

Crude-linked grain rally collides with fertilizer shock and Brazil–Iran export concentration

Global Agricultural Developments

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Crude-linked grain rally collides with fertilizer shock and Brazil–Iran export concentration

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Grains and oil rallied together as the Iran conflict pushed energy and freight risk into ag markets, while fertilizer prices and supply timing became a front-line issue for 2026 margins. This brief also highlights practical, quantified innovations—from planter closing-wheel checks and manure-based fertility to performance-warranted biologicals and autonomous scouting—plus key Brazil–Iran trade exposure and spring weather risks.

1) Market Movers

Energy-led grain rally (U.S. and global)

Grain markets pushed to fresh highs alongside a sharp crude-oil move tied to the Iran conflict and Strait of Hormuz disruptions, with one market segment calling grain strength “100% correlated” to crude this week ¹. Crude was cited as up **almost \$23/barrel** on the week in that discussion ².

- **Funds positioning shifted materially:** funds entered the week short wheat/short corn and ended **net long wheat for the first time in over three years**, while also rebuilding a net long position in corn ³.
- **Pricing levels highlighted for producer marketing:** December corn futures were cited **north of 480**, with November beans “knocking on the

¹Markets Now Closes - 3/6 Grains Surge to Fresh Highs with Energy Prices: How High Will Prices Rally?

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door of 1150,” alongside a warning that the rally “could be gone before we realize it” ⁴.

“As it relates to the grain markets, we’re trading crude oil. I don’t think we’re trading corn and soybeans or wheat.” ⁵

Global food pricing also turned higher after several months of declines: February’s **FAO Food Price Index** was reported up **0.9% month-over-month** and down **1% year-over-year**, with gains in **grains, meat and vegetable oils** breaking a five-month downtrend ^{6,7,8}.

Livestock: strong prices, macro sensitivity (U.S.)

Weekly livestock pricing snapshots showed:

- **Live steer (5-market avg): \$2.40/cwt**, down about \$2 week-over-week but up about \$40 year-over-year ⁹.
- **April live cattle futures: 234.33¢/cwt**, up about \$2 week-over-week (despite large Friday moves) ¹⁰.
- **Choice box beef: 387.7¢/cwt**, up **\$10** week-over-week ¹¹.

Commentary also emphasized cattle’s correlation to broader risk markets, pointing to stock market weakness, higher crude, and a jobs report surprise as drivers of late-week pressure even while “numbers are tight” fundamentally ¹².

2) Innovation Spotlight

Planter setup: closing wheels as a high-impact “small part” (U.S.)

Farm Journal highlighted poorly performing **planter closing wheels** as a repeatable emergence/stand-count issue that can cost **75–100 bushels/acre** ¹³. A recommended approach was an **open-furrow check** (ratcheting V press wheels up) to evaluate row cleaner settings, spacing, sidewall smearing, and depth consistency row-by-row before closing the furrow ¹⁴. Centering matters:

⁴Markets Now Closes - 3/6 Grains Surge to Fresh Highs with Energy Prices: How High Will Prices Rally?

⁵“It’s Crude Oil, Bro” - Grains Post Fresh Highs

⁶ post by @irfandonat

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mis-centered V press wheels can leave a raised ribbon and effectively change depth by **0.5 inch** ¹⁵.

Risk-sharing biological seed treatment: performance warranty (U.S.)

Advancing Eco Agriculture described a new performance warranty (administered/underwritten with Growers Edge) for **BioCoat Gold**—a microbial inoculant seed treatment combining mycorrhizal fungi, bacterial inoculants, and biostimulants ¹⁶. The warranty commits to **break-even ROI or a 100% refund** (with required use/application verification) ¹⁷¹⁸.

Autonomous scouting to reduce labor bottlenecks (U.S.)

TerraClear introduced **Terrascout**, an autonomous field scout designed to gather field data for **weeds and rocks** with “minimum labor” ¹⁹.

Seed treatment: red crown rot attention (U.S.)

Successful Farming reported Syngenta’s **Victrato** seed treatment is available for the **2026 soybean season**, as **red crown rot** gains attention in Midwest fields ²⁰.

“Algae as fertility system” in high-cost production regions (U.S. – California)

A Farm Journal report followed a Central Valley operation transitioning part of its acres toward **certified organic/regenerative**, emphasizing that fertility pullbacks need to be gradual and monitored (SAP/tissue/soil sampling) to avoid the yield “J curve” in transition ²¹²². One featured practice was on-farm microalgae production and application:

- Microalgae was described as being grown in **algae producing vessels (APVs)** using local water, with **native strains** selected for better survival in the farm’s ecosystem ²³.
- The system was positioned as a way to “supercharge” the soil microbiome and improve water infiltration in very low organic matter soils (cited at **~0.5% soil organic matter**) ²⁴²⁵.

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¹⁶Podcast Short: BioCoat Gold and the Future of Risk-Sharing in Ag

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Strip-till and fertility logistics: larger liquid + dry capacity (U.S.)

At Commodity Classic, a strip-till equipment configuration was described with a **1,250-gallon liquid tank** plus a **5-ton dry fertilizer bin**, enabling liquid and dry application together via a dual drop tube on the row units ²⁶.

Manure-based fertility: chicken litter outcomes (U.S. – Illinois)

No-Till Farmer highlighted chicken litter rates around **2–2.5 tons/acre** and reported:

- **Corn after corn** “tickling **300 bushel** corn” with 2 tons of litter (highest yield in that comparison set) ²⁷.
- **Soybeans after corn**: 2 tons of chicken litter delivered the highest yields and profitability in the first year of use ²⁸.

Input reduction + yield gains on-farm (India)

A progressive farmer in Uttar Pradesh described switching toward organic practices using Zydus “Zaytonic” technology, reporting (per acre):

- **DAP reduced from 50 kg to 25 kg**, saving about **800 INR** ²⁹.
- **Wheat yield increased from 15–16 quintals to 24 quintals** ³⁰.

3) Regional Developments

Brazil: Iran exposure concentrates corn flows and creates shipment risk

Brazil’s corn exports to Iran were described as having grown **280% over five years** ³¹. Reported volumes included **3.23 million tons** exported to Iran (referenced for 2021) and **9 million tons** last year, with Iran representing about **22–22.5%** of total Brazilian corn exports ³²³³³⁴.

For **Jan–Feb 2026**, Brazil exported **5.8 million tons** of corn total, with **1.3 million tons (23%)** going to Iran ³⁵. Corn export flows to Iran were also described as highly concentrated through two ports: **Santos and Paranaguá**,

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together near **80%** of shipments; of the 1.3 million tons in Jan–Feb, nearly **600k** moved via Santos and nearly **400k** via Paranaguá ³⁶.

Separate Canal Rural coverage also cited **660k tons** of soy and soy meal awaiting loading in Brazilian ports for Iran amid heightened Hormuz risks ³⁷³⁸. The same reporting flagged that rerouting to alternative ports (examples cited: **Saudi Arabia and Oman**) can be discussed, but costs may not make it economical “at the moment” ³⁹⁴⁰⁴¹.

Brazil: trade balance strength, but “low value-add” export mix

Canal Rural reported Brazil posted a **US\$4.2B** February trade surplus (fourth best on record for the month), with agribusiness characterized as the key driver because it “exports a lot and imports little” ⁴²⁴³. However, commentary argued the mix is largely commodities with limited value-added, and highlighted “verticalization” as a route to jobs, income, and potentially higher margins ⁴⁴. Corn was cited as a candidate for value-added exports such as **corn ethanol** and **DDG** (described as **30% protein**) for China, which “opened its market” ⁴⁵.

Brazil: weather delays for harvest and safrinha operations

Canal Rural forecast heavier rains disrupting **soy harvest and second-crop corn planting** in **Mato Grosso do Sul, interior São Paulo, and southern Mato Grosso** ⁴⁶. In interior São Paulo (Presidente Prudente), rain totals were cited as potentially exceeding **100 mm** over five days—helping water deficits but hindering fieldwork ⁴⁷.

U.S.: spring fieldwork risks—wet East, drier West

A U.S. outlook emphasized sustained above-normal rainfall and flooding concerns in the **eastern Ag Belt** (with some areas suggested at **3+ inches**), implying early planting delays “east of Iowa” due to March/April wetness ⁴⁸⁴⁹. The **western Ag Belt** was described as trending drier, with below-normal

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precipitation highlighted especially for May ⁵⁰⁵¹.

Trade/policy (U.S.)

- Farm Journal reported eight enforceable U.S. trade agreements aimed at reducing an expanding ag trade deficit since 2020 ⁵².
- Ahead of an April Trump–Xi meeting, U.S. officials cited upcoming pre-summit meetings that could create headline-driven volatility, with agricultural barriers “not just limited to soybeans and sorghum” and U.S. beef access constrained by facility registration renewals ⁵³.
- USDA’s FY2026 ag trade deficit was projected to improve to **\$29B** (from roughly \$50B), with stronger exports cited as a driver; 2025 highlights included **corn exports +29%**, dairy exports **+15%**, and ethanol **+11%** ⁵⁴.

4) Best Practices

Pre-plant planning + fertility fundamentals (U.S.)

A recommended pre-plant checklist emphasized:

- Plan equipment, fertilizer, and crop protection needs before “go time” ⁵⁵.
- Use soil testing to establish baselines for **P, K, soil pH**, and ensure **N and S** are covered ⁵⁶.

For nitrogen management in wet periods, one segment described nitrogen as a “leaky system” and suggested stabilizers (e.g., **N-Serve** for anhydrous ammonia or **Instinct** for liquid manure/dry fertilizer), with typical protection cited as **~8 weeks** to reduce leaching/denitrification and maintain availability into peak uptake ⁵⁷.

Early planting: test “cold germ,” not just the tag (U.S.)

Ag PhD recommended **cold germination testing** for early planting decisions, noting that standard seed-tag germination is typically a warm test (77°F) while cold tests run at **40–50°F** and better reflect spring soil conditions ⁵⁸.

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⁵²U.S.–China Trade Reset? What It Means for Farmers in 2026

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⁵⁴March 6, 2026: Farm Bill Movement, USDA Headlines and Farmer Sentiment

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⁵⁷March 6, 2026: Farm Bill Movement, USDA Headlines and Farmer Sentiment

⁵⁸ post by @AgPhDMedia

Weed management: combine cultural practices with herbicide strategy (Brazil)

Brazil-focused weed management emphasized low-cost cultural practices such as **crop rotation** and **soil cover** alongside herbicide programs ⁵⁹. Research commentary also highlighted resistance challenges (including multiple resistance in capim-amargoso) and reported that **caruru (Amaranthus)** expansion can drive soybean yield losses around **8%** and up to **20%** at an average density of **1 plant/m²** ⁶⁰.

Biosecurity readiness: African swine fever (U.S.)

USDA messaging during ASF Action Week reiterated:

- Strong on-farm biosecurity: limit visitors, clean/disinfect equipment and vehicles, and ensure employees follow protocols and review plans regularly ⁶¹.
- Traveler actions: avoid bringing pork products from ASF-affected countries, declare food items, clean clothes/shoes after farm visits, and wait **five days** before visiting U.S. sites with pigs ⁶².

Greenhouse production efficiency: water, energy, and biocontrol (Brazil – floriculture)

Brazil's floriculture sector in the Holambra region was described as using:

- Rainwater capture from greenhouse roofs, treatment, and storage for irrigation and climate management ⁶³.
- Water recycling (capture → filtration → reuse) to increase water efficiency ⁶⁴.
- On-farm solar generation supplying nearly **100%** of energy needs in the region, with some producers exporting surplus to the grid ⁶⁵.
- Biological pest control and climate management (temperature, humidity, light, CO₂), with chemical use reported down **more than 80%** in the sector ⁶⁶.

⁵⁹Personagem Soja Brasil: conheça o produtor que usa gestão e tecnologia para alcançar produtividade

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5) Input Markets

Fertilizer: price spikes, logistics risk, and antitrust scrutiny (U.S.)

Multiple reports underscored how abruptly nitrogen economics have shifted:

- StoneX commentary cited **urea prices up 71% in the past 90 days**, while **corn prices rose 2%** over the same period ⁶⁷. Retailers were described as sometimes **not making bids** amid the surge ⁶⁸.
- A key shipping route near Iran was described as handling about **20% of the world’s oil** and roughly **one quarter of globally traded nitrogen fertilizer**, with disruptions already pushing fuel and fertilizer higher; urea was cited as jumping **more than \$70/ton** in recent days, while diesel could climb **40 cents/gal** ⁶⁹.
- One Farm Journal report said fertilizer prices increased by **over \$100/ton in 24 hours** amid Hormuz-related uncertainty, with NOLA April urea cited trading at **\$457/ton (Friday)** and around **\$550/ton (Monday)** ⁷⁰.
- Timing risk remains material: one segment estimated **30 days** to ship a urea vessel from the Persian Gulf to U.S. shores, plus another **3–4 weeks** to move inland, making a load today “not readily available until May 1st” ⁷².

⁶⁷Fertilizer Prices Up More Than 71% in 90 Days: Worst-Case Scenario for Farmers?

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⁷⁰Hormuz Shipping Drops 90%, Fertilizer Prices Spike as Middle East Conflict Hits Agriculture

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Hormuz Shipping Drops 90%, Fertilizer Prices Spike as Middle East Conflict Hits Agriculture (1:01)

Alongside price volatility, Bloomberg-reported **DOJ scrutiny** of fertilizer suppliers was echoed in multiple segments, naming **Nutrien, Mosaic, CF Industries, Koch, and Yara International** as companies under examination for potential collusion to raise prices ⁷³⁷⁴.

Fuel: week-over-week jumps add cost pressure (U.S. and Brazil)

- U.S. **diesel** was cited at **\$4.33/gal**, up **57 cents** week-over-week; **gasoline** at **\$3.32/gal**, up **33 cents** week-over-week ⁷⁵⁷⁶.
- In Brazil, diesel increases were cited as reaching **R\$1.00 per liter** in some areas, described as disproportionate ⁷⁷⁷⁸.

⁷³Report: Several Fertilizer Companies Are Under Investigation

⁷⁴Hormuz Shipping Drops 90%, Fertilizer Prices Spike as Middle East Conflict Hits Agriculture

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Brazil inputs: urea up 33%, import dependence, and biodiesel blend proposal

Brazil-focused reporting cited **urea up 33%** since the beginning of the conflict and noted Brazil's dependence on imported nitrogen fertilizer ⁷⁹⁸⁰. At the same time, CNA commentary said producers have already purchased much of what's needed for the season (noting current use in second-crop production), with deliveries generally extending until **June** as a practical limit for second-semester deliveries ⁸¹.

CNA also said it sent a request to Brazil's Ministry of Mines and Energy to increase the biodiesel blend in diesel to **17%**, citing a record soybean crop (reported as **more than 130M tons**) and low soybean prices (sometimes **below R\$100/sack**) as supportive conditions for a higher blend to reduce diesel prices ⁸².

Risk management baseline: crop insurance spring prices (U.S.)

The 2026 crop insurance spring prices were cited as **\$4.62/bu corn, \$11.09/bu soybeans, and \$6.19/bu wheat** (based on February futures averages), with ARC benchmark prices cited at **\$5.03 corn, \$12.17 soybeans, and \$6.98 wheat** ⁸³.

6) Forward Outlook

1) Expect continued volatility tied to energy + freight + input timing

Market commentary warned volatility "is going to continue," framing it as both risk and opportunity—especially with prices reaching levels "we didn't really think we'd have until this summer" ⁸⁴.

2) Acreage debate: corn vs. soy rebalancing remains unsettled (U.S.)

Estimates varied, but multiple sources pointed to a potential corn/soy rebalance:

- One outlook projected **181–182 million combined corn + soybean acres**, with **93–94 million corn acres** and soybeans increasing to **~86–86.5 million acres** ⁸⁵.
- Another market segment explicitly tied fertilizer shock to acreage shifts, saying corn acres were reduced by **1–1.5 million** to **~93–93.5 million**,

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⁸⁵AgDay In Depth: The Crop in the Field in Brazil

with soybeans increased to ~**86.5–87 million** (especially in fringe areas)
8687.

3) Brazil: export concentration + war risk creates a “routing and pricing” planning problem

With Iran still taking roughly **22–23%** of Brazil’s corn exports in the cited periods ⁸⁸⁸⁹, multiple Brazil-focused segments argued the conflict could pressure freight, premiums, and second-half shipment economics if it persists into late March/April ⁹⁰. Separately, the concentration of corn-to-Iran movement through Santos and Paranaguá suggests a logistics risk “single point of failure” dynamic for flows serving that demand ⁹¹.

4) Weather watch: wet eastern U.S. could delay planting; drier west raises later-season moisture questions

The eastern Ag Belt was described as persistently wet enough that early planting “east of Iowa” was viewed as unlikely ⁹², while the west was described as below-normal for precipitation—especially in May ⁹³. Another outlook suggested drought across the lower 48 could improve from ~**75% coverage** to below **60%** by early April, with improvements centered in the Mississippi and Ohio River Valley areas ⁹⁴.

5) Near-term planning checkpoints (Brazil)

Expo Direto Cotrijal (Rio Grande do Sul) was described as bringing together **613 companies** and hosting multiple producer-focused forums, including an agricultural insurance forum with **20+ insurers** discussing coverage, income insurance, and production-cost policies ⁹⁵⁹⁶. The event also highlighted canola as a growing winter crop, with a target expansion in RS from **300,000 hectares to 1 million hectares** in coming years ⁹⁷.

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⁹⁵A 26ª edição da Expodireto Cotrijal começa na próxima segunda-feira em Não-Me-Toque/RS

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Tactical takeaway (what to do with this week’s information)

- If you’re marketing grain into headline-driven rallies, multiple sources emphasized the importance of having a plan (including downside floors via options) rather than freezing in volatility ⁹⁸⁹⁹.
- For operational execution, focus on avoidable yield leaks (planter closing performance) before weather and input volatility compress the spring window ¹⁰⁰¹⁰¹.

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