

# corn talk

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## Inside

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- Legislative session ends in flurry
- Minnesota Corn will work to shape 45Z tax credit guidance
- Minnesota Corn releases first-ever Sustainability Report



**D**uring the 2024 state legislative session, which ended May 20, the grassroots policy team at the Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA) worked hard to advocate for measures that benefit corn farmers and rural communities and, in some cases, prevented measures that would have a negative impact. (See page 3 for more information on the 2024 session.) But just because the session ended doesn't mean MCGA's grassroots advocacy work is finished.

This summer, MCGA has continued to pay close attention to state and federal agencies with jurisdiction over areas affecting agriculture to ensure that any actions are in the best interest of corn farmers. Additionally, MCGA is engaging state and federal candidates and elected officials from both political parties to build relationships and ensure policymakers are well versed in issues important to corn farmers.

This important foundational work will continue through the 2024 general election and beyond. Stay up to date on the latest efforts by MCGA at [mncorn.org/news](https://mncorn.org/news) or by subscribing to our weekly Leader Update e-newsletter. You can subscribe at [mncorn.org/leaderupdate](https://mncorn.org/leaderupdate). To join the Minnesota Corn Growers Association, visit [mncorn.org/join](https://mncorn.org/join). 🗎



*Look for this icon in this issue to learn about research, promotion and outreach efforts fueled by farmers' investment in the Minnesota corn check-off.*

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# Legislative session ends in flurry



By **Amanda Bilek**  
Senior Public Policy Director

The 2024 Minnesota legislative session will likely be remembered by legislators and those who work most closely with the process for its acrimonious ending. With time running out, DFL leaders wrapped nine different bills/conference committee reports into one mammoth piece of legislation and passed it in both chambers before the clock struck midnight, leaving no time for the minority to review or debate the details. Beyond how it started or ended, what passed or fell out of final bills that corn farmers should know about?



**Amanda Bilek**

## Nitrates and nitrogen management

In response to Minnesota's plan to the Environmental Protection Agency to address nitrate concerns in southeast drinking water, there was a lot of focus in agriculture and environment committees on sources and management of nitrogen fertilizer. This was also happening in a year in which the Agriculture Fertilizer Research and Education Council (AFREC) was set to sunset in 2025 and the farmer-funded fee for research in 2024.

Early discussions in the House focused on establishing a new commercial nitrogen fertilizer user fee on farmers and using revenue collected under the new fee for nitrate treatment options in drinking water efforts in southeast Minnesota. The Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA) was opposed to a new nitrogen fertilizer fee and advocated instead for general and dedicated sources of funding to address nitrate concerns in southeast Minnesota and other vulnerable groundwater areas. The bill that passed off the House floor proposed

to repurpose the current AFREC fee for southeast Minnesota nitrate drinking water treatment and end AFREC in 2025 but keep the fee in place for treatment with no sunset date. The Senate agriculture bill had a clean 10-year extension of AFREC and appropriated \$3 million in general fund dollars for southeast Minnesota private well drinking water treatment options.

The final agriculture bill did not include any new nitrogen fertilizer user fee or repurpose the current AFREC fee for nitrate treatment. Instead, the bill:

- Appropriated \$2.8 million from the general fund for nitrate home water treatment in southeast Minnesota.
- Appropriated an additional \$495,000 to the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Soil Health Financial Assistance Program targeted specifically to eight southeast Minnesota counties.
- Renewed AFREC for five years while also making some changes to the makeup of the council and adding legislatively directed research priorities for manure as a nitrogen fertilizer source.

Separately, in the final constitutionally dedicated Legacy bill, legislators directed specific Clean Water Fund appropriations for nitrates. That included:

- \$1 million to MDA for continued research and demonstration in partnership with University of Minnesota Extension for best management practices to avoid nitrogen loss.
- \$3.4 million for the AgBMP Loan Program, \$3 million of which will be directed toward southeast Minnesota.
- \$2.8 million to the Minnesota Department of Health for well testing, well inventory, and education for southeast Minnesota.
- \$2 million to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency for a continuous nitrate monitoring system.
- \$1 million for easements around groundwater supply areas with priority in drinking water supply management areas.

## Omnibus environment bill

One of the bills MCGA followed most closely throughout the session was the House omnibus environment bill. Specifically, there were three provisions in the bill that were of serious concern to MCGA, none of which was contained in the Senate environment bill:

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# Farm Bill 2024

## When you come to a fork in the road...

By *Jeff Harrison*

*Senior Counsel, Combest, Sell & Associates*

**T**here's a lot of doom and gloom about the prospects for a Farm Bill this year but there's also reason not to give up.

Yes, Senate Republicans are underwhelmed by Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow's (D-MI) Farm Bill because it doesn't "put the farm in the Farm Bill."

And, yes, House Democrats are hopping mad that Chairman G.T. Thompson's (R-PA) Farm Bill—although definitely putting the farm in the Farm Bill—would prohibit the Secretary from using a 2018 Farm Bill provision to increase SNAP funding by \$250 billion as he did in August of 2021, would build the working lands conservation budget by more than 50% but take climate guardrails off of new conservation dollars, and would curtail the Secretary's use of the CCC's \$30 billion line of credit.



*Jeff Harrison*

These, Democrats say, are red lines that can't be crossed.

So, what's the road forward then?

Well, first, Chairman Thompson cleared the first hurdle for the House Farm Bill, passing the measure in Committee on a bipartisan vote, a feat few expected he could pull off. But without the support of Democratic leadership in the lower chamber and a handful of squirrely House Republicans that largely prevent Republicans from passing legislation alone, more rank-and-file House Democrats will need to express their support in the coming months before the measure can proceed to the floor.

That puts the ball back in the Senate's court. While it's true there's also a logjam in that chamber, it's also true that there is an opening... if the Senate wants to take it.

Senate Democrats will likely insist that SNAP's Thrifty Food Plan provision cannot be altered, as the House proposes, so big increases (or cuts) can be unilaterally implemented by an Administration, an insistence that would pay off under a second Biden Administration but which Democrats might regret under a Trump Administration.

Senate Democrats will likely insist that IRA dollars invested in conservation programs be dedicated to climate rather than spread amongst other important conservation initiatives.

But, maybe, maybe, Senate Democrats would also see the opportunity presented by Chairman Thompson's quest to have the Budget Committees overturn CBO's plainly flawed budget scoring of a provision in Thompson's version of the Farm Bill to limit the Secretary's use of the CCC so that the savings from this can be parlayed into at least \$53 billion that can be used to write the Farm Bill. For the record, we believe the \$53 billion over 10 years is still very conservative given the \$75 billion in CCC funds used over the past six years, but CBO assigns the savings at a paltry \$8 billion which simply lacks credibility.

When President Trump used the CCC to make Market Facilitation Program payments, Democrats argued the authority ought to be restricted and Congress should reclaim the power of the purse. However, President Biden has subsequently used the CCC but in a manner that is much more in line with Democratic priorities.

So, it boils down to whether the CCC question is really a matter of principle. If it is, then Chairman Thompson's idea is one Senate Democrats might latch onto. Sure,



# House Farm Bill clears first hurdle

In May, the Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA) commended the U.S. House Agriculture Committee for taking the first step in re-authorizing a Farm Bill by advancing the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2024.

MCGA President Dana Allen-Tully thanked Agriculture Committee Chairman G.T. Thompson (R-PA) and both Democratic and Republican members of the committee for their hard work on the legislation. She also thanked the committee's two members from Minnesota, Rep. Angie Craig (D) and Rep. Brad Finstad (R), for their efforts.



Dana Allen-Tully

"The House bill makes important investments to strengthen the farm safety net by protecting and enhancing crop insurance, increasing funding for trade promotion programs, and maintaining voluntary conservation practice adoption, reflecting many MCGA Farm Bill priorities," Allen-Tully said. "We look forward to the House and Senate working together to reauthorize a comprehensive, bipartisan bill that will provide the certainty needed for Minnesota corn farmers."

Some specific provisions MCGA supports include:

- Increasing the statutory reference price for corn and maintaining the effective reference price escalator.
- Increasing the coverage level and maximum rate for the Agriculture Risk Coverage program.
- Increasing base acres for producers based on recent plantings.
- Expanding crop insurance support for beginning and veteran farmers and ranchers and enhancing crop insurance for all farmers.
- Doubling mandatory funding for the Market Access Program (MAP) and Foreign Market Development (FMD) Program.
- Maintaining voluntary adoption of conservation practices and delivery of technical assistance.

Stay up to date on the latest Farm Bill news at [mncorn.org/news](https://mncorn.org/news). 🙌

if President Biden wins, Democrats might have some regrets. But if former President Trump wins, Democrats will have killed two birds with one stone: they will have completed a Farm Bill and limited the new President's use of the CCC.

If the additional funds allow the Chairwoman to satisfy Senator Boozman's Farm Bill priorities, a bipartisan bill could sail through the upper chamber on a supermajority vote, putting winds in its sails in the House where Chairman Thompson could take up the Senate-passed bill or make tweaks to his own bill to adopt Senate provisions that diffused current controversy. Under either scenario, a Farm Bill could be adopted by the House by a supermajority without having to go through a gauntlet of amendments.

With the explosive items having all been addressed, there would then be little to stop Congress from completing work on the Farm Bill or to prevent the President from signing it into law.

On the other hand, if the Senate fails to seize upon the opportunity presented, it's hard to see the Farm Bill moving further this year. What is more, under a divided government, it's difficult to see what changes next year. The wild card, though, is if one party sweeps: then watch for a reconciliation process where the party in power can write the Farm Bill on its own terms.

In short, there's a path to completing the Farm Bill this year. It may not be a perfect path but, in the words of Yogi Berra, "when you come to a fork in the road, take it."

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# Minnesota Corn will work to shape 45Z tax credit guidance



*If the current GREET model updates and guidance are preserved in the 45Z tax credit, opportunities for Minnesota corn farmers to supply feedstock for SAF will be limited.*

**By Amanda Bilek**  
*Senior Public Policy Director*

**T**his spring, the U.S. Department of the Treasury released long-awaited guidance for the 40B tax credit. This tax credit was authorized under the Inflation Reduction Act and is geared toward blenders of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF). Although MCGA was disappointed in the guidance, it is important to note that the 40B tax credit expires at the end of 2024, and with just a couple SAF blenders in the country, the benefit of this credit to corn farmers is limited. Consequently, Minnesota Corn is devoting time and resources to help shape the 45Z tax credit guidance.

Minnesota Corn sees the emerging SAF market as a significant opportunity for future corn demand. New demand could be met with ending stocks of corn instead of new cropland. A common argument against using agriculture feedstocks for renewable fuel production is conversion of non-ag land into crop production, but those detractors overlook available feedstock supply now and into the future.

According to projections completed in October 2023 by the USDA Economic Research Service (ERS), ending corn stocks for the 2023/2024 crop year could exceed 2.1 billion bushels. Due in part to improvements in corn hybrids, ending corn stocks could climb even higher in the 2024/2025 crop year to 2.6 billion bushels and 2.7 billion bushels in the 2025/2026 crop year. ERS also projects a corresponding decline in the price of corn as

stocks increase. Identifying new uses for corn is integral to ensuring financial sustainability for Minnesota corn farms.

## **Minnesota Corn's part in the future of SAF**

Minnesota has big aspirations for SAF. Public policy leaders see SAF development as a significant opportunity for Minnesota due to a combination of abundant agricultural feedstocks, a strong biofuel production system, a major airline hub airport, and existing fuel refining assets. Last year, the State Legislature approved an SAF tax credit to help bolster the production and use of SAF. GREATER MSP launched an SAF hub with partners from Delta, Ecolab, and Bank of America to create a model to scale SAF. Minnesota Corn joined the hub in fall 2023.

Partnerships will be key to help SAF take off in Minnesota. There's a lot of work to do to fully realize the promise of SAF in Minnesota. Investments need to be made in research, demonstration and pilot projects, expedited environmental permitting, additional environmental permitting reform, and complementary public policy. All of this will need to be implemented in a relatively short period of time to take advantage of the federal tax credits. Minnesota Corn will be sharing more in the coming months about specific activities and projects we will be undertaking to help take advantage of this opportunity for Minnesota's corn farmers.

The next available federal SAF tax credit is 45Z and is effective Jan. 1, 2025, through Dec. 31, 2027. MCGA will

now focus the next several months, with our partners, on working to ensure that the GREET model update and guidance for 45Z is more flexible and provides a pathway for Minnesota corn farmers to supply a low-carbon and sustainable feedstock source for SAF. If the current GREET model updates and guidance are preserved in the 45Z tax credit, we think opportunities for Minnesota corn farmers to supply feedstock for SAF will be limited.

## How we got here

Before digging into some shortcomings of the recently released 40B guidance, a little SAF background. There are several pathways to produce SAF, all dependent on some level of additional technological innovation. The alcohol-to-jet pathway is the most immediate and near-term opportunity to supply significant volumes of SAF. An alcohol-to-jet pathway could use abundant volumes of Midwestern corn-based ethanol and use a catalytic process to upgrade ethanol to SAF.

The biofuel tax credits authorized in the Inflation Reduction Act stipulate that fuel must reduce greenhouse gas (GHG), on a lifecycle basis, compared to fossil fuel-based fuel. There are different tools or models that can be used to evaluate lifecycle GHG emissions, but in December the Treasury Department specified use of the GREET model to certify SAF emission reductions. GREET stands for the Greenhouse Gases, Regulated Emissions, and Energy use in Transportation (GREET) and is the gold standard for evaluating the lifecycle emissions of various transportation fuels (liquid, gaseous, electric) options on a level-playing field. It was developed by scientists at the Department of Energy Argonne National Laboratory.

In most cases, existing Midwest ethanol plants will need to implement new energy efficiency, renewable energy, or carbon management technologies to meet the 50% GHG reduction threshold required to qualify for the 40B tax credit. Plants can also look outside the fence of the ethanol plant to reduce downstream emissions. This offers an opportunity for corn farmers as it is where the calculation of potential carbon reductions in the feedstock production process is considered.

## What the 40B guidance means

The 40B tax credit guidance issued on April 30 by the U.S. Treasury Department for the first time provided a method to recognize and calculate emissions reductions from feedstock production practices. Unfortunately, the method proposed is not appropriate for most Minnesota corn farmers. Treasury is referring to this method as a Climate Smart Agriculture pilot program.

To credit emissions reductions from the production of corn to produce SAF, a corn farmer will need to utilize no-till or strip-till, cover crops, AND enhanced efficiency nitrogen fertilizer on all acres that grow corn for ethanol-to-SAF. An enhanced efficiency fertilizer could include a

nitrification inhibitor product, urease inhibitor product, or a slow-release fertilizer. It doesn't appear the guidance recognizes the full suite of strategies corn farmers use to manage nitrogen use efficiency. In addition to the practice bundle approach, MCGA also has significant concerns with the reporting and verification requirements for the CSA pilot, adding to the barriers for Minnesota corn farmers.

The CSA pilot program practice bundle method awards carbon reduction points in the overall lifecycle assessment under an all or nothing approach. A better approach would be to focus on outcomes that can be comprised of a suite of feedstock production practices that reduce carbon emissions such as variable rate nitrogen application, the use of manure to supply nitrogen fertilizer to the crop, and crop rotations to name just a few. MCGA will be working with our state and federal partners over the next several months to help shape the guidance for 45Z to ensure it more fully recognizes the suite of practices corn farmers utilize to increase efficient production of the crop and reduce emissions. 🙅

## At a glance: IRA biofuel tax incentives

### Section 40B (sustainable aviation fuel tax credit)

- Available to SAF produced in 2023 and 2024 that reduces lifecycle greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by at least 50% compared to petroleum-based jet fuel.
- Eligibility is determined using the modified version of the Argonne Greenhouse gases, Regulated Emissions, and Energy use in Transportation (GREET) model released in April.
- The credit is \$1.25 per gallon plus an additional cent for each percentage point a fuel reduces lifecycle GHG emissions, up to \$1.75 per gallon.

### Section 45Z (clean fuel production tax credit)

- Available to biofuels produced in 2025-27, including SAF, with a carbon intensity (CI) score below 50 kilograms of carbon dioxide equivalent per million British thermal units.
- Eligibility will be determined using a yet-to-be-released version of the GREET model.
- For SAF, the credit is up to 3.5 cents per gallon for each CI point under 50, up to \$1.75 per gallon.
- For all other fuels, the credit is up to 2 cents per gallon for each CI point under 50, up to \$1 per gallon.

Source: Growth Energy

# MCGA continues Unleaded 88 advocacy



*The bipartisan Consumer and Fuel Retailer Choice Act would create parity between Unleaded 88 and regular unleaded fuel, ensuring the biofuel blend can be sold year-round.*

**A**fter the Biden administration's approval in April of an emergency waiver allowing Unleaded 88 sales in summer 2024, the Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA) has continued advocating for permanent year-round sales of the fuel.

MCGA has encouraged Congress to pass the bipartisan Consumer and Fuel Retailer Choice Act, which would ensure permanent and uninterrupted sales of Unleaded 88 nationwide. The organization thanks Minnesota Senators Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith and Minnesota Representatives Angie Craig, Brad Finstad, and Michelle Fischbach for sponsoring the bill, which would create parity between regular unleaded and Unleaded 88. Regular unleaded fuel can be sold year-round.

MCGA also looks forward to the implementation of a petition, approved by the administration in February, allowing for year-round Unleaded 88 sales in eight Midwestern states, including Minnesota, starting in 2025. Approval of the petition was a positive step, but it's not a fill-in for congressional action.

"Year-round Unleaded 88 availability on a permanent basis would be a win for drivers, farmers, rural communities, and all consumers, especially at a time of rising gas prices and continued global uncertainty," Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA) President Dana Allen-Tully said in a statement. "We thank Minnesota Governor Tim Walz and the members of Minnesota's congressional delegation who have worked toward this outcome and their advocacy on behalf of biofuels."

Minnesota Corn has been a leader in increasing consumer access to, and awareness of, Unleaded 88, which is also known as E15—a nod to its 15% ethanol concentration. For years, the organization has promoted Unleaded 88 to consumers through multiple outreach efforts, including the Better Fuel Initiative. And, MCGA has played a key role in advocating for the creation of biofuel infrastructure programs at the State Legislature.

In 2021, for example, the organization successfully advocated for a \$6 million biofuel infrastructure grant program at the Legislature. The Minnesota Corn Research & Promotion Council contributed \$1 million to the program, which allowed 44 fuel stations to upgrade equipment. MCGA successfully advocated for a \$6.75 million state biofuel infrastructure grant program during the 2023 legislative session.

Thanks in part to these efforts, about 500 Minnesota fuel stations offer Unleaded 88. In 2023, the state reported a record year for Unleaded 88 with over 127 million gallons sold.

First offered for sale in Minnesota in 2013, Unleaded 88 is approved for use in 2001 and newer cars, trucks, and SUVs. The fuel reduces emissions compared to regular unleaded and lowers costs at the pump—about 16 cents per gallon on average, according to the latest state data. It also increases consumer choice and supports farm families and rural communities.

Learn more about Unleaded 88, and find an Unleaded 88 station near you, at [BetterFuel.org](https://www.betterfuel.org). 🖱️

# NCGA continues focus on trade policy



*By Brook S. Appleton*  
*Vice President, Public Policy, NCGA*

It's an evening we all remember in the Washington office of the National Corn Growers Association and is now a familiar war story that is brought up often at our gatherings.

On a cold February night in 2023 as staff settled into their homes after a day at the office, our communications director sent an email around: "Please be advised, Mexico plans to ban all genetically modified white corn imports beginning tomorrow."

The news came after a months-long campaign by NCGA to stop Mexico's president from banning imports of genetically modified corn into his country. That evening, Pres. Andrés Manuel López Obrador decided to push back, and the Reuters Mexico City Bureau had received word from the National Palace that the ban on white corn, often used for food-grade products, was imminent.

The ban on these products from a country that is our number one customer was an ominous development, particularly for states, like Nebraska, that export large quantities of white corn.

As soon as word reached us, our homes, scattered across the Washington region, became de facto command centers where we worked well into the night on our response and forward-looking strategy. We also alerted our state organizations, which in turn activated

their farmers, like Nebraska grower Andy Jobman, who had already been advocating on the issue and were ready to act.

The story illustrates how international affairs and trade issues are as important to farmers as what goes on at the local co-op and why the issue is a top concern to NCGA. Expanding international demand for corn is one of our top advocacy objectives. It is also a reminder to growers of the strong role they play when they communicate about these issues with their members of Congress.

We only must look at the data to understand the economic importance of trade to farmers. Forecasts show that corn exports will consume 13.7% of total production for the marketing year 2023/24. In 2023, ethanol exports translated to over \$2.8 billion to corn growers. Beef and pork exports, which rely heavily on corn as feed, accounted for over \$3 billion in revenue for corn growers in 2023.

Yet, as a country we're not fulfilling our true potential on the trade front and there are many threats that impede our efforts to export more corn.

The U.S., for example, has had a trading surplus in ag exports averaging \$12.5 billion over the past ten years. But the latest forecast by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for FY 2023 predicts a food and ag trade deficit of \$30 billion.

In the meantime, international competitors, such as Brazil, are working hard to forge new agreements that leave American commodities in the dust.

That is why we have been pushing the Biden administration to drastically increase its efforts to secure meaningful access opportunities for agricultural commodities, so that other countries do not secure them first.

We have also been working with members of Congress and the administration to reinforce the need to increase funding for the USDA market access and foreign market development programs, which will help build long-term international demand for corn and corn products.

We are pleased that our top Farm Bill priority on trade, to significantly increase funding for these efforts, is in the House version of the bill. Our goal is to make sure this increased funding is in the final bill that is signed into law.

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# Minnesota Corn releases first-ever Sustainability Report



*Sustainability is central to the mission of Minnesota Corn. The organization's new Sustainability Report captures the many ways the state's corn farmers are increasing the efficiency and productivity of corn farming and quality of life for growers and all Minnesotans.*

**M**innesota Corn has made significant investments for decades in three important elements of sustainability, namely People, Planet, and Profit. The organization's new Sustainability Report details investments to-date in projects and programs that comprise the three pillars of sustainability. Future versions of the report will build on the baseline established in this report and will include an action plan and associated metrics to track Minnesota Corn's continued progress on its sustainability journey.

The complete 2024 Minnesota Corn Sustainability Report is available at [bit.ly/MNCornReport](https://bit.ly/MNCornReport). Some highlights from the report are included here.

## People



Strengthen rural communities while enabling a safe and healthy quality of life for non-farmers and ensuring food security for communities worldwide. In the People category, Minnesota Corn has developed sponsorships, scholarships, community programs, educational opportunities, and

resources to support local outreach by county corn farmer organizations.

- Since 2021, Minnesota Corn has invested nearly \$1 million in agriculture programming such as Twin Cities Road Crew presentations to schools and public events, Minnesota Ag in the Classroom, FFA, and 4-H.

- Since 2019, Minnesota Corn has given \$80,000 in scholarships to Young Adult Members for continuing education.
- The state's 52 county affiliates collectively engage thousands of consumers about biofuels and corn farming during more than 300 events each year which Minnesota Corn supports through its matching funds program.

## Planet



Responsibly managing and replenishing finite resources used for farming while protecting and enhancing the environment that is impacted by farming practices. Nearly \$20 million has been invested since 2008 into research and extension programs focused

on improving productivity as well as practices that benefit the environment.

## Research

- Reduce losses: Dr. Tim Griffis (University of Minnesota) is studying whether winter rye cover crops and enhanced efficiency fertilizers reduce nitrous oxide losses during the soil freeze thaw cycles of spring, which can contribute up to 35% of the annual nitrous oxide emissions.
- Real-world application: Research by Dr. Gary Feyereisen is designed to evaluate the performance

of conservation practices at reducing nitrate-nitrogen (N) loads from corn-soybean agriculture in a small-watershed scale under real world conditions.

- Precision agriculture: Dr. Vasudha Sharma (University of Minnesota) is studying how better irrigation scheduling has the potential to address some of the complex agricultural environmental challenges faced in Minnesota.



activities including investments in export programs for corn, corn products, and animal protein; commercialization of new corn-based products; and ethanol promotion. Supporting a reliable and diverse market for corn farmers enables them to make investments

both in the community and best management practices on their farms to benefit the environment.

### Educational and outreach programming

Minnesota Corn scales up research outcomes and supports initiatives that help farmers engage in best management practices on their farms, such as:

- Nitrogen Smart: Nitrogen Smart is an educational program from University of Minnesota Extension which presents fundamentals for maximizing economic return on nitrogen investments while minimizing nitrogen losses. Minnesota Corn has financially supported Nitrogen Smart for many years.
- Climate Smart: This Minnesota Corn funded University of Minnesota program helps Minnesota's corn growers and the agricultural sector respond to a changing climate while building resilient farming operations and a sustained agricultural economy through in-person and virtual events.

### Profit

Providing a fair profit margin for farmers while delivering equitably priced goods to the nonfarming public. Minnesota Corn has supported key market development

Exports of corn and its coproducts contribute to Minnesota's economy, supporting 21,679 jobs and adding \$1.78 billion in gross state product. Since 2008, Minnesota Corn has invested \$34 million in biofuel research, promotion, and infrastructure. Innovative, new, and expanded uses of corn demonstrate its versatility and potential for various industries.

- ClearFlame Engine Technologies is replacing diesel with ethanol to reduce fuel and environmental costs while keeping these engines running as a vital part of the economy.
- Minnesota Corn has joined the Minnesota Sustainable Aviation Hub in its mission to create a model for scalable sustainable aviation fuel.
- Låkril Technologies has made a significant breakthrough in the production of acrylic acid and acrylates. These chemicals, widely used in the manufacturing of paints, coatings, textiles, and more, are now being produced in a cost-effective manner from renewable feedstocks like corn. 🙌

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## Deadline for conservation award nears

The Minnesota application deadline for a \$10,000 award that recognizes landowners who implement voluntary conservation practices is nearing.

The Sand County Foundation, which works with private landowners to improve water quality, soil health, and wildlife habitat, is accepting applications for the Leopold Conservation Award in Minnesota through July 1. Named in honor of conservationist Aldo Leopold, the award recognizes farmers and forestland owners who inspire others with their dedication to environmental improvement.

Each year, the Sand County Foundation and national sponsor American Farmland Trust present Leopold Conservation Awards to private landowners across the U.S. In 2024, the foundation will present the award in over 25 states, including Minnesota for the first time.

Minnesota Corn is sponsoring the award as part of its effort to highlight the many voluntary ways producers increase on-farm sustainability.



The Sand County Foundation will announce the Minnesota winner at the Premier Soil Health Event in Mankato in December. The winner will receive \$10,000 and his or her conservation story will be featured in the foundation's public outreach efforts.

Nominations may be submitted on behalf of a landowner, or landowners may apply themselves. The Minnesota application can be found at [sandcountyfoundation.org/ApplyLCA](https://sandcountyfoundation.org/ApplyLCA). Applications are reviewed by an independent panel of agricultural and conservation leaders from Minnesota. Applications must be emailed to [award@sandcountyfoundation.org](mailto:award@sandcountyfoundation.org). 🙌

# Analysis: Permitting reform needed

A 2018 analysis commissioned by Minnesota Corn found that the lengthy and cumbersome nature of Minnesota's air permitting process has negative economic effects on the state's ethanol plants. Similarly, the analysis found, the state's lengthy environmental review process has negative economic impacts on some beef feedlots and swine operations. Ethanol plants, beef feedlots, and swine operations are key users of corn, accounting for well over 500 million bushels annually in Minnesota, according to the market research firm ProExporter Network.

Now, a new analysis by the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce has affirmed that Minnesota's air permitting process has negative economic effects and has offered recommendations for streamlining all state permitting processes.

On average, it took 656 days for the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) to issue air permits between 2017 and 2022, according to the analysis. That's 1.5 to six times longer than in the four states bordering Minnesota and six other similarly sized states across the country.

For example, in Minnesota, the analysis found that simple errors in an air permit application, such as missing information in a field, can cause the MPCA to reject the entire application, sending the applicant to the back of the review queue. Other states avoid this problem by either setting a time limit on administrative review, assigning the task to non-technical staff to check for basic completeness, or skipping the step altogether.

Once applications are complete, it can take the MPCA months to assign a permit engineer to begin the technical

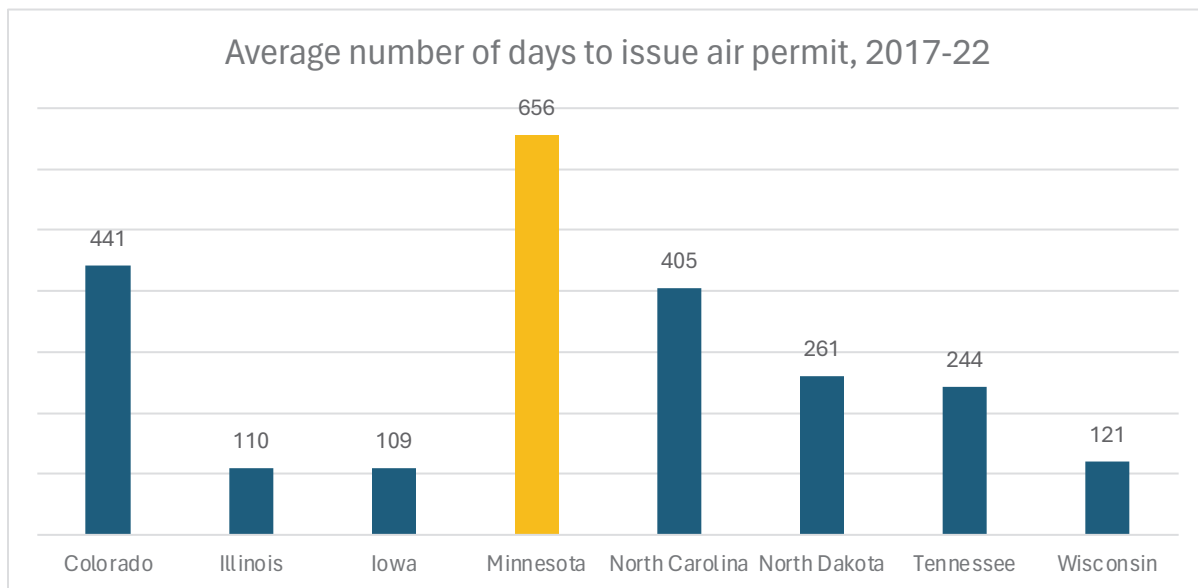
review process. Additionally, Minnesota requires companies to complete air dispersion reviews before work on an application can occur. In other states, such as Illinois or Iowa, permit engineers can work on the application while the modeling is taking place.

If Minnesota's air permitting review process matched that of other states in the study, the state would see hundreds of millions in additional economic activity, according to the analysis. For example, if Minnesota's air permitting review process was like that of Iowa, the state would see an additional \$800 million in economic activity and 3,000 full-time jobs, according to the analysis. If the state's review process was like that of Illinois or Wisconsin, it would see an additional \$910 million in economic activity and 3,400 full-time jobs.

To improve the air permitting process, the analysis recommends the state make updates such as: issuing construction permits separately from operating permits; revising its approach to determining whether an application is complete; reviewing the format and organization of air permits; collecting and publishing more detailed data on air permit processing timelines; and more.

To improve the environmental review process, the analysis recommends the state update its environmental review projects database, narrow the focus of content required on Environmental Assessment Worksheets, and revise scoping requirements for mandatory Environmental Impact Statements.

Read the report online at [bit.ly/MNchamberreport](https://bit.ly/MNchamberreport). 🖱️



Source: Policy Navigation Group via Minnesota Chamber of Commerce

# MCGA-supported grant program honored

A state-run, Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA) supported soil health grant program has been honored by a Minnesota nonprofit.

The Soil Health Financial Assistance Program, run by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), received the Rural Vitality Award from Environmental Initiative during the organization's 30th annual awards program on June 5. The Rural Vitality Award recognizes efforts to solve community-scale challenges in rural areas, such as grassroots revitalization and beautification efforts, alternative land-use strategies, and policy initiatives contributing to economic prosperity and environmental stewardship.

Created by the State Legislature in 2022 as a pilot program, thanks in part to MCGA's grassroots advocacy, the Soil Health Financial Assistance Program provides grants to help offset the cost of purchasing and/or retrofitting soil health equipment. The program was made on-going during the 2023 legislative session and received funding from the general fund and the Clean Water Fund.

The program, which is voluntary and inclusive of a wide range of practices, is open to farmers, producer groups, and local government units. Eligible expenses include parts and materials to retrofit existing equipment, down payments on equipment, subscriptions or equipment

technology for precision agriculture, technical assistance for conservation plans, and more. Grants can range from \$500 to \$50,000.

To date, in two rounds of funding, MDA has awarded 97 grants totaling over \$2.8 million to farmers, producer groups, and local government units across Minnesota. Equipment purchased and/or retrofitted through the program has included no-till drills, drones for cover crop seeding, air seeds, strip till units, portable corral systems for livestock grazing, vertical tillage tools, and more. MDA estimates the equipment will be used on about 172,000 acres annually.

The department plans to open the program for a new round of grant funding in August and will have about \$2.8 million available for grants, including \$495,000 specifically for southeast Minnesota counties. The State Legislature allocated the funding for southeast Minnesota counties during the 2024 session. (See more information about the 2024 legislative session on page 3.)

MCGA thanks the state lawmakers from both political parties who supported the creation of the Soil Health Financial Assistance Program and MDA Commissioner Thom Petersen for his administration of it. To learn more about the program, visit [mda.state.mn.us/soil-health-grant](https://mda.state.mn.us/soil-health-grant). 🙌

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## Ag weather network expansion begins

A \$3 million expansion of Minnesota's agricultural weather station network—passed by the State Legislature in 2023 thanks in part to grassroots advocacy by the Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA)—is underway.

This summer, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) is installing the first of approximately 40 new weather stations it will build with the funds, said Stefan Bischof, a hydrologist in the department's Pesticide and Fertilizer Management Division. He said the goal is to have a weather station every 20 miles in the state's agricultural areas.

Currently, most of northwestern Minnesota has a station every 20 miles, but there are few stations in southern Minnesota. Most of the stations in northwestern Minnesota are run by North Dakota State University based North Dakota Agricultural Weather Station Network, or NDAWN.

"It's a big task, but it's exciting," Bischof said of the build-out.

Like existing stations, the new stations will collect a variety of weather data, including total rainfall, air temperature, relative humidity, wind speed, wind direction, four-inch bare soil temperature, and more. The data will be uploaded in real time to the ag weather station website run by NDAWN, [ndawn.ndsu.nodak.edu](https://ndawn.ndsu.nodak.edu), where it will be free to access, and to the free NDAWN smartphone app.

MCGA supported the build-out of the network in 2023 as part of its mission to ensure Minnesota corn farmers have access to the tools needed to sustainability and productivity grow a corn crop. 🙌

# CommonGround Minnesota: Bridging the gap between farmers and consumers



CommonGround Minnesota volunteers at the 2024 state conference.

**C**ommonGround Minnesota is a group of women farmers breaking ground in fostering meaningful conversations about food and farming. CommonGround Minnesota is more than just an organization; it's a vibrant community of female farmers who volunteer their time to bridge the gap between farmers and consumers.

At the core of CommonGround Minnesota's mission is the commitment to serve as a connection between farmers and consumers, leveraging social media, a dynamic website, and insightful blogs to spark conversations about agriculture. But it doesn't stop there. CommonGround Minnesota actively engages with consumers through a myriad of events, primarily in the metro area, to foster connections and deepen understanding.

This year brings an exciting addition to the roster of events with CommonGround Night Out. Set against the backdrop of James Beard Award-winning Chef Ann Kim's renowned restaurant Young Joni volunteers will engage with food-conscious individuals, offering insights into the realities of farming in Minnesota.

Another highlight of the summer is the Farm Dinner, a unique experience where attendees step onto a local farm for a meal and conversation. Hosted by our dedicated volunteers, the Farm Dinner offers an intimate setting for guests to engage directly with farmers and gain valuable insights into the dedication, care, and innovation that go into producing the food we enjoy. But the outreach doesn't end there. CommonGround is also planning trivia nights, cooking classes, grocery store pop-ups, and other events to continue the conversation about agriculture.

We are actively seeking new volunteers! Volunteers represent a wide spectrum of crop and animal agriculture, encompassing various operation sizes and structures. Some volunteers also balance their farm work with off-farm employment, while others identify more with the role of 'farm wife' rather than 'farmer.' What unites them is their involvement in production agriculture and their shared passion for engaging with consumers to share insights about their operations and the broader world of agriculture.

If you are interested in becoming a CommonGround volunteer or want to learn more, reach out to Kelly at [kstanek@mncorn.org](mailto:kstanek@mncorn.org) or visit [CommonGroundMinnesota.com](http://CommonGroundMinnesota.com). 🙋

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## Four re-elected to MCR&PC

**F**our Minnesota corn farmers have been re-elected to the Minnesota Corn Research & Promotion Council, the 11-member body responsible for managing the Minnesota corn check-off. Doug Albin was re-elected in District 1/2/4 (western Minnesota), John Mages in District 3/5/6 (central Minnesota), Duane Epland in District 8 (south-central Minnesota), and Scott Winslow in District 9 (southeast Minnesota). Each will serve another three-year term.

Albin raises corn and soybeans with his wife, Lois, in Clarkfield. He served on the Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA) board in the 2000s before joining the

council in 2012. Mages raises corn, soybeans, and seed soybeans with his wife, Cindy, and their oldest son near Belgrade. He was elected to the council for the first time in 2021 after serving on the MCGA board for nine years.

Epland raises corn and soybeans with his brother, Bruce, in Twin Lakes. He has been on the council since 2018 and is serving vice chair in 2023-24. Winslow raises corn, soybeans, and hogs in Fountain with his wife, son, and daughter-in-law. He's been on the council since 2015 and was chair in 2019-20.

To learn more about the council, visit [mncorn.org](http://mncorn.org). 🙋

# Join Minnesota Corn at Farmfest!



**F**armfest is back for 2024, and Minnesota Corn will once again have an active presence at the annual agriculture show held at Gilfillan Estate near Morgan. This year's event is set for Aug. 6-8.

Stop by the Minnesota Corn tent at the corner of Seed Row and Seventh Street to learn about the many ways corn growers are driving innovation, supporting rural communities, and ensuring a prosperous future for farmers and their families.

Renew or sign up for Minnesota Corn Growers Association membership during Farmfest to earn a special reward. Catch up with old friends and, of course, don't forget to grab a free sample of the famous sweet corn ice cream. Made by the University of Minnesota, this delicious ice cream is the perfect snack to beat the summer heat!

Each year, Farmfest aims to bring together the best in agribusiness from Minnesota and across the U.S. Visitors can network with over 400 exhibitors showcasing the latest in agriculture; participate in political forums and debates; see displays that include farm machinery, livestock equipment and thousands of ag products and services to assist your farm operation; and much more.

Minnesota Corn is proud to be present at Farmfest each year as part of our mission to engage and support corn farmers and rural communities across the state. We look forward to another successful Farmfest and can't wait to see you there!

For all Farmfest-related announcements, check out our website [mncorn.org](http://mncorn.org) and follow Minnesota Corn on Twitter ([@mncorn](https://twitter.com/mncorn)) and Facebook ([@Minnesota Corn](https://facebook.com/MinnesotaCorn)). 🙌

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## NCGA continues focus on trade policy

Continued from page 9

An additional concern for us is that U.S. food and ag exports still face trade-restrictive tariffs in key markets around the globe. That is why we are working closely with the U.S. Trade Representative to encourage her agency to enforce our bilateral and multilateral trade agreements.

This brings us back to the infamous story I mentioned earlier about the Mexican ban on food-grade corn, because our work on that front is illustrative of what it takes to effect change on trade issues.

Prompted by the advocacy efforts of corn growers, shortly after the ban on white corn, the U.S. Trade Representative filed a dispute settlement against Mexico under the United-States-Mexico-Canada Agreement. A decision that will hopefully resolve the matter is expected late this year.

This outcome would have never come to pass if not for the fact that corn growers across the country were reaching out and making their voices heard.

We will keep putting trade front and center, along with other key issues, in our advocacy efforts. But we need you by our side. Please text COB to 52886 to stay informed on these and other advocacy efforts.

To affect change on trade, we must remember: all politics are local but demand is global.

*Appleton is the vice president of public policy at the National Corn Growers Association. 🙌*

# Legislative session ends in flurry

Continued from page 3

- Require a drain tile real estate disclosure at the time of sale of agricultural property that would include size and location of private tile lines as well as outlets for the history of the agricultural property, not just the current landowner.
- Ban the planting of corn on state-owned land and transition the current approximately 4,000 acres of corn (mostly used as wildlife food plots) to native vegetation.
- Changes to the public waters statute that would use the statutory definition to determine what is or what is not a public water and reduce reliance on the Public Waters Inventory (PWI) as the definitive source of a public water determination.

How did these three items shake out in the final environmental bill? The drain tile real estate disclosure was not included. In addition to concerns from agriculture, county government (recorders/assessors) also raised concerns. We fully expect discussions and proposals specific to private agricultural drain tile to continue next year along with the discussions on public drain tile systems.

The corn ban on state land, as proposed in the House position, did not make it into a final bill. Instead, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will need to include specific management directives in the cooperative and lease agreements with farmers on state land east of Interstate 35 in the karst region. Those specific management directives include:

- Prohibit fall fertilizer application (for commercial fertilizer, the Groundwater Protection Rule already prohibits fall application in the karst region).
- Require that no more than 50 percent of a nitrogen budget be applied before crop emergence.
- Prohibit nitrogen rates from exceeding the University of Minnesota recommended rates.
- Require the use of fall cover crops.

Although these specific management directives are only for state-owned acres farmed under a cooperative or lease agreement in the karst region, these directives do give some insight into the types of directives some legislators would like to require on private farmland acres to address environmental concerns.

Finally, with respect to public waters. The House position to require the use of the statutory definition to determine whether a water body is a public water was included but with an effective date of July 1, 2027. This gives the

opportunity to work on this in a future session and continue to argue that this change provides no certainty to a farmer of what is or what is not a public water. The PWI should provide that certainty.

To that end, an additional \$1 million per year for the next eight years was appropriated to the DNR to make updates or corrections to the PWI. MCGA, along with our ag partners, will be actively engaged as the DNR utilizes these funds to make the necessary updates and corrections that are long overdue.

## Next steps

As we turn the page on the 2024 legislative session, we look forward to engaging with MCGA members on specific legislative outcomes and starting to gather grassroots input on future state legislative priorities and grassroots policy resolutions. We also look forward to an active summer and fall working with state agencies on the implementation of various provisions and directives from the Legislature. Lastly, we will have an active summer and fall continuing to deepen relationship with elected officials and building relationships with candidates for public office on issues that are important to Minnesota corn farmers. 🙌

## By the numbers: 2024 appropriations\*

**\$495,000**

For soil health cost-share grants in eight southeast Minnesota counties.

**\$1 million**

Annually over the next eight years to the DNR to update the state's Public Waters Inventory.

**\$2.8 million**

For nitrate home water treatment in southeast Minnesota.

**\$3.4 million**

Appropriated from the Clean Water Fund for the AgBMP Loan Program, \$3 million of which will be directed toward southeast Minnesota.

*\*All appropriations are from the general fund unless otherwise noted*

# Spring in photos for Minnesota Corn

It was another busy spring for Minnesota Corn and its partners, with many holding events aimed at engaging students, motorists, and the public. Additionally, with spring planting underway, Minnesota Corn's district field managers were busy checking in with—and providing planting snacks to—leaders of the state's 52 county corn grower associations. The following is a snapshot of those efforts. See the full list of upcoming events for Minnesota Corn and county corn organizations at [mncorn.org/events](https://mncorn.org/events).



*From left to right: Lac Qui Parle Corn & Soybean Growers Association board members Ed Hegland, Jeff Rheingans, and Aaron Olson pose with planting snacks delivered by their Minnesota Corn district field manager in April.*



*Members of Minnesota Agriculture & Rural Leadership Program (MARL) Class XII pose outside the SPAM Museum during an April seminar. Minnesota Corn is a longtime supporter of MARL as part of its mission to strengthen rural communities.*



*West Central Area FFA member Jaime Johnson smiles with her Diversified Crop Production Placement Award alongside Minnesota Corn Program Manager Kelly Stanek at the state FFA convention in April.*



**Stearns County Corn Growers Association board members Ken Reuter (second from left) and John Mages (right) talk with drivers at a county fuel event in April.**



**From left to right: Staci Martin of AgriBank, Amanda Bilek of Minnesota Corn, and Ashley Kohls of Minnesota Turkey. The three were featured on a policy panel at the 2024 Women's Agricultural Leadership Conference in April.**



**Clay/Wilkin Corn & Soybean Growers Association President Jeremy Tischer mans the organization's tent during the Clay County breakfast on the farm event at Kasin Farms June 1 in Hawley.**



**Children play in a utility trailer filled with corn during the Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota's first-ever agriculture education day on June 1 in Mankato. Minnesota Corn was a proud sponsor of the event.**



**Minnesota Corn's mascot Maizey shows off some of the many products made from corn during an April assembly at a Twin Cities elementary school hosted by Twin Cities Road Crew.**



**MEG Corp's Hoon Ge at a Minnesota Corn-supported ethanol workshop for high school students in May.**



**Minnesota Corn Research & Promotion Council treasurer John Mages (back center) participates in a meeting focused on climate adaptation in agriculture hosted by the University of Minnesota Climate Adaptation Partnership in April. Minnesota Corn is supporting efforts by the center to develop a climate smart agriculture Extension program.**

**Participants in CommonGround Minnesota's May trivia night at Broken Clock Brewing Cooperative in Minneapolis pose for a photo after the event.**



**We want to hear from you.**

Send photos and brief descriptions of your county events to your district field manager. Find your DFM on our maps at [mncorn.org/contact/staff](http://mncorn.org/contact/staff).

thanks to our allied partners



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**First Vice President** - Jim Kanten of Milan  
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\*NCGA Board member

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Chad Willis of Willmar  
320-235-4452

Scott Winslow of Fountain  
507-951-0363

**Ex-Officio** - Thom Petersen  
Minnesota Dept. of Ag  
651-201-6219



# cornstalk

## calendar of events

june  
**26**

Minnesota Corn board meeting,  
Burnsville

july  
**4-5**

Minnesota Corn office closed for 4th  
of July

august  
**6-8**

Farmfest, Redwood Falls, MN