Opening Remarks
ISA On-Farm Network® 2009 Conference
March 5, 2009

Good Morning! And welcome to the Iowa Soybean Association's Ninth Annual On-Farm Network® Conference.

Some of you will remember that this conference began here in Ames, in a room with fewer than 50 people attending. Christine tells me we have nearly 500 people here today.

At that first conference, our total focus was nitrogen. As you've no doubt seen at the On-Farm Network website or in your binder this morning, the group has grown well beyond nitrogen.

Our focus remains the same, however. The initial goal of this program was to help all farmers improve profits, and since we're all growing both corn and soybeans, we're still looking at nitrogen. We've added to the studies on timing and rate of nitrogen fertilizer. Growers are looking at manure management, nitrification inhibitors, and different types of products that might help us improve our nitrogen management. And beyond fertilizer, we're studying the economic and agronomic impacts of fungicides, different weed control programs, the need for lime, and muc more.

The second goal of the On-Farm Network is no less important than the first. That is, to arm growers with data that can help them avoid unnecessary and sometimes unreasonable regulatory interferences in their business that come to us in the form of local, state and federal regulations.

The more we learn about managing nitrogen, the more efficiently we can use it, meaning we only use what's necessary to optimize yields. Using nitrogen efficiently improves our bottom line. And, when we manage it right, it should minimize our impact on water and the environment.

As we do this, all growers can benefit from the work. And as we all move towards more efficient nitrogen use, the general public benefits, because public water supplies will carry less nitrate and less sediment. And, we as growers do our part to correct some of the environmental concerns in the Gulf of Mexico that are due, at least in part, to soil and nutrient losses from farmland.

Over the past nine years, growers working with the On-Farm Network have shown us that they can produce 200 bushels of corn or more with less than 100 lbs. of nitrogen per acre – in a corn-soybean rotation in a good year. We've also seen that in years like the past two, Mother Nature can take away much of what we put out, even when we're using the practices that have worked very well for us in the past.

Through the On-Farm Network, we've also learned that there are ways to predict and detect when substantial losses of nitrogen occur, and when this

happens, there are ways growers can recover from what might be a financial disaster by applying extra nitrogen.

We saw again this year that even when we apply enough manure to provide for the total nitrogen needs of corn, yields are still improved by the addition of more nitrogen fertilizer.

Once we learned to use precision ag tools and standardized protocols to study fertilizer and manure management, we found we could also use them to look at other management practices and inputs.

This past year, working with fungicide, herbicide, and other farm input makers and a number of farm supply dealers, the On-Farm Network established more than 400 replicated strip trials to continue our studies on fungicides and seed treatments, and add new studies on weed control systems, soil additives, and foliar fertilizers.

Today, you'll have the opportunity to hear about studies involving insecticides, lime and soil pH, cover crops, developing an energy audit for your farm, plus a couple dozen other topics that will be covered in part by Jim Andrew and later by Tracy Blackmer.

We have one of the largest databases on nitrogen and manure management that exists anywhere. We have more information on fungicide performance than the companies that make fungicides. But it is not enough to just have data. We are moving forward in using the data we have. We're looking back over years and

finding similarities and patterns that will allow growers more confidence the conclusions drawn from On-Farm Network studies.

And beyond that, the data collected has been used by ISA to speak out against manure management regulations, to speak for changes in nitrogen application recommendations, and more.

As the On-Farm Network has grown, so has its base of support. The soybean checkoff is still an important source of funding for this work. That money is leveraged by state and federal funding. Relationships have developed with a number of different – sometime very different – outside groups, including chemical and seed companies and conservation and environmental groups.

That brings us back to the two focal points of the On-Farm Network. By helping growers learn how to better manage production inputs, we're helping improve their economic performance. That sums up the first point.

By becoming better managers, we're able to do more to protect our soil resource, which, in turn, has a positive effect on water and the environment. In the end, that means we're able to use, but not use up, our soil resource, leaving the land more productive and more stable for the next generation of farmers, many of whom are home feeding the hogs or milking the cows so you can be here today.