is tough to swallow," Gammans explained. "Fertilizer prices would have to fall for farmers to not see more of their production costs going to fertilizer."

Similar to grain-marketing concepts where experts advise selling grain in smaller increments, making input purchases using the same approach can help farmers spread their risk.

"The typical advice is to buy in batches, so you don't put all of your risk on one purchase because it's hard to forecast whether prices are going to go up or go down," Gammans maintained. "We don't know how everything will unfold in the Middle East or everywhere else that affects these global prices. So, the general strategy is to buy some in the fall, some in mid-winter and then some before planting. Obviously, if you see a price that is great, you might want to buy a bigger batch, but the general advice is to spread your purchases out over the winter to try and spread that risk."



Dr. Matthew Gammans

## Policy Influence

Gammans stated that there are reasons to be positive looking forward to 2027, especially in the areas of domestic biofuel production and an improving trade outlook.

The 45Z-production-tax-credit guidance released by the Internal Revenue Service supported the use of ag products, such as soybean oil, for biofuel production. The policy also outlined specific production practices that can be monetized by the oil processors, providing another potential source of revenue for farmers.

In September, U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed to reduce tariffs on $60 billion worth of goods traded between the two countries, including several major U.S. agricultural commodities. However, soybeans were excluded from the tariff-cut list.

Policy-related financial headwinds include a return of port fees for Chinese-owned or operated vessels operating at U.S. ports. Those fees are applied to bulk and container vessels, and would significantly increase shipping costs and limit vessel availability. The U.S. Trade Representative Section 301 tariffs also include a tariff on Chinese-built ship-to-shore cranes that are used to handle shipping containers.

While farmers are focusing on ways to maximize profitability on their farm, it may be wise to keep an eye on global happenings which could have ripple effects all the way to the farm gate.

"Soybeans, corn and fertilizer are globally traded commodities, so something that's going on halfway around the world can and does have an effect on the prices that folks around here will see," Gammans said. "A lot of price determination is caused by factors going on well outside the borders of the United States."

# Super El Niño Could Bring a Warmer Winter

—By Daniel **Lemke**, Editor-in-Chief

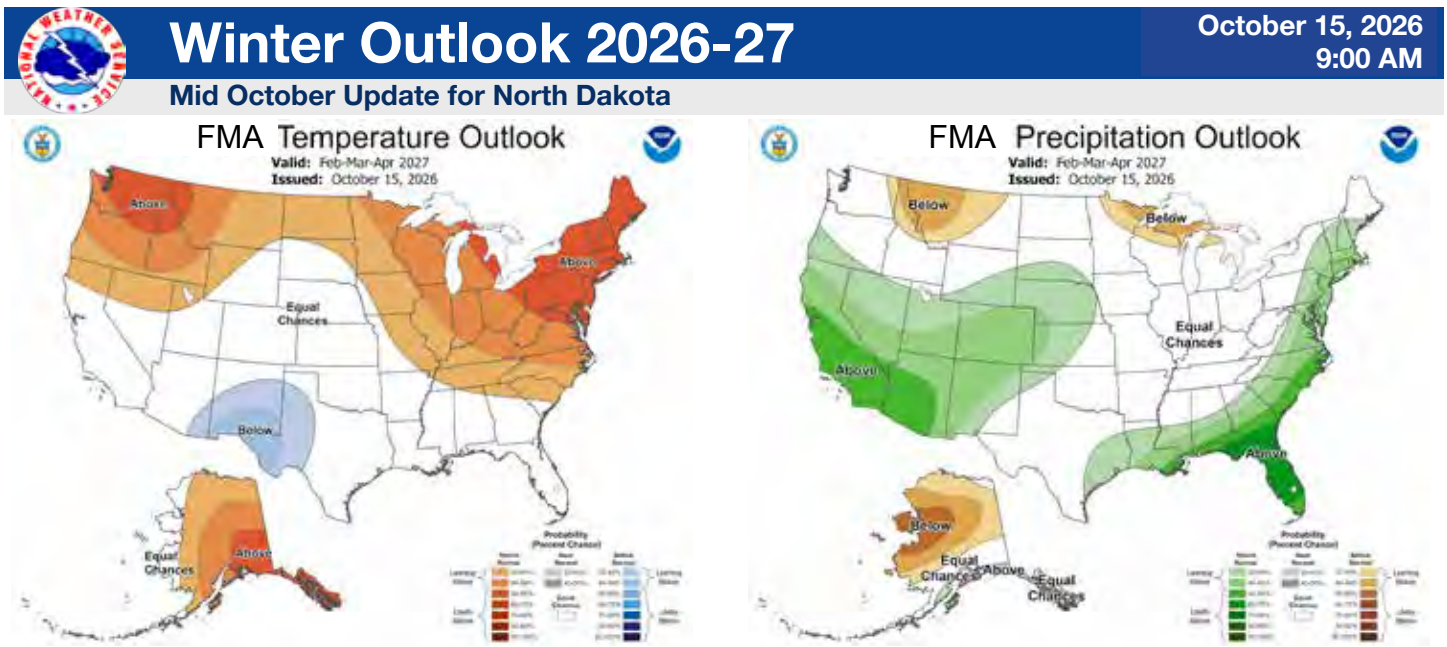
News outlets are calling it Super El Niño and even Godzilla El Niño.

North Dakota State Climatologist Daryl Ritchison has a more pragmatic outlook.

"Oceanographers and even meteorologists would prefer to say it's just a very strong El Niño," Ritchison explained. "The 'super' concept is really any time a key region in the central Pacific goes two degrees Celsius or higher, people that will call it a super El Niño."

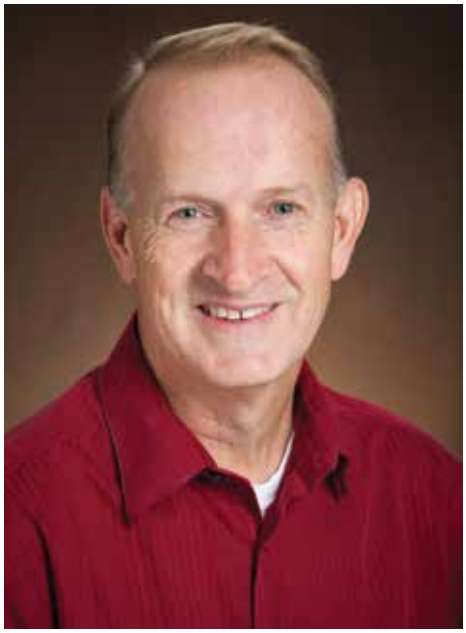
Ritchison said that he would prefer not to use the term "super El Niño," but "no doubt it's a very strong El Niño, possibly the strongest one we've had since the 1800s."

During an El Niño pattern, the polar jet stream often shifts farther north, allowing slightly warmer air from the south to have easier access to the state. It's very likely that




The signal for above normal temperatures continues through the winter and spring (February, March, and April). Long term trends suggest spring is cooling across North Dakota, which is why the warm signal isn't quite as strong as it is earlier in the cool season (33 to 40% chance for above normal temperatures). The lack of no strong signal in precipitation continues into the spring.

Source: National Weather Service reports



State Climatologist Daryl Ritchison

North Dakota will experience a warmer-than-average winter during the months of December, January and February.

"It's just a matter of how much warmer," Ritchison stated. "Will it be two, three or four degrees above average, or will it be eight, nine, ten degrees above average? Those are always the big question marks, and the answer could come down to a snowstorm."

Ritchison explained that, even though a strong El Niño is a dominant weather force, there are a wide range of other factors that influence weather patterns. For example, one powerful snowstorm could have a noticeable influence on overall temperatures across the state.

"That's why there's always uncertainty as to where that warmth is going to be several degrees or just slightly above average," Ritchison asserted. "But the odds are probably in the 80% range that the winter will finish with above-average temperatures."

Ritchison described the last five El Niño that were close in strength to the current El Niño. Four of those five weather patterns resulted in average or below-average precipitation.

Moisture is limited during December, January and February already, meaning that it could only take one storm to hit the average.

"Which is typically anywhere from an inch-and-a-half total in those three months in western North Dakota to a little bit more than two inches total for those three months in central and eastern North Dakota," Ritchison contended. "Most years, that would come mostly in the form of snow, anywhere from 20 to 35 inches of snow during those three months."

El Niño may mean that winter arrives a little earlier than it typically does in North Dakota, too. Because El Niño patterns typically have a greater influence during the winter, Ritchison expects the El Niño to fade quickly next spring.

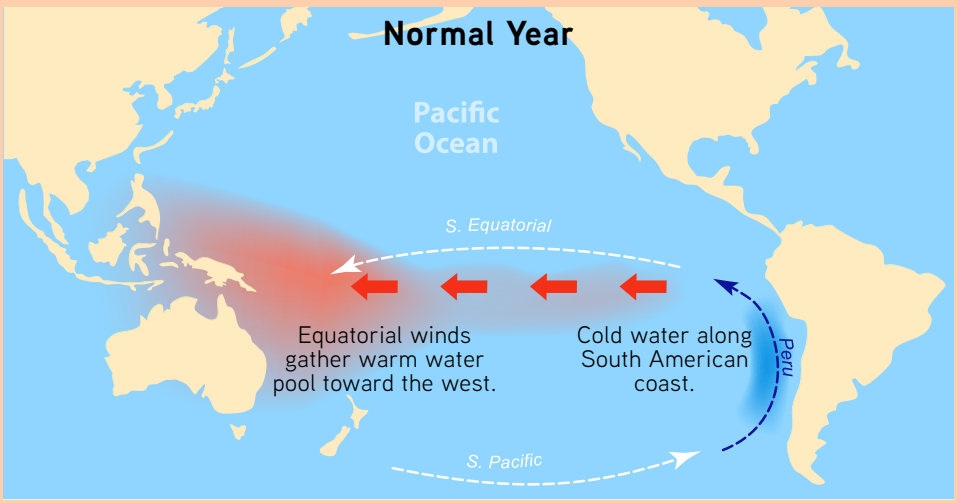
"By then, the El Niño is gone, and I can almost guarantee you there will not be an El Niño during the 2027 growing season," Ritchison said.

# Winter 2026-27: What to Expect

According to the National Weather Service (NWS), North Dakotans can expect above-normal temperatures in December and January, with potentially closer to normal temperatures in February and March.

In October, the first measurable snow was not predicted until late November, and there was no indication of a more active season than normal. Forecasters said that based on previous winter seasons and the forecast pattern, farmers should expect below normal snowfall with increased chances for mixed precipitation events, or even rain, if temperatures are warm enough.

Stay up-to-date on the latest state and local weather forecast at weather.gov/bis/.




## The El Niño Phenomenon





# Soy to the World

—By Daniel **Lemke**, Editor-in-Chief

It's a good thing North Dakota soybeans don't need passports. Data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Foreign Agriculture Service (FAS) reveal that U.S. soybeans reached over 50 distinct national and territorial markets in 2025. With roughly half of the state's soybean production exported, North Dakota farmers are truly sending soy to the world.



ND Checkoff Investment

Soybeans aren't the only things that are outward bound. Farmer leaders also invested significant time away from their farms promoting North Dakota soybeans, building relationships and providing vital customer service to current and potential partners.

In all, North Dakota farmers traveled to nine countries in 2026: Cambodia, China, Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico, Nigeria, South Korea, Thailand and Vietnam.

Soybean farmers also hosted visitors from 32 different countries, spreading connection, camaraderie and a global trust of North Dakota growers.



NDSC Director Paul Anderson of Harvey, ND, met with U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Ronald Johnson and his wife Alina.

Harvey, North Dakota, farmer Paul Anderson was part of a group of national soybean farmers and experts who traveled to Mexico and El Salvador in August.

In El Salvador, Anderson's group toured a vertically integrated poultry operation that operates chicken farms which supply product to grocery stores. The company, Pollo Compero, also operates a chain of restaurants, including stores in the U.S.

"They're way more our neighbors than China is, and I think we have a lot in common with both [Mexico and El Salvador]," Anderson explained.

"My takeaway from El Salvador is that there is a tremendous amount of people who want more protein in their diet," Anderson stated. "The best way to do that is to feed animals."

El Salvador's population is about 6.3 million people.

"That's roughly one person for every soybean acre in North Dakota," Anderson continued.

Poultry and egg production in El Salvador represents a real opportunity for U.S. soy products. Currently, soybean meal is the primary product shipped to El Salvador, but operators in the country have their sights set on growth.

"There is a real desire to build soybean crushing capacity in El Salvador," said North Dakota Soybean Council International Market Development Specialist Avery Hansen.

Mexico is already one of the United States' best soybean customers, but even with a mature market, there's room for growth. Hansen described how Mexican companies like the consistency and quality of U.S. soy products. Shipping soybeans to Mexico is also relatively straightforward, with much of the product arriving by rail, even from North Dakota.




"North Dakota is one of the top states sending soybeans to Mexico, which is ironic since we're next to Canada," Hansen asserted.

Changing global trade patterns also help explain Mexico's importance as a destination. With China's role as a buyer of U.S. soybeans shifting from the levels seen in previous years, Mexico has provided an important market for U.S. soybeans. During the 2025-26 marketing year, increased shipments to Mexico helped meet demand in that market. For North Dakota, the combination of Mexican demand and established rail connections creates opportunities to serve customers farther south, despite Canada being the state's closest neighbor.

In late August, Mayville farmer Brent Kohls traveled to Colombia to represent U.S. farmers at Soy Fest 2026.

The event featured conferences and panels, which covered animal nutrition, ingredient quality, precision nutrition, sustainability and market outlooks, with experts from 10 countries, primarily from Latin America.

"Some of the countries that participated aren't necessarily big customers yet, but they're markets where we're hoping to make inroads," Kohls declared.

Kohls added that the conference provided a range of technical information for feed millers as well as nutrition information for swine and poultry nutritionists. The primary focus was on leveraging U.S. soy trade relationships with major Latin American market sectors.

"We're laying the foundation and being a technical resource because, hopefully, the countries will buy on a larger scale in the future," Kohls said.






ASA Director and North Dakota soybean farmer Josh Gackle examines soybean meal during a WISHH trade mission to Cambodia.




In August, Josh Gackle, Kulm, North Dakota, traveled to Cambodia as part of a World Initiative for Soy in Human Health (WISHH) effort.

"U.S. soybean representatives have been working with buyers in Cambodia and in that region of southeast Asia for several years," Gackle explained. "Going there gives us an opportunity to talk again with those customers, to see what challenges they are facing in their operations. And to show them that we, as U.S. soybean growers, are willing to work with them as we continue to build markets in Cambodia and that part of the world."

Cambodia is primarily a market for soybean meal as a feed ingredient for aquaculture and livestock. The country's animal-agriculture and soybean-processing sectors are modernizing, and the country has a growing middle class which adds to the possibility for growth. The country may not have the export potential of China or Mexico, but Cambodia does have an appetite for U.S. soy products.

"I would say there's a strong preference for U.S. soy in Cambodia, but we also know that we have competitors," Gackle contended. "I think our efforts show the value of what a program like WISHH can do in maintaining relationships and continuing to find new opportunities for U.S. soy."

WISHH develops agricultural value chains in emerging markets, creating trade and long-term demand for U.S. soy by strengthening customer supply chains that enhance nutrition, economic growth and food security.

*—Story continued on page 32*



NDSoy Checkoff Investment

# New Report Sheds Light on the Importance of Building Future Markets

U.S. agriculture can't continue to count on its current leading customers alone for future growth.

That fact is a key takeaway from Building the Next Generation of U.S. Agricultural Export Markets, commissioned by the Farm Journal Foundation and authored by Dr. Shawn Arita, associate director of the Agricultural Risk Policy Center at North Dakota State University.

In the report, Arita focused on building the next generation of U.S. ag markets.

"Our whole ag sector has recognized, for some time now, that we need to diversify more in our export markets," Arita said. "We have a fairly concentrated set of key sources of demand. China was at the forefront, but we've struggled, obviously, under trade tensions. We all hope that new deals and commitments do come through, but we also know that we can't rely on China alone."

Arita stated that some markets which the U.S. has long served are mature, with slower growth ahead, although they will remain



Dr. Shawn Arita

central to U.S. agricultural trade. Arita saw growth potential for U.S. agriculture in some developing countries and regions, including sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia.

"That is where most of the future growth in food demand will be," Arita contended, "but at the same time, it's very difficult to establish a foothold. There's a long list of hurdles stemming from not only lower purchasing power for many of these developing markets, but then you also have undeveloped value chains; you have weak institutions, (a) lack of U.S. commercial relationships, trade barriers and protectionism, and just a high amount of risk."

## Humanitarian Efforts

Arita described how development in areas such as sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia could take decades to develop. The U.S. soy industry is no stranger to playing the long game when building markets. The American Soybean Association had an office in China for 30 years before the U.S. sold a single bushel of beans to China.

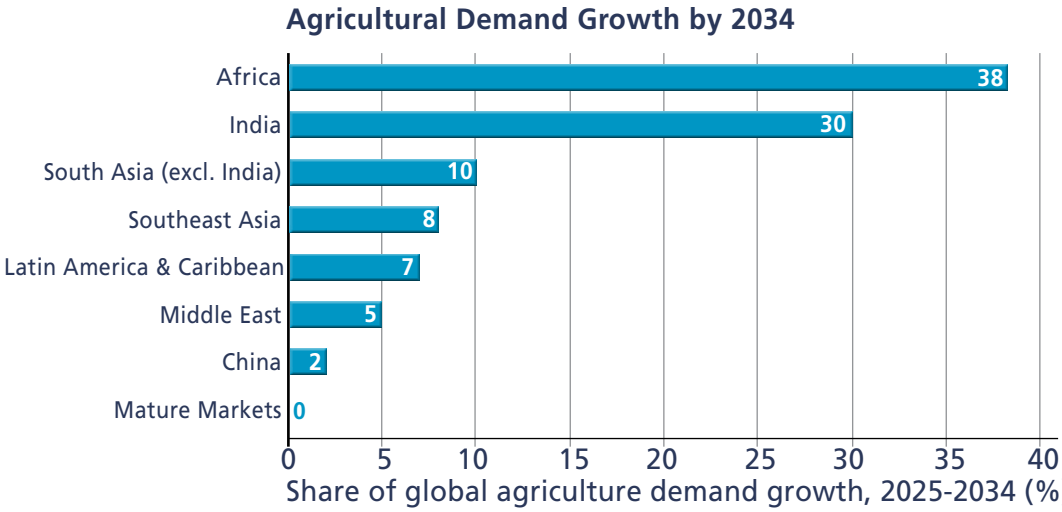
Arita asserted that many of today's large U.S. export markets followed a similar path, with food-security and development programs early and commercial trade later.

"If you look at South Korea and Mexico, we can see that there has been a common pattern where we have had U.S. engagement first through food-security programs, in part helping build familiarity for U.S. products," Arita explained. "These programs served humanitarian objectives, but they also helped seed commercial relationships."

## Mutually Aligned Objectives

Arita's evaluation pointed to the soybean industry as an example of how emerging markets can be developed effectively. In Pakistan and Bangladesh, the report traced how the World Initiative for Soy in Human Health (WISHH) worked first on feed use and industry development. As those markets matured, the U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC) took on the commercial role, carrying forward the relationships that WISSH built.

"WISHH and (the) USSEC are an excellent example of that handoff, where you have the development assistance efforts first," Arita said. "Then as these markets develop, there is a sequential hand off to (the) USSEC, and they take over in terms of the trade promotion. Together, that leads to a mutual alignment of objectives. Nobody wants these food security or assistance programs to go on indefinitely. You do want to eventually develop these commercial relationships that leads to the economic livelihood improvement that is the foundation of these programs."




Source: OECD-FAO Agriculture Outlook 2025-2034

*To read the full report, scan the QR code:*

# Make a Difference: *Serve as an NDSC County Representative*

—By Suzanne **Wolf**, NDSC Communications Director

The North Dakota Soybean Council's (NDSC) 2027 election process will begin in December 2026 for the following counties:

- **District 3:** LaMoure and Dickey Counties
- **District 4:** Cass County
- **District 6:** Stutsman County
- **District 11:** Divide, Williams, Burke, Mountrail, Renville, Ward, Bottineau, McHenry, Rolette, Pierce, Towner, Benson and Ramsey Counties

## How Does the NDSC Election Process Work?

Elections are conducted by mail. In December 2026, soybean farmers in these counties will receive nomination instructions in a green envelope.

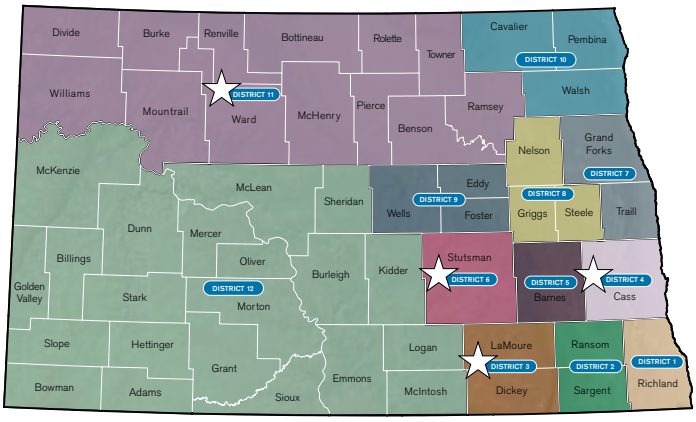
In February 2027, official ballots will be mailed in a blue envelope. To ensure fairness, North Dakota State University (NDSU) Extension oversees the election. All NDSC representatives and board members are elected by North Dakota's soybean farmers.

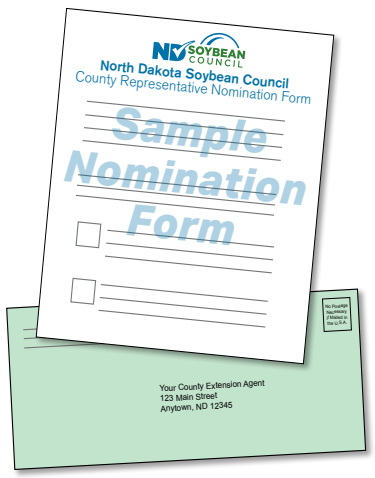
In single-county districts, the elected producer will serve on the NDSC's Board of Directors. For multi-county districts, each county will elect a representative, and these representatives will later meet, with one being chosen to serve on the NDSC board.

If you're a soybean producer in one of these counties, consider nominating a peer or even yourself for the role of county representative!

*To learn more about the NDSC's election process, scan the QR code:*

## North Dakota Soybean Council District Map




> "A friend of mine served on the council and told me it was one of the best boards he had ever been a part of. My experience on the board exceeded my expectations."
>
> *—Past NDSC Director Milo Braaten of Portland*




## NDSC TREASURER LETTER

# An Opportunity to Learn, Lead and Give Back

*By* Dallas **Loff**
*NDSC Board Treasurer*



Serving on the North Dakota Soybean Council (NDSC) has been a rewarding experience, and I encourage farmers in districts with elections to consider getting involved. Whether you serve as a county representative or pursue a seat on the council's board, it's an opportunity to make a difference for North Dakota soybean farmers while learning more about our industry.

I farm with my dad and brother near Colfax, where we raise corn, soybeans and sugarbeets. Before joining the council, I served on the Colfax Farmers Elevator board for many years, including several as president. I also serve on our local school board, so I understand the value of people who are willing to step up, to share their perspectives and to help make decisions that affect others.

> "You don't have to be an expert to get involved!"

I've been an NDSC director since 2022 and now serve as the NDSC's treasurer. I chair the council's Research Committee and represent the NDSC on the North Central Soybean Research Program board. These roles have given me a deeper understanding about the research and collaboration which are needed to address the challenges facing soybean farmers.

When I first considered joining the council, I knew several people who had served and was curious about their work. I saw the opportunity as a chance to learn something new, and that's exactly what happened. I've had fun, learned a lot and gained a broader perspective on our industry. After that experience, running again was an easy decision.

Research is an important part of the council's work. Weed resistance is a significant agronomic challenge, and the council helps fund innovative research to find solutions and to support farmers. Through my work with the Research Committee and the North Central Soybean Research Program, I've seen the value of investing in research that addresses real-world challenges for soybean growers.

You don't have to be an expert to get involved. Serving as a county representative is a meaningful way to learn about the council, to share your perspective and to help connect local farmers with the work being done on their behalf. Board members have the opportunity to help guide priorities, to support research and to make decisions that benefit soybean farmers across North Dakota.

If your district has an election, I encourage you to consider running. You'll meet other farmers, gain new perspectives and have a voice in shaping the industry's future. Serving on the council has been worthwhile for me, and I encourage other farmers to give it a try.

## 2027 Best of the Best in Wheat and Soybean Research

**Feb. 3, 2027 – Alerus Center, Grand Forks, N.D.**
**Feb. 4, 2027 – Courtyard by Marriott, Moorhead, Minn.**
**Feb. 16, 2027 – Clarion Hotel, Minot, N.D.**

The annual Best of the Best in Wheat and Soybean Research workshop offers growers a free chance to learn the latest in checkoff-supported wheat and soybean production from researchers and Extension specialists. Featured session topics include: Weed control, pest management, weather issues, soil health and more!

**Thank you to our sponsors!**

Minnesota Association of Wheat Growers · Minnesota Wheat Research & Promotion Council · Minnesota Soybean Research & Promotion Council · NDGGA North Dakota Grain Growers Association · ND Soybean Council · North Dakota Wheat Commission

# Soybean Industry Organization Overview



# UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

## Death by Suicide Remains a Concern for Farm Families

—By Daniel **Lemke**, Editor-in-Chief

In the fall of 1983, Jeff Irwin's father, Gary, had a phenomenal-looking edible bean crop.

At the time, pinto beans were the primary money-maker on the family's farm near Forest River, North Dakota.

That year, the beans had been cut and windrowed before combining due to a severe September weather event that packed heavy rains and high winds, leaving fields decimated.

"Crop was strewn all over the place," Jeff recalled.

Months later, another adverse weather event occurred. When the fields dried out, the Irwins picked up what beans they could, only to find that many pods were split or moldy.

Jeff said that federal crop insurance covered some of what his father lost that year, but high interest rates, mounting farm debt and no income coming in made a dark situation desperate.

Jeff remembers his father falling into a state of depression that lasted weeks as the family's financial strain kept getting worse.

"He (Gary) wasn't eating; he was losing weight, wasn't sleeping; and he was having nightmares," Jeff said. "My sister said there were days when he would keep the shades drawn in the bedroom all day, and he wouldn't get up."

After weeks of being in a depressed state, Gary briefly turned a corner. He called farmers to let them know he was available to drive truck and to earn extra money. He was also working on a payment plan for equipment-repair debts.

In February of 1984, Gary was supposed to help haul grain for his father.

Gary didn't show up.

Instead, at age 42, Gary shot himself. It was Jeff's 22nd birthday.

### "If Despair Has a Picture"

The first time he saw his mother afterwards, Jeff realized nothing would be the same again.

"If despair had a picture, it was my mother's face," Jeff said. "It was devastating. She asked me, 'What do we do now?' I didn't have a lot of words of wisdom at 22. I said we'd get through this together. That was about all I could muster."

The rest of that day and the days ahead were a blur. Friends and neighbors stopped by when they heard the news. Many people were shocked and shaken.

"It was evident to me that he really had a lot of friends," Jeff said. "This really impacted our community."

Since then, Jeff has had to accept that many questions surrounding his father's tragic death might just remain unanswered.

### "It All Piles up in Your System"

Unfortunately, farmers who die by suicide isn't as rare as we think, and a number of

### Symptoms of Stress and Anxiety

- Breathing more quickly
- Rapidly beating heart
- Clenched teeth
- Aching neck and shoulders
- Sweating hands and feet
- Churning stomach
- Dropping sexual interest
- Feeling highly anxious

### Physical Stress Self-Check

Circle the bodily sensations that best describe your own:

- My muscles (loose or tight)
- My head (clear or aching)
- My stomach (calm or upset)
- My breath (easy or tense)
- My energy (good or low)

**SOURCE:** NDSU Extension Services Farm Stress Fact Sheet, 2025.

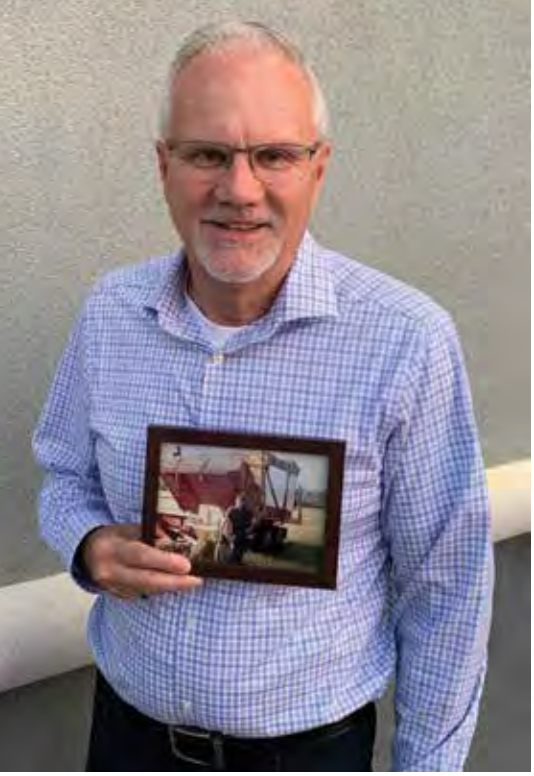
> **"If despair had a picture, it was my mother's face. ... She asked me, 'What do we do now?' I didn't have a lot of words of wisdom at 22. I said we'd get through this together. That was about all I could muster."**
>
> *—Jeff Irwin*



Gary Irwin on his family farm near Forest River, North Dakota.



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Jeff Irwin holds a photo of his father, Gary, who died by suicide in 1984.

factors play into that situation.

Adriana Drusini, North Dakota State University (NDSU) Extension program coordinator for farm and ranch stress, stated that, by August 2026, at least nine North Dakota farmers had died by suicide.

"Big, small or in between, we all deal with different things that stress us, and the problem gets worse when those stressors start piling up in your system," Drusini said. "Now we are not just dealing with the stress of weather. We also have the stress of high input costs, such as the cost of diesel; stress of what's happening in the markets; and the stress of wondering what's going to happen next year when I need to plant and harvest. That's just on the work side. Then, if there are relationship problems or health problems, it all piles up in your system."

Living in a rural state doesn't help either.

## Unhealthy Isolation, Limited Resources

One of the worst things people can do when they're feeling low is to isolate themselves, and that's easy to do in a rural environment.

"The biggest issue, especially when we talk about farmers, is the isolation component,"

## Get Help Now

If the situation is potentially life-threatening, get immediate emergency assistance by dialing 9-1-1.

## 9-8-8 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

Available 24 hours a day
Call or text: 9-8-8
Online chat: chat988lifeline.org

## FirstLink Help Line

24-hour helpline, services and referrals
Call: 2-1-1

## NDSU Extension Farm/Ranch Stress Resources

Online: ndsu/agriculture



Three-year-old Jeff Irwin holds an Easter basket beside his father, Gary.



Jeff Irwin (right) with his father, Gary, and mother in 1978.

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Drusini explained. "They have all these stressors, and they don't have a way of talking about them (stressors) because they are very isolated. They feel they have to be tough and strong, and they can deal with everything that comes their way. In reality, what we need to do is talk about what's stressing us because, sometimes by doing that, you feel like those things are leaving your system, and then other people may help us deal with those issues."

Drusini explained that some farmers have good support systems around them when stresses pile up to the point where people are thinking about suicide. Other farmers do not have support systems at all, and resources in rural North Dakota can be limited.

"Therapists or counselors are not common in rural North Dakota," Drusini contended. "We have so many communities without resources. That's a big problem."

## Sharing the Story

Since his family's experience, Jeff Irwin is open and wants to raise awareness about rural suicide, hoping that his story might prevent another tragedy.

Jeff shares his story as a guest on podcasts. He's participated in a national suicide-prevention forum, and he is writing a book about his family's story.

He also sees how today's farmers are facing the same challenges that his father did.

"Right now, I think the pressures are equally as bad as they were in the 1980s," Jeff said. "Interest rates aren't quite as bad, but input costs are just through the roof, and there is always going to be weather and commodity price pressures."

Jeff's father had taken out a life-insurance policy likely thinking that the payout would cover the bills and that the family's financial challenges would get settled.



Adriana Drusini, NDSU Extension program coordinator for farm and ranch stress.

> **"We don't have to have all the answers. Sometimes, the most important thing we can do is listen, have the conversation and help someone find a way forward."**
>
> *—Adriana Drusini, NDSU Extension Services*

"I am speculating, but it is flawed thinking that it would help the situation," Jeff explained. "The takeaway from me telling our story is to get people to realize the impact suicide is going to have on the family. Don't just think of yourself. Things aren't going to be better just because you're gone."

Jeff stated that he still has a lot of unanswered questions about why his father chose the path of suicide. However, he surmises that pride and a fear of failure weighed heavily into his father's decision.

"No one wants to be the one to lose the farm," Jeff said, adding that he wished his father would have recognized that he wasn't alone in his struggles. "Sometimes, you think you're the only one that's having an issue, and it turns out a lot of people are."

The thing is, Gary Irwin was a hard-working man who had options, even if he couldn't see them. He likely could have become a mechanic, driven a truck or found another line of work.

"People would rather see you switch careers than go to your funeral," Jeff asserted.

Now, in a new book, Jeff will include stories

## ND HOPES Reveals the Effect of Adverse Mental Health for Farmers

North Dakota Healthcare, Opportunity, Prevention and Education in Suicide Prevention (ND HOPES) data show that mental-health concerns affected the health and well-being of individuals, resulting in a higher suicide risk among farmers and ranchers who may have difficulty accessing resources. Data also showed:

- Among farmers and ranchers who died by suicide between 2019 and 2023, nearly 54% reported a current depressed mood, and 48% had a diagnosed mental-health condition at the time of death.
- Nearly half were over the age of 55.
- All were men.




**Farming and Ranching are Stressful**

Concerns about production, prices and policy can weigh heavily on us.

It is okay not to be okay in times of high stress, whether during harvest time or when dealing with an uncertain farm economy.

If you feel isolated or overwhelmed, talk to someone. Reaching out for help isn't weakness; it's a sign of wisdom and strength.

**Find stress management tools made for farmers and ranchers at ndsu.ag/managingstress.**

If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. **Call or text 988.**

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about what it was like growing up on the farm and what he learned from his dad. The book also includes questions he never got to ask.

"I want to wake the reader up, and hopefully, if people are contemplating suicide, maybe they'll think twice," Jeff said.

Jeff recommends ruralminds.org and 7stepstogod.org as hope resources for people in crisis.

### Keeping the Dialogue Open

Drusini hopes that farmers continue to open the dialogue around mental-health issues in the farming and ranching community.

"We think that it's so important that people talk about this issue," Drusini explained. "By talking openly about these issues, we can reduce the stigma and help people feel comfortable talking about what's going on. We don't have to have all the answers. Sometimes, the most important thing we can do is listen, have the conversation and help someone find a way forward."

## ND HOPES' Rural Suicide Prevention Webinar Set for January 13, 2027

NDSU Extension's North Dakota Healthcare, Opportunity, Prevention and Education in Suicide Prevention (ND HOPES) program is offering Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) webinar training to help farmers recognize the warning signs of a mental-health crisis, approach someone with compassion and connect people with vital support resources.

The next training is set for 11 a.m. on January 13, 2027.

ND HOPES is a five-year, suicide-prevention initiative funded by the Centers for Disease Control.

The group also developed "Let's Talk About It," an initiative that focuses on breaking the stigma around stress and depression in farming and ranching.

For more information about the initiative and to register for the webinar, visit the Events page at ndsu.edu, or scan the QR code.

# High Heels and Canola Fields

## Kelly to Speak at 2027 Expo

—By Lonna **Whiting**, Staff Writer

She's from Canada and grows mostly canola, but farmer, entrepreneur and mental health advocate Lesley Kelly knows that trauma, depression and anxiety can grow under any conditions.

On February 9, 2027, Kelly will speak at the Northern Corn and Soybean Expo about why mental health matters for farmers, their families and communities.

"I'm a farmer myself, so a lot of what I share comes from my own experiences. The good, the hard, the messy middle and everything in between. I talk about the challenges we face, the things we don't always say out loud and what I've learned through my own mental health journey and advocacy work," Kelly said.

Kelly began addressing farmer mental wellbeing topics on High Heels and Canola Fields, her social media platform where she shares her insights on food, farming, family, and agriculture trends with more than 100,000 followers.

Kelly asserts that farmers have a unique journey when it comes to mental health, and the first step in healing is to reduce stigma.

"There's shame, fear, silence, withdrawal and so many misconceptions about what it means to struggle with your mental health. People worry about being judged, being seen as weak or having others question their ability to run their farm. So instead of talking about what we're going through, we pull back, put on a brave face and try to push through," Kelley said. "In agriculture, we're really good at pushing through. We're proud of being resilient, hard-working and independent. Those are wonderful qualities that can also make it really difficult to share when we're not okay."

In her talk at the expo, Kelly will share why mental health challenges aren't a sign of weakness, nor does it reflect a person's ability to be a good farmer.

"I also think we need to remember that support doesn't always start with a formal resource. Sometimes it starts with a phone call, a coffee, a neighbor checking in or someone asking, 'How are you really doing?' and sticking around to hear the answer," Kelly said. "We don't need to have all the answers. We just need to care enough to start the conversation, and we shouldn't wait until someone is in crisis to do that."

In addition to High Heels and Canola Fields, Kelly contributes to What The Farm podcast, a weekly segment that prioritizes real-life conversations about farming and farm life. In 2019, Kelly co-founded the Do More Agriculture Foundation, a Canadian mission focused on breaking stigmas and barriers around farmer mental wellbeing.

Learn more about Kelly's work on her website at highheelsandcanolafields.com and follow her on Instagram at @highheelsandcanolafields.




Lesley Kelly will speak on Tuesday, February 9, 2027 at the Northern Corn and Soybean Expo at the Butler Machinery Arena in West Fargo, North Dakota.

# NDSC Research Open House Connects Farmers and Researchers

—By Suzanne **Wolf**, NDSC Director of Communications

On September 15, the North Dakota Soybean Council (NDSC) brought together soybean farmers, board members, researchers and industry stakeholders for its Research Forum & Open House, which focused on identifying research needs and helping guide future research priorities in North Dakota.

The event provided an opportunity for participants to discuss emerging challenges facing soybean farmers, to share perspectives about research needs and to explore opportunities for future research investments.

Through facilitated small-group discussions, attendees exchanged ideas on key research topics and identified priorities for NDSC consideration. The event also provided time for farmers, researchers and industry representatives to connect and to strengthen the relationships between the individuals conducting research and the people who benefit from it.



NDSC Research Committee Chairman Dallas Loff of Wahpeton, third from left, discusses research priorities with researchers.



NDSC Chairman Evan Montgomery of Grand Forks, center, visits with researchers.



NDSC Director of Agronomy and Research Miki Miheguli, left, organized the forum to encourage collaboration and to exchange ideas between farmers and researchers.



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"Our goal is to bring farmers and researchers together to make sure future research efforts are focused on the needs and priorities of North Dakota soybean farmers," said Miki Miheguli, NDSC director of agronomy and research. "Creating opportunities for these conversations helps us identify where research can make a meaningful difference for farmers."

The Research Forum & Open House gave NDSC an opportunity to hear directly from farmers and strengthen connections with the research community. Input gathered during the discussions will help inform future research priorities, keeping farmer needs at the center of efforts to address the challenges and opportunities facing North Dakota soybean production.



NDSC Director Paul Anderson of Harvey, left, shares his perspective on soybean production challenges.



Barnes County soybean farmer and NDSC Research Committee member Joe Ericson discusses on-farm challenges with researchers.


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# Building Better Beans

## NDSU Develops New Soybean Variety



—By Daniel **Lemke**, Editor-in-Chief

North Dakota State University (NDSU) has released a new, public soybean variety, which was supported, in part, by checkoff funds.

In this Q&A, NDSU Soybean Breeder Dr. Carrie Dottey shares more about this variety, the science behind it and why new varieties can take years to be released.

### What are the strengths of this new variety?

The new variety released this year is ND2501SCNGT. It's a maturity group 0.1. It's novel because it has Peking-like resistance to soybean cyst nematode (SCN) HG 2.5.7. This advancement is exciting in terms of SCN defense. The variety has good iron deficiency chlorosis (IDC) tolerance, combined with strong SCN tolerance, which is a hard combination to find in the market.

> "The seed stays (in Costa Rica) for three growing seasons...but that only takes one year instead of three....What used to take about four years...I can do in a year and a half.."
>
> —Dr. Carrie Dottey, NDSU

### Is soybean breeding a long process?

I've been in this role six years, and the very beginning of this new variety was done by my predecessor, so it gives you an idea of how long it takes to get varieties to market. It can take up to 10 years to get a variety out, but people want things faster than that and rightfully so, so I devoted a lot of my planning to speed up variety releases.

### Walk us through the process.

After you make a soybean pollination, that first seed is 50% of one parent and 50% the other parent. You have to grow that seed out until the genetics start to stabilize. We typically say around generation four or five is when you can really start evaluating them in the field and know that you're going to see the same results year after year. Then, you have to test in the field for three to four years, so that's eight to ten years for a variety release.



ND Checkoff Investment





Dr. Carrie Dottey is the NDSU Soybean Breeder and has spent the past several years developing ND-2501SCNGT. Photos: Contributed

## How have you sped up the process?

Growing out a seed out 4 or 5 times used to take 4 or 5 years. I did a lot of my Ph.D. work near the equator, but the problem with growing soybeans there is that it starts to grow too quickly. As soon as it comes out of the ground, it gets the signal to start flowering and putting on pods. The plant will mature in 30 days, but you may only get 5 or 6 seeds. For what I need to advance seed, that's actually fine. I only need one seed per plant.

I do crosses in the field in North Dakota, grow the first seed in the greenhouse, so we can monitor it and make sure it looks good; then, I ship the seed to Costa Rica. It stays there for about three growing seasons, but in Costa Rica, that only takes one year instead of three, so I can get through the generations needed before I can evaluate in the fields. What used to take about four years between cross and field testing, I can do in a year and a half.

## Is the new variety available?

Foundation seed increases occurred this fall. Next season is when it will go into certified seed production.

## What's been key to advancing better public varieties?

Some of the first research I did was evaluating materials we had because I was unhappy with the progress of our yield gains. We did a full-blown genetic analysis of the soybean lines in our collection and concluded that we needed to increase diversity.

I worked with public breeding programs in other states, such as Nebraska and Illinois, to get some of their high-yielding lines that already have good disease resistance and then converted them to be adapted and growable in North Dakota. In some of the top-performing crosses, we have seen a yield increase of about 15 bushels per acre.

## What else should growers know?

I am grateful for the North Dakota Soybean Council and the farmers who contribute to the soybean checkoff. I want to reiterate my commitment to soybean producers in North Dakota that we really are here working for you.



# New Tools Can Help Farmers Improve Soybean Disease Management

—By Carol **Brown**, Soybean Research and Information Network

Soybeans are resilient, but they have their enemies. Diseases can cause a range of issues, from reduced yield to plant death. Through ongoing research supported by the North Central Soybean Research Program, a team of pathologists continues to study soybean diseases in order to help farmers improve disease management and to preserve the soybeans' yield potential.

Richard (Wade) Webster, North Dakota State University soybean pathology specialist, leads a team of experts from seven states: Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio and Wisconsin. The team is in year three for the project, and the results have already produced decision-making and return-on-investment tools, with more to come.

"We are conducting uniform field trials in all seven states, comparing high-intensity and low-intensity treatment strategies," Webster said. "High intensity includes a premium seed treatment package with a two-pass fungicide program. There are combinations of treatments as well as no seed treatment with no fungicide applications"

The idea, he explained, is to understand whether the disease-management intensity will affect yield across the North Central Region.

## Unique Approach to Research

The team is taking a unique approach toward biological control agents and how effective they are in reducing the fungal pathogen Sclerotinia sclerotiorum, which causes white mold in soybeans.

"We are using biological fungicides, which degrade and eat at the overwintering sclerotia," Webster stated. "We're looking at their ability to degrade the pathogen in an off year. For this component, all of the research plots are empty with no crop being grown."

During the winter, the team grew sclerotia in the lab and placed the fungi in mesh baggies. These bags were buried, to mimic tillage, and placed on the soil surface in the empty plots. Each group placed about 3,000 sclerotia in its respective research plot. The researchers immediately sprayed the biologicals, which had two fungal products (Coniothyrium and Trichoderma) and one bacterial product (Pseudomonas), over the bags and the soil surface. The team checked the bags in July, August and September, retrieving some of the sclerotia and placing them on growth media in the lab to see if they were still viable. The researchers left some bags to overwinter in the plots and then sampled the sclerotia in the spring.

"We want to see the degradation over the full year and look for differences between the buried and surface sclerotia," Webster explained. "We are seeing fascinating results and big differences between years. In some cases, the sclerotia are completely gone, and sometimes, they are fully intact and still viable."

## Foliar Soybean-Disease Research

Another component of the project is conducting uniform foliar fungicide trials on frogeye leaf spot, Cercospora leaf blight and septoria brown spot. The team is using 10 different fungicide programs, looking at product efficacy as well as application timing.

"These diseases become bigger issues the further south we go in the North Central Region," Webster commented.

The field trials include treatments with commercially available products that farmers are using across the region. The growers are applying products at the R3 growth stage, and some products are also applied at the R5 stage (Table 1).

| Treatment Number | Fungicide Program |
|---|---|
| 1 | Non-treated control |
| 2 | Delaro Complete 8 fl oz/ac @ R3 |
| 3 | Delaro Complete 8 fl oz/ac @ R5 |
| 4 | Delaro Complete 8 fl oz/ac @ R3 & R5 |
| 5 | Adastrio 8 fl oz/ac @ R3 |
| 6 | Badge SC 1.5 pt/ac @ R3 |
| 7 | Affiance 14 fl oz/ac @ R3 |
| 8 | Generic Quilt (Tigris Azoxyprop) 12 fl oz/ac @ R3 |
| 9 | Generic Quilt (Tigris Azoxyprop) 12 fl oz/ac @ R5 |
| 10 | Viatude 16 fl oz/ac @ R3 |

Table 1. Foliar fungicide treatment programs applied through uniform trials in Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio and Wisconsin.

Applying a foliar fungicide later than the R3 stage in the North Central Region is less understood. Therefore, collecting data about late-season applications will help the team learn how this procedure could affect the soybean crop.

## Putting It All Together

Taking the research results and deciding the best way that farmers can use the information are just as important as the research itself. The results are informing new decision-making support tools, and the team has already developed several tools.

"Frogeye leaf spot was added to the crop risk model, and the white mold ROI (return-on-investment) calculator was released last year," said Webster. "We're now developing a similar ROI calculator for soybean foliar diseases. We've also updated several Extension publications, including Fungicide Efficacy for Control of Soybean Foliar Diseases and Fungicide Efficacy for Control of Soybean Seedling Diseases."

Lastly, the team is in the process of developing a survey to gain insight from farmers about the topics with which they are knowledgeable and where the pathologists might need to provide more information. In 2025, the team conducted listening sessions with farmers to gather qualitative data, and the survey is on track to go to farmers this winter.



The biological agent Coniothyrium minitans attacks and parasitizes the sclerotia fungus that causes white mold on soybeans. Photo: Amit Sharma, University of Wisconsin.



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NORTHERN CORN SOY EXPO



**Tuesday, February 9, 2027 • Butler Machinery Arena • Red River Valley Fairgrounds • West Fargo**

# Tentative Agenda

## 7:30 a.m. | Butler Arena

Registration, Light Breakfast, and Visit the Research Pavilion and Trade Show

## 8:30 a.m.

Welcome
Michelle Rook, Farm Journal, Emcee

Fertilizer Market
Josh Linville, Stone X

Association Annual Meetings and Policy Keynote
Corn Growers Association Annual Meeting
Soybean Growers Association Annual Meeting
**Policy & Trade** – Jim Wiesemeyer, Policy Analyst

Trade Show Break

Mental Wellbeing
Lesley Kelly, High Heels & Canola Fields

Trade Show Break & Lunch

War on Food: Modern Agriculture Under Pressure
Andy Curliss, National Pork Producers Council

Ag Grain Market Outlook
Susan Stroud, No Bull Ag

## 3:50 p.m.

**Industry & Partners Reception**

*Agenda subject to change*

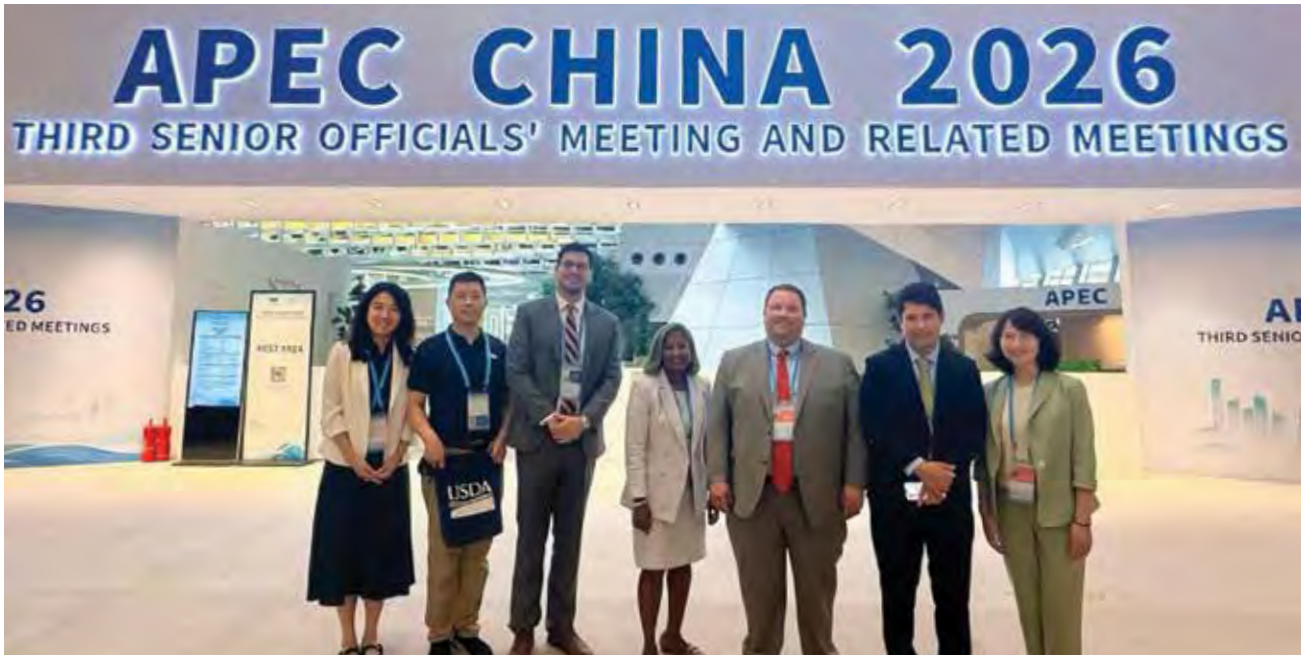
## Butler Arena

Red River Valley Fairgrounds
West Fargo, North Dakota



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Representing North Dakota soybean farmers, Justin Sherlock met with agriculture groups in China to help grow international partnerships.

*—Story continued from page 18*

In August, Dazey, North Dakota, farmer Justin Sherlock traveled to China on a U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC) trade mission and participated in the Asia Pacific Economic Conference.

Sherlock met with some of China's largest soy processors and livestock producers while also visiting new soy-crushing and port facilities.

"One of my key takeaways is that they would really like to buy U.S. soybeans," Sherlock said. "Many of the customers said that the U.S. quality is superior and (that) they would really like to do business again. They hope we can resolve the trade issue so that we can get back to business as normal."






Dazey, ND, farmer Justin Sherlock displays a bottle of soybean oil during his August trade mission to China.

Sherlock reassured buyers that North Dakota farmers also want a successful, long-term relationship.

"I reminded them that Chinese soy demand and the growth in acreage and the buildup of our transportation infrastructure in North Dakota went hand in hand," Sherlock explained. "We have a good product to offer, they want our soy. We just have to figure out the trade issues and make it happen."

China remains one of the top purchasers of U.S. soybeans despite recent disruptions that have hampered trade between the two countries. Even with those challenges as the backdrop, Sherlock explained how face-to-face meetings with Chinese buyers remain crucial.



NDSoybean Checkoff Investment

**FS2284** (March 2026)

# TAKE CARE OF YOUR EQUIPMENT

# TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AND OTHERS




## Are you worried about someone's safety? Your own?

Directly ask about your concerns or warning signs of stress:

***"Have you thought about hurting yourself or others?"***

Directly ask about suicide as it relates to warning signs of stress:

***"Do you have a plan?"***

## SOMETIMES YOU NEED HELP. SOMETIMES YOU ARE THE HELP.

## RESOURCES

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- **FirstLink Help Line** (24-hour helpline, services, referral) – Call **2-1-1**
- **In an emergency, call 9-1-1**
- **NDSU Extension – Farm/Ranch Stress Resources:** www.ag.nsu/edu/farmstress

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# No Such Thing as a Bad Win

——By Daniel **Lemke**, Editor-in-Chief

I'm a baseball guy. I played until I was 35 before hanging up the cleats to start coaching.

Back in the day, my primary position was pitcher. There were games where I pitched well enough to get a win but didn't. There were also plenty of times that, in spite of my less-than-stellar mound efforts, my team won.

The lesson that I learned from those experiences is to take the wins when they come.

There's been no shortage of strikes in the ag world lately. Challenging weather conditions, trade wars, and rising input costs for fertilizer and diesel have conspired to pinch farm budgets. Still, sprinkled within today's challenges are wins worth celebrating.

As we detailed in the previous issue of The Soybean Grower Magazine, changes in the biofuel landscape have provided a boost for ag-based renewable fuels, such as biodiesel, renewable diesel and sustainable aviation fuel. Updated volume requirements should spur increased demand for ag products such as soybean oil. The 45Z biofuel-production tax credit could result in farmers getting a premium for crops produced using certain conservation practices.

Anything that rewards growers for the work which they do and the care they give to the land is a win.

There are trade issues with some key partners, including Canada and China, but there is also a strong appetite for North Dakota soybeans globally.

In 2026 alone, representatives from 32 countries visited North Dakota farms. Meanwhile, farmer leaders from North Dakota didn't stay in the dugout. They visited 9 different countries, promoting the state's soybeans for quality and consistency.

This relationship building is key to opening new doors and making new teammates hungry for North Dakota soybeans.

Part of what makes North Dakota soybeans so desirable is their quality and sustainability. High-quality soybeans are the byproduct of a farmer's attention to detail, precision and commitment to stewardship.

Many of us grew up in an era where mental health wasn't a topic that was discussed freely and openly. There is always room for improvement, but numerous entities are committed to keeping mental health in the spotlight while highlighting the resources available to help people in crisis.



Daniel Lemke

Kudos to them. We really are in this together.

I grew up on a farm and have been involved with the agriculture industry for nearly all of my 40-year career. Like dedicated sports fans who have high hopes for their team at the start of each new season, I am constantly amazed at the optimism that farmers exhibit in the face of uncertainty and challenges. The resilience that farmers demonstrate is amazing, and it is something for which all of us who eat should be grateful.

Similarly, the North Dakota Soybean Growers Association and the North Dakota Soybean Council are both comprised of farmers who donate their time, expertise, insights and curiosity to better the soybean industry for their fellow growers. They may be volunteers, but you'd be hard pressed to find anyone more committed to their mission than these directors. Dedicated leaders have helped grow North Dakota's soybean industry into the global force that it has become. It doesn't get said enough, but thank you to our farmers; our readers; and everyone who works to put food on our tables, clothes on our backs, and fuel in our tanks regardless of the circumstances.

I know there will be more wins in the future.

Despite localized drought pressures limiting yields in parts of the state, 2026 brought major economic, infrastructure and trade milestones for North Dakota's soybean farmers. Driven by skyrocketing domestic-biofuel demand and strong international commitments, the industry achieved significant momentum.



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