

## AMERICA'S FARMERS: TIME TO START DOUBLE CROPPING



By: [Richard M. Blau](#), Esq.  
Chair, National Food Law Group

With the international demand for grains and vegetable oils rising, and expected to continue at extraordinary levels due to Russia's invasion of agricultural-exporter Ukraine, many American farmers are considering whether to double crop.

### **RUSSIA'S AGGRESSION PRODUCING CRITICAL FOOD SHORTAGES**

According to Taras Vysotskyi, Ukraine's first deputy minister of Agrarian Policy and Food, blockades imposed by Russia on Black Sea ports have curtailed Ukraine's ability to export agricultural commodities. Current projections indicate that Ukraine will only be able to export a maximum two million tons of grains a month, down significantly from the 10 million tons per month levels Ukraine achieved in 2021.

The loss of supply is further compounded by the fact that India, a large grain exporter attempting to fill the gap left by Ukraine, recently announced that it was ending all exports of wheat due to an intense heat wave sweeping the country that has hurt the nation's crops, and caused domestic food prices to rise significantly.

Experts across the globe are forecasting dire food shortages for the future. The [United Nations estimates](#) that in the past year, global food prices have risen by almost one-third, fertilizer by more than half, and oil prices by almost two-thirds. According to [U.N. figures](#), the number of severely food-insecure people has doubled in the past two years, from 135 million pre-pandemic to 276 million today.

At the extreme end of the hunger spectrum, the U.N. estimates that more than half a million people are experiencing famine conditions – an increase of more than 500% since 2016. United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres recently warned of "the specter of a global food shortage in the coming months," without urgent international action.

## IS DOUBLE CROPPING A SOLUTION?

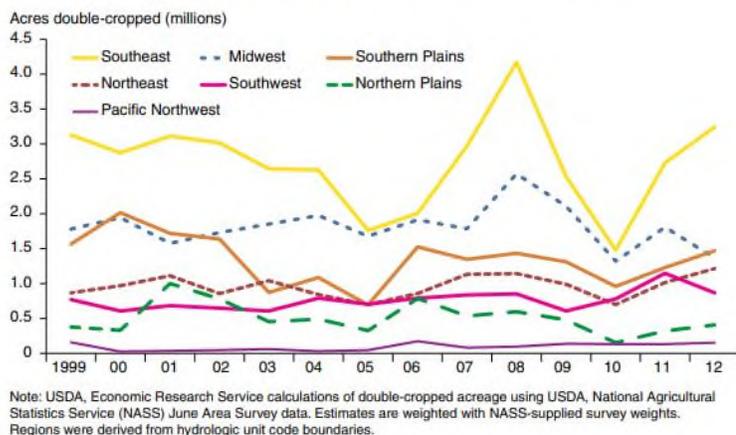
One way to expand production and potentially increase the return to farming is by intensifying the use of existing cropland through multi-cropping. The four main multi-cropping practices are: (i) cover cropping, (ii) integrated crop-livestock systems, (iii) woodland-based systems (such as woodland pasture and agroforestry), and (iv) double cropping.

“Double cropping” refers to the harvesting of two crops or commodities in a calendar year, such as winter wheat in the spring and soybeans in the fall. Common double crop options are soybean, sorghum, and sunflower. Other possibilities include summer annual forages and specialized crops such as proso millet or other short-season summer crops – even corn.

Double cropping has the potential to produce expanded yields on a macro level for emergency disruptions, such as the one the world now faces due to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Double cropping also can help farmers limit the environmental consequences associated with cropland expansion (like increased soil erosion and loss of wildlife habitat, or carbon sinks) as U.S. farmers increase production to meet growing global demand.

Florida and the Southeast lead the United States in double cropping. From 1999–2012, the most recent years for which double cropping data are available, the Southeast had about one-third of total U.S. double cropped acreage (with an average 2.7 million acres), while the Midwest had slightly more than one-fifth (with an average 1.8 million acres); the Pacific Northwest contained the least double cropped acreage, with an average 92,000 acres. The U.S. Department of Agriculture contends that the Southeast’s larger acreage share reflects its longer growing season.

The Southeast leads the Nation in total double-cropped acreage, 1999-2012



Nationally, an average of 53% of total double cropped acres planted soybeans. Over the past 10 years, planting summer soybeans (rainy season) with a subsequent crop of corn has become well established in some regions. Within the Southeast, soybeans represented a much larger share of double cropped acreage than in other regions.

There are two main determinants for such dynamics: the no-till practice for soybean production, which has decreased the time between the harvest of summer soybeans and the planting of corn, and the development of herbicide resistant varieties of corn, high-quality inputs, and technical improvements, which have made it easier to plant

the crop directly after soybeans. These factors have made double cropping more available as a production intensification option for farmers than ever before.

## DOUBLE CROP CAUTIONS AND PRECAUTIONS

While modern farming tools and practices make double cropping more attractive than ever, there are risks farmers must consider carefully. The available growing season may be short, depending on location. Heat and/or dry conditions in July and August may negatively impact germination, emergence, seed set, or grain fill.

Likewise, farmers should take precautions to reduce the risk of herbicide carryover. For example, many herbicides applied to wheat are in the *sulfonyl urea* herbicide family and have the potential to remain in the soil after harvest. If an herbicide such as Finesse, Glean, or Ally is used, the most tolerant double crop will be sulfonylurea-resistant varieties of soybean, e.g., sulfonylurea-tolerant soybeans (STS), sulfonylurea ready (SR), or DuPont/Pioneer's Bolt brand, which reportedly is more tolerant to herbicides that inhibit acetolactate synthase (ALS). If using any herbicide-resistant variety, be sure to match the resistance trait with the specific herbicide used (not just the herbicide group).

Farmers looking to double crop also should be aware that there is little or no mention of rotational restrictions for specific cover crops on the labels of most herbicides; however, this does not mean there are no restrictions. Generally, the packaging for most herbicides will display a statement that indicates "no other crops" should be planted for a specified amount of time, or that a bioassay must be conducted prior to planting the crop.

## WHY DOUBLE CROP?

Double cropping wheat, soybeans and sunflowers now can produce significant ag-commodity opportunities for American farmers. Prices are unlikely to depreciate in the one to four year horizon, and may continue their upward trajectory during the next two farming cycles. Higher commodity prices add an extra layer of income, like a safety net, for when drought, disease, pests, or market fluctuations affect the farm's main cash crop.

Additionally, adding in another crop can provide balance to the soil, and help resist pests or diseases that favor the first crop but not the second. For example, in Florida, strawberries have become almost as popular as citrus; they also pair well with watermelon. Florida strawberry farmers are getting watermelon plants started in their berry fields in the middle of the berry-picking season in late winter. By the time the berries are done, the watermelon plants are ready to take over, effectively turning the operation into a melon farm for the rest of the season. Strawberries require a lot of nitrogen, while watermelons thrive on phosphorus. Likewise, The most common strawberry pests are slugs, strawberry bud weevils, tarnished plant bugs, spittlebugs, and strawberry sap bugs – most of which have no interest in watermelon plants.

In addition to the benefits reaped by individual farmers, increased ag-production in grains and oils can yield tremendous benefits for all of America. Increased domestic yields will help reduce food prices and curb inflation at home, and opportunities to increase exports will enhance our nation's balance of trade. Less tangible, but perhaps most important, America's farmers have the opportunity to strengthen our nation's foreign policy and help the U.S. burnish its reputation as the leader of the Free World.

For more information on double cropping, access the USDA website [here](#), or contact **GrayRobinson's Nationwide Food Law Group** via e-mail at [foodlaw@gray-robinson.com](mailto:foodlaw@gray-robinson.com) or via telephone at **(866) 382-5132**.



[Richard M. Blau](#) leads GrayRobinson's [Nationwide Food Law Practice](#), focusing on the laws that govern the production, importation, processing, marketing, distribution, and sale of foods and beverages throughout the United States. Richard works with all levels of the food industry. He has represented international importers and domestic manufacturers, statewide wholesaler trade groups and regional distributors, and retailers (including multistate restaurant and grocery store chains) across the United States. Richard has achieved numerous peer-related accolades for his legal work, including:

**Chambers and Partners** - Nationally ranked as "Band 1" for Food and Beverage Law; **Best Lawyers in America** - Nationally listed for Food and Beverage Law; and **Super Lawyers** - Elected member.