

FARM & HOME

Energy surge puts pressure on farm budgets

■ K-State economist suggests energy-driven price increases may threaten already tight farm margins.

MANHATTAN — A surge in oil prices is poised to hit farmers where it hurts most — their bottom line — and with new estimates suggesting a \$90-per-barrel market, this could significantly raise production costs across the board.

According to Kansas State University economist Gregg Ibendahl, higher oil prices are already creating a ripple effect through key farm inputs, particularly diesel fuel and fertilizer.

Fuel and fertilizer costs are rising for farmers

"\$90 oil would add more than a dollar per gallon to the fuel cost and could easily add another \$10,000 to total fuel expenses," Ibendahl said.

He says while fuel is not the largest expense on most operations, it remains a critical input. The average Kansas

grain farm spent about \$30,000 on fuel last year, meaning even moderate increases can quickly strain budgets.

Ibendahl suggested fertilizer costs present an even bigger concern. Because fertilizer prices are closely tied to energy markets, rising oil prices could push fertilizer expenses up by about 10%. For the average grain farm, that translates to roughly \$12,000 in additional costs.

His recent analysis shows fertilizer markets are already responding to global events. Following geopolitical tensions and increased oil prices, nitrogen fertilizer prices are expected to rise and remain elevated longer than previously projected, with anhydrous ammonia potentially exceeding \$1,000 per ton in the coming year.

Limited options mean higher prices that could last past geopolitical tensions

Despite rising costs, Ibendahl noted that supply shortages are unlikely.

"The U.S. is almost self-sufficient

when it comes to energy, so availability shouldn't be the issue," he said. "But we are not immune from higher prices."

Farmers may have limited options to avoid higher diesel costs, as fuel prices tend to respond quickly to changes in the oil market. Fertilizer impacts, however, may be delayed. Many producers have already secured inputs for the current season, meaning higher prices may not fully materialize until later this year, according to Ibendahl.

Ibendahl added that even if geopolitical tensions ease, prices may not return to previous levels quickly.

"Oil prices and diesel prices won't come down as fast as they went up, even if the war stops tomorrow," he said. "It will likely take a few months to clear."

As uncertainty continues, Ibendahl encourages producers to monitor input markets closely and utilize decision-making tools available through AgManager.info and his agricultural analysis platforms.

Good for the steer, great for the rooster

■ K-State researchers are adapting a cattle vaccine to also protect chickens from bird flu

What's good for the steer may be good for the rooster. New research at Kansas State University seeks to adapt a successful cattle vaccine as a new method for protecting chickens from the threat of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, or HPAI.

In Kansas, more than 413,000 poultry have been affected statewide since late 2025, and nationwide, reported cases exceed 196 million.

A team of College of Veterinary Medicine researchers is developing a new vaccination strategy by adapting existing technology, supported by a \$2 million grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, or APHIS.

From bovines to broilers
The ongoing spread of HPAI, also commonly known as bird flu, poses a serious threat to the poultry industry, said Waithaka Mwangi, lead investigator and professor of veterinary immunology.

Mwangi's team had previously developed a new type of cattle vaccine that guards against three genotypes of Bovine Parainfluenza Virus Type 3 and Bovine Viral Diarrhea Virus. They later adapted that vaccine to also protect cattle against H5N1, the virus that causes HPAI in cattle and other animals.

In lab tests using chicken embryo cells, this modified vaccine grew rap-

idly and successfully produced the specific proteins that trigger a strong immune response.

Since the bovine parainfluenza virus is not a chicken pathogen, Mwangi said it allows for the development of a lateral flow device, or LFD — a testing device similar to those many people used for at-home COVID-19 detection during the pandemic.

Using a process called Differentiating Infected from Vaccinated Animals, or DIVA, these LFDs detect immune responses specific to both the vaccine backbone and H5N1 antigens.

Such devices could help animal producers and health officials more rapidly respond to HPAI in chicken flocks and hatcheries, as well as support more effective disease surveillance and poultry trade requirements.

Preliminary vaccination research could lead to broader poultry protection

"Our project has two main aims: first, to assess the safety, immunogenicity and efficacy of the prototype H5N1 vaccine in chickens; and second, to develop and validate a companion DIVA diagnostic LFD," Mwangi said.

The goal is to fast-track product development to enable rapid deployment and help curb the spread of HPAI in chickens, Mwangi said.

So far, Mwangi's team is focusing on methods for vaccinating fertilized eggs in ovo, or before the chicks hatch, and on administering the vaccine to day-old chicks and young female chickens via spray or water. They will test and validate the LFD diagnostic perfor-

mance using study and field samples.

If proven effective in protecting young and unhatched chickens, the research team will then explore expanding the vaccination protocol to mature chickens or even other poultry species.

"The vaccine's flexibility for administration in ovo via spray or water makes it well-suited for integration into existing hatchery and farm-based mass vaccination systems," Mwangi said. "Early immunization will provide protection to broilers, layer chicks and pullets, ensuring broad applicability across production types. Beneficiaries include poultry hatcheries, farmers, allied service providers, consumers of poultry products and poultry meat exporters, which are vitally dependent on disease-free certification."

Mwangi's co-investigators are K-State's Santosh Dhakal, Igor Morozov, Juergen A. Richt and Huldah Sang. With the support of the Kansas State University Research Foundation, Mwangi has a patent application pending for the new use of the vaccination technology.

The research project was funded through the HPAI Poultry Innovation Grand Challenge program administered by APHIS. The U.S. Secretary of Agriculture allocated \$100 million for innovative projects to advance prevention, therapeutics, vaccine development and other mitigation strategies.

Through a highly competitive process, APHIS received 417 proposals totaling over \$793 million in funding requests. Less than 60 projects were approved for funding.

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121 Help Wanted

CLEANER NEEDED. Please apply in person T-F, 3-6; Sat, 10-2. AWOL, 116 S 23rd, Independence. APR4

AWOL IS in need of a can collector. Call 620-331-9368 or come by the shelter T-F, 3-6 for more info. 116 S. 23rd, Independence. APR4

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Helpful Tips

Keep your baby sun-safe

Spending time outdoors is a summertime tradition for people of all ages.

Parents of infants may be extra excited to get outdoors this summer. Chances to get out and about don't come around very often for parents of infants, and those chances may be even more rare as social distancing guidelines remain in place. But before parents rush out the door to soak up some summer sun, it's imperative that they take steps to protect their tiny tots from UV rays.

· Avoid exposing infants to the sun. The Skin Cancer Foundation notes that infants' skin is especially sensitive to the sun, so the organization advises parents to shield children six months and younger from the sun rather than using sunscreen. Instead of applying sunscreen to their infants, parents should keep them out of the sun entirely. Seek shade between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., when the sun's rays are especially intense. When taking infants out in their strollers, make sure they are shaded at all times and avoid walking on the sunny side of the street.

· Dress babies for the sun. The SCF advises parents to dress their babies in brimmed hats and lightweight clothing that fully covers their arms and legs. Dressing babies for the sun may seem like common sense, but the SCF notes that researchers at the University of Miami found that only 43 percent of parents consistently cover their babies with hats, and even fewer (40 percent) cover babies with long-sleeved shirts and pants when going out in the sun.

· Consider sunglasses. Sunglasses are another way parents can protect their children from the sun's harmful ultraviolet rays. Sunglasses can be an alternative for parents whose infants keep taking off their hats, as many baby-sized sunglasses are equipped with elastic straps to keep the glasses on. Sunglasses may be vital because the melanin in infants' eyes is still forming, and that development can be adversely affected if infants' eyes are exposed to UV rays.

· Introduce sunscreen at six months. The SCF advises parents to begin applying sunscreen to their infants when their children reach six months of age. Choose a broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen with a minimum sun protection factor (SPF) of 15. The SCF notes that sunscreens that contain zinc oxide and titanium dioxide are good choices because these physical filters do not rely on absorption of chemicals and are therefore less likely to cause a skin reaction. The SCF also advises testing the sunscreen on your baby's wrist before applying it all over the body. This can indicate if the product irritates the child's skin and needs to be replaced, or if it's safe to use.

In the rush to get outside, parents should make sure they don't forget to take every step necessary to protect their infants from UV exposure.



Songs of the Flint Hills

THE LITTLE COWGIRL

I met Jane McKee Layman in 1993, when she was on a deer hunting trip back here to the ranch where she'd grown up. She was 62 at the time, had a long braid down her back, and wore a large hunting knife on her belt. My little girls thought she was something special.

She and her friends insisted on camping out that cold December weekend. I asked if I could interview her about early days on the ranch, and she agreed, turning out to be a great storyteller.

Jane told about driving cattle across a large roadless area northeast of the ranch, to and from Hymer - the closest railroad cattle shipping point. She began doing this with her father at quite a young age in the 1930's. She recalled:

"We always had some two-year old cattle on feed. We used to drive

the cattle to Hymer and load out on the train.

"We would go horseback to Hymer. It was about nine miles. We'd go up through the gate just east of the Foster place.

"So often the train was late and we'd have to wait. What was bad is if we were getting cattle IN, and the train was late. That would be hard and we'd have to hurry to get home before dark.

"To ship OUT, we'd get up in the dark, go out and first thing take care of our horses since they'd have to work all day. Then come in and eat breakfast.

"Then we'd be out in the pasture as soon as we could see. We'd take all the cattle and push them up in the northeast end of the pasture. Cut out the ones we did not want to ship and keep the ones we wanted to ship. And then we'd start the

drive.

"How many cattle? I can't remember numbers. It wouldn't be a big number. Maybe we'd run 500 head through the chute.

"Best part of that trip is at noon my mom would come up in the car and bring us hot food. Hungry? We were so hungry. The food tasted so good. We'd sit out under a tree and eat.

"When I got older, I was so proud because our neighbor Harold Miller would hire me to help him ship cattle to Hymer. That made me really proud."

Grownup Jane went on to marry a K-State professor of literature, and became a wildlife photographer and nationally-known dog trainer. Yes, she was something special.

See more stories and songs of the Flint Hills at tallgrassexpress.com

K-STATE Research and Extension

KANSAS CROP PROGRESS AND CONDITION

For the week ending March 29, there were 6.5 days suitable for fieldwork, according to the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service. Topsoil moisture

supplies rated 23% very short, 42% short, 33% adequate and 2% surplus. Subsoil moisture supplies rated 18% very short, 41% short, 39% adequate and 2% surplus.

Field Crops Report: Winter

wheat condition rated 7% very poor, 15% poor, 38% fair, 35% good and 5% extra. Winter wheat jointed was 23%, ahead of 8% last year and 7% for the five-year average.

Corn planed was 2%, equal to last year and near 1% average.



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