

# STRAIGHT ROWS

*Digital Edition*

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## Policy is personal, the farmer voice matters



**Teresa Brandenburg, Russell**  
 ASA | Kansas Representative

Farmers learn to live with a fair amount of uncertainty. We plant seeds in the soil and pray for enough rain and for prices that reflect the work and investment we put in. I've heard farmers joke that we don't need casinos because every year is a gamble with Mother Nature. Lately, the worst uncertainty hasn't come from the weather forecast; it comes from Washington, D.C.

Fall is always chaotic with harvest. Add in kids, life, and an off-farm job, and we've eaten more meals on the go than I care to admit. This year, though, my phone has reminded me that the chaos is bigger than our household. Weather apps, markets, news, social media, and policy alerts are all telling the same story: farming is becoming increasingly difficult to manage around the variables we can't control.

Uncertainty has been the loudest noise this fall. Markets swing on headlines of tariff rumors, stalled Farm Bill negotiations, and trade tensions that ripple through every app on my phone. Input costs keep climbing, and soybean prices fluctuate not because of supply or demand, but because of press conferences.

This uncertainty doesn't just affect my spreadsheets; it shifts the energy of an entire town. Repairs get delayed. Purchases are second-guessed. Every input decision for next year gets scrutinized. In rural communities where every business touches agriculture, uncertainty is contagious. Fewer pickups at the local café, less inventory at the parts store, the co-op is quieter, and even the school fundraisers feel it when farm families tighten their belts.

I don't share this for sympathy; that's the last thing farmers want. I share it because **this is where policy becomes personal**. When uncertainty pushes soybean prices down, we don't just lose profit; we lose margin, confidence, and sometimes hope. This is why farmer-leaders take time away from their operations to travel to Washington, D.C., and why I'm often trying to return policy emails at 11 p.m. after the kids finally fall asleep.

Because here's the truth:  
**We are not powerless.**

This year, we secured increased RVOs, which is a regulatory win that will strengthen demand for soy through biodiesel. Additionally, soybean farmers had a loud voice about trade deals and tariffs. This boldness led to soybeans being explicitly mentioned in the U.S.-China trade deal and fostered trade relationships with other countries.

That didn't happen because someone in Washington, D.C. suddenly remembered that rural America exists. It happened because ASA staff and farmer-leaders — people just like you — showed up. We made phone calls, sent comments, and shared our stories. And it worked.

If farmer voices can move the needle on something like RVOs, we can move it on trade, on tariffs, and on securing a strong farm safety net through the Farm Bill. Policy doesn't have to happen TO us, not if we stay in the conversation.

It's been a bright spot seeing the American Soybean Association and farmer-leaders step up. If you receive ASA action alerts, you've seen firsthand how tirelessly we have been advocating for soybean growers. If you don't, you should, because our voices matter.

So don't underestimate the power of your own, chaos-filled, real-life farm story.

When you answer an action alert, send a message to your legislators, show up at a meeting even though harvest is happening and the kids are supposed to be dropped off somewhere... you remind those in power that agriculture has a face, a family, and a future attached to every decision.

We can't control the weather, and we can't control the markets, but we will show up. Because when we do, our families thrive and our rural communities are strengthened.

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## Ultra-processed food labeling could mislead consumer, harm reputation of soy foods

Tofu and twinkies. Would you put these in the same nutritional category? One has 6 grams of protein and the other has 1; one has less than 1 gram of sugar and the other has 15.

Yet both are classified as ultra-processed foods due to the number of steps it takes to get to the final product in the grocery store, rather than by their nutritional value.

The Make Our Children Healthy Again Strategy called on the Food and Drug Administration to create a definition for ultra-processed foods. However, defining and using the term "ultra-processed foods" for health claims could harm the reputation of soybean oil or prompt companies to unnecessarily reformulate packaged products.

The Kansas Soybean Association believes that qualitative definitions of food, such as wholesome or nutritious, should be based on the food's actual nutrient composition without regard to geographical origin, growing practices, crop type or processing method.

Following our mission to serve as the voice for soybean farmer members, KSA submitted comments to the FDA which outlined growers' concerns about using processing methods to determine a food's nutritional value.

The comments focused on several key areas including:

- The health benefits of soybean oil and its importance to human nutrition
- The economic significance of soybean oil to Kansas' agricultural and food industries
- The challenges and risks of relying on definitions of ultra-processed foods to assess a food's nutritional value

Recently, seed oils and soy foods have received unfounded negative rhetoric and fearmongering due to their processing while numerous studies point to the benefits of seed oils. One study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association Internal Medicine showed that higher intake of plant-based oils was associated with 16% lower cancer, cardiovascular disease and total mortality.

Soy provides all nine essential amino acids in amounts the body needs and is the only plant-based protein with an authorized health claim from the FDA.

Products like soybean oil, also known as vegetable oil, play a crucial role in the food system as an ingredient in dozens of packaged goods.

"If a person cannot or chooses not to eat animal protein, we want them to choose soy as their alternative," Brett Neibling, Highland farmer, says. "There's a variety of soy food products you could substitute with or add into your regular meals — edamame, vegetable oil, mukimame, tofu and more."

As the administration moves forward with a possible definition of ultra-processed foods, KSA emphasizes that policy and guidance should be based on nutrient composition and demonstrated health effects, with processing-based labels serving as a contextual tool rather than a basis for declaring a food "healthy" or "unhealthy."

To learn more about the benefits of soy foods and ways to incorporate them into your diet visit [sniglobal.org](http://sniglobal.org).

## ASA Trade Update: Expanding Markets, Strengthening Demand

Trade remains one of the most important drivers of profitability for U.S. soybean farmers, and ASA has been actively engaged as significant developments unfold in global markets. While China continues to be a central destination for U.S. soy, ASA is working to ensure farmers are not overly dependent on a single buyer by expanding market opportunities both abroad and here at home.



**Blair Shipp**

ASA | State Policy Communications  
Coordinator

Following the Oct. 30 meeting between Presidents Trump and Xi in South Korea, China agreed to suspend its 10 percent retaliatory tariff on U.S. soybeans and committed to purchase 12 million metric tons by the end of 2025, with projected annual purchases of 25 million metric tons through 2028. These steps mark meaningful progress in restoring a relationship that has seen considerable uncertainty in recent years. Still, U.S. soybeans continue to face some tariff disadvantages compared with South American competitors, and ASA is working closely with the administration to clarify purchase timelines, verify commitments, and ensure China remains a dependable partner for U.S. agriculture.

At the same time, ASA is prioritizing export diversification across Asia to reduce reliance on any one market. Engagement through frameworks and agreements with Japan, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, and Malaysia is helping create new pathways for soybean meal, oil, and value-added products. For example, the U.S.–Japan Framework Agreement includes significant annual commitments that support agriculture, and ASA works to ensure those high-level frameworks translate into real commercial demand for soybean products. As populations grow and livestock and aquaculture sectors expand across Southeast Asia, these markets offer strong long-term potential for U.S. soy.

ASA is also emphasizing the importance of domestic demand as part of a diversified market strategy. Biofuels remain one of the strongest and most reliable sources of soybean oil use, helping stabilize markets when global trade faces uncertainty. Continued growth in renewable diesel and sustainable aviation fuel provides farmers with a dependable outlet that complements export opportunities. As ASA works with EPA and Treasury to finalize key biofuel policies, the organization is reinforcing the message that a strong domestic biofuels sector strengthens America’s trade position by creating consistent baseline demand at home.

Trade advocacy remains a cornerstone of ASA’s work, particularly as global competition intensifies and foreign suppliers strengthen their own trade relationships. By pushing for stable agreements with China, expanding opportunities across Asia, and growing domestic demand through biofuels, ASA is working to give soybean farmers in Kansas and across the country the balanced, diversified market foundation they need to remain competitive and plan for the future with confidence.

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## USDA resumes payments, FSA reopens

American farmers went three weeks without critical services during one of the busiest times of year: harvest.

In October, Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins announced the United States Department of Agriculture and Farm Service Agency would resume certain core operations and resume distribution of program payments that were stalled during the government shutdown. These programs include Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage payments, both of which offer financial assistance to agricultural producers. FSA will resume processing farm loans, allocating disaster relief payments and distributing funds through other programs.

USDA will process previously authorized payments that total an estimated \$1.9 billion under ARC and \$589 million under PLC. Rollins emphasized that restarting these operations will allow the USDA to process farm loans, issue payments and continue other critical services essential during harvest season.

According to USDA, there will be 2,100 county FSA offices reopened nationwide with limited staff to process payments and assist producers.

Your support of the Kansas Soybean Association and the American Soybean Association allows farmer-leaders and staff to engage with elected officials and advocate on your behalf in Topeka and Washington, D.C. Thank you for your commitment to Kansas soybean farmers.

## Biofuel wins support Kansas soybean farmers

Promoting increased biodiesel usage is a top priority for the Kansas Soybean Association.

“As we suffer significant economic hardship through loss of export market access, increased production costs and commodity price instability, EPA’s support in the biofuels industry is more important than ever,” Brett Neibling, Highland farmer, says. “Biofuels create jobs and support rural economies, strengthen domestic energy security and provide a stable market for U.S. soybean oil.”

Earlier this year, the Environmental Protection Agency proposed renewable volume obligations that will provide strong support for the domestic biofuel industry and in turn, domestic feedstock producers like soybean farmers.

Now KSA urges the EPA to include Small Refinery Exemption reallocation volumes equivalent to 100% of the 2023-2025 exempted volumes in the 2026-2027 RVOs. This reallocation will continue to support U.S. soybean farmers, reflecting the priority the Administration showed by establishing renewable volume obligations aligned with production capacity.

Biomass-based diesel production supports approximately 10% of the value of every bushel of soybeans grown in the United States. For Kansas farmers, that extra value was \$149 million in 2024.

These points were all shared by KSA President Brett Neibling and CEO Kaleb Little during a meeting with EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin in Emporia, Kansas along with leaders from Bunge and National Oilseed Processors Association.

“This event showcased the significant domestic market opportunity for U.S. soybean farmers through strong federal biofuel policies like the Renewable Fuel Standard and the 45Z tax credits,” Neibling says. “We are thankful to the Trump Administration for the robust Renewable Volume Obligations proposed, and it is time to get those volumes finalized and across the finish line, build demand for soybean processing and support farm families across Kansas and the rest of the country.”



Kansas Soybean Celebration is a free event coordinated by the Kansas Soybean Association and made possible by checkoff funding from the Kansas Soybean Commission. Celebration brings Kansas soybean growers together with farmer-leaders to unite over industry wins.

The second annual Celebration event is scheduled for January 30, 2026, at the Salina Hilton Garden Inn.

**2:30 pm** - KSA Annual Meeting

*social & networking hour*

**4:30 pm** - Kansas Soybean Celebration begins

[Register for Celebration Here](#)

Thank you to all of our [corporate partners](#) who support KSA's efforts.

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