

OPINION

GUEST COMMENTARY

When agriculture is strong, Iowa's economy is strong



MIKE NAIG  
IOWA SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE

Iowa's economy is built on agriculture. What happens at the farm gate ripples through our entire state. When farmers are doing well, Main Street businesses thrive, equipment dealers stay busy, manufacturers expand production and rural communities remain strong. When agriculture struggles, the effects are felt everywhere.

That's why helping farmers succeed is not just an agricultural issue, it's an Iowa issue. Every Iowan benefits from a strong agriculture.

Our hardworking farmers and naturally rich soil make Iowa an agricultural powerhouse. Iowa ranks first in the nation in corn, pork, eggs and biofuels production. We are second in soybeans and consistently rank in the top ten for beef, turkey and dairy. Only California exceeds Iowa in agricultural sales, making us the second-largest ag-producing state in the country.

Agriculture contributes nearly \$160 billion annually to Iowa's economy and supports roughly one in every five jobs. Those numbers tell an important story: when agriculture is strong, Iowa is strong.

That's why Iowa must continue to embrace common sense agricultural, business and tax policies that support growth and reward hard work and innovation, while protecting our natural resources.

First and foremost, we must increase demand for the agricultural products Iowa farmers grow and raise. That starts at home. Expanding domestic use should be a top priority, because American consumers benefit from a food supply that is safe, reliable and affordable — and Iowa farmers deliver all three. At the same time, we must continue pressing for stronger, more balanced trade agreements. Iowa has a proven track record of working with farmers and industry leaders through trade missions and direct engagement with global partners to open doors for Iowa-grown corn, soybeans, pork, beef and biofuels. For Iowa, trade isn't abstract — it often makes the difference between a profitable year and a tough one for farm families.

Second, we should continue investing in programs that keep dollars circulating in local communities. The Choose Iowa initiative does exactly that by connecting consumers with Iowa-grown, Iowa-made and Iowa-raised food and ag products. When people buy local, they support small businesses, strengthen rural econo-

mies and help family farms capture more value from the products they produce. Choose Iowa is about more than branding — it's about giving farmers and entrepreneurs the tools to grow, diversify and succeed.

Just as important, Choose Iowa supports farms of all sizes and production methods. Iowa agriculture is diverse, and success doesn't look the same for everyone. Some farms want to grow and scale up; others want to remain smaller operations that serve local markets. Our job is not to pick winners and losers, but to ensure farmers have the freedom and opportunity to choose the path that works best for their family.

Third, we must continue to invest in and accelerate farmer-led conservation work that improves water quality and soil health. Iowa farmers care deeply about the land, and they are leading the way by adopting conservation practices like wetlands, cover crops and reduced tillage. The state's role should be to partner with farmers, not punish them, by providing cost-share support, technical assistance and science-based practices that deliver results. Conservation and productivity are not competing goals; when done right, they go hand in hand and help ensure Iowa agriculture remains sustainable for future generations.

Finally, Iowa must maintain a tax and regulatory climate that allows farmers to plan for the future. Republicans have worked to eliminate the death tax so farm families can pass their operations on to the next generation without being forced to sell land or assets just to pay the tax bill. That matters deeply in a state where more than 21,000 Century (100 years) and 2,000 Heritage (150 years) Farms have been in families for generations.

We also need to recognize a hard truth: excessive regulation and higher taxes often accelerate consolidation in agriculture. When compliance costs rise, it's the smallest farms that feel the impact first. If we want to preserve family farms and rural communities and keep costs at the grocery store and gas pump affordable for working families, we must be thoughtful about the policies we impose and the burdens we create.

Iowa agriculture has always been resilient. Our farmers adapt, innovate and lead — but they shouldn't have to do it alone. By growing markets, strengthening local economies, accelerating conservation, and maintaining a common-sense tax and regulatory environment, we can ensure Iowa's ag economy remains strong today and for generations to come. Because when agriculture is strong, Iowa is strong.

GUEST COMMENTARY

Farm income projected to plummet, ag-related layoffs expected to continue. Who is here to help?



RITA HART  
CHAIR OF THE IOWA DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Nick Larson and a quarter of Iowa farmers get their health insurance through the Affordable Care Act. When ACA provisions expired at the end of 2025, Larson's family faced an immediate tax increase of \$3,000 per year.

Skyrocketing health care prices are only one challenge Iowa farmers are current-

ly facing.

An ag downturn hit Iowa family farms hard in 2025. Iowa recorded the second-most farm bankruptcies in the nation during the first six months of 2025.

Predictions show things may only get worse this year.

Iowa's farm income is projected to plummet by 24% in 2026.

Simply put, that means there will be more layoffs in ag-related manufacturing this year and an already three-year downturn for corn and soybeans will continue.

In 2025, Ag-related manufacturers like John Deere, Bridgestone, Kinze Manufacturing and even Tyson Foods were hit hard, collectively laying off thousands of Iowa workers.

Iowa is an ag-dependent state. Iowa's family farms are the backbone of our state and when our agriculture industry — which accounts for nearly a quarter of Iowa's economic output — struggles, we all struggle.

So what to do?

What we shouldn't do is make things worse.

Between skyrocketing health insurance costs, declining farm income, uncertainty brought on by Donald Trump's trade wars, and House Republicans' inability to pass a farm bill, farmers have been left to figure things out on their own.

Lawmakers at the statehouse do have some power to help Iowa's farmers. Fully funding farmer programs could provide more tax credits to landowners leasing to new farmers and more low-interest loans for land, equipment and livestock purchases.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Time to give governor clean bill on property rights

It's the beginning of yet another session of the Iowa Legislature, with the unresolved issue of eminent domain for CO2 pipelines frustrating legislators and landowners alike. Numerous bills to address the problem were introduced during the past four sessions, but only one made its way to the governor's desk. Nevertheless, Gov. Kim Reynolds vetoed that bill, HF-639, with a stroke of her pen.

The governor argued the bill was too broad and would hinder other utility projects while threatening Iowa's economy. Reynolds said she wanted "a clean bill." To that end, we propose the Property Rights Protection Bill, which would simply prohibit the use of eminent domain for carbon dioxide pipelines.

Privately-owned companies build CO2 pipelines solely for profit. They are not a public utility because they are not used by the general public. Unlike water, electricity and telephones, the public isn't waiting excitedly for CO2 to reach their homes. CO2 pipelines do not meet the constitutional requirement of public necessity to invoke the use of eminent domain.

The Property Rights Protection Bill does not affect any pipeline infrastructure other than carbon dioxide pipelines. This bill does not ban CO2 pipelines from Iowa, nor does it prohibit Summit and other companies from building them. The proposal simply disallows the use of eminent domain to build carbon dioxide pipelines in this state.

With the safety net of this bill, property rights

will be protected, and landowners will not be forced into eminent domain easements when they do not want a CO2 pipeline on their land. Negotiations will be fairer when landowners can say, "No," without the threat of eminent domain tipping the scales in favor of the pipeline company.

Some state senators support a bill to widen the corridor (the land the pipeline company might potentially use for the project) from one-half miles to 10 miles either side of the proposed route. This, they say, will solve the problem because Summit will have a broader area in which to find landowners willing to sign voluntary easements.

This may be true, but a wider corridor does not protect property rights. For example, if one landowner along the route does not want to sign, but all the neighbors in both directions have signed, how likely would it be for Summit to reroute 10 miles out of the way to accommodate this landowner? A bill to prohibit the use of eminent domain for CO2 pipelines should be the legislature's top priority.

Landowners with property targeted for eminent domain have been living in limbo with this threat looming for over five years. We have been unable to make plans for our land or the future. It's time for the Iowa Legislature to do the right thing and pass the bill requested by Reynolds. A clean bill: No eminent domain for carbon oxide pipelines. Protect property rights in Iowa.

— BONNIE EWOLDT, OF MILFORD, TARGETED LANDOWNER IN CRAWFORD COUNTY



ISSN 0746-0872  
22 E. Fourth St., Box 197  
Spencer, IA 51301  
An Enterprise Media Publication

CALL: 262-6610 or  
1-800-383-0964

Periodical postage is paid at:  
Spencer, IA 51301

POSTMASTER  
Send address changes to:

The Spencer Reporter,  
Box 197, Spencer, IA 51301

PUBLISHED TUESDAY  
AND FRIDAY EXCEPT FOR:  
New Year's Day, Memorial Day,  
Independence Day, Labor Day  
and Christmas Day

STAFF  
Brad Hicks ..... Publisher  
Nick Lowrey ..... News Editor  
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