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# The Star Press

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## ANALYSIS



The U.S. Department of Agriculture's final estimates in January for how many corn acres farmers planted and harvested in 2025 represented unprecedented increases from initial estimates in June. EVELYN HOCKSTEIN/REUTERS FILE

# Corn harvest revision hits USDA's credibility

Final estimate shows sharp jump from June

Tom Polansek  
 REUTERS

CHICAGO — The U.S. Department of Agriculture, long the world's gold standard for crop estimates, faces mounting doubts about the reliability of its data from farmers, grain traders and economists following deep staff losses and a sharp upward revision in how many acres of corn were harvested.

Farmers, traders and food manufacturers everywhere closely follow monthly USDA reports on production, supplies and demand so they can anticipate prices and inventories. Thousands of employees left the USDA last year as part of President Donald Trump's drive

to shrink the federal government, and experts worry the shrinking staff hobbled the agency's ability to produce accurate and timely data.

The USDA's final estimates in January for how many corn acres farmers planted and harvested in 2025 represented unprecedented increases from initial estimates in June. Already-low grain prices sank more than 5%, at a time when growers were struggling to make money.

USDA data last month "appeared to reflect an agency in disarray," said Arlan Suderman, chief commodities economist for consultancy StoneX, citing changes to acres and other estimates.

The revisions prompted the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service, which releases acreage estimates, to launch an internal review, said Lance Honig, a top NASS official.

**"Given the turmoil and turnover at the USDA at the time, there were already concerns about data quality, with the miss from June to final doing everything to reinforce those fears."**

Angie Setzer  
 Partner at advisory firm Consus Ag Consulting

At the Farm Service Agency, another USDA branch, staffing reductions hampered employees from processing

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# Ball State partnership delivers VR experiences

Jane Imbody  
 AI-assisted reporter  
 USA TODAY NETWORK

Ball State University's Institute for Digital Intermedia Arts has teamed up with Mechdyne to offer immersive 3D educational experiences to colleges, museums and other institutions.

The collaboration merges Mechdyne's visualization technology with the IDIA Lab's expertise in creating historically accurate, interactive virtual environments, according to a community announcement. The partnership will result in a curated library of ready-to-use demonstration experiences for virtual reality systems.

Students working through the IDIA Lab are playing a key role in the project, contributing to the creation, testing and refinement of immersive learning content. This hands-on experience allows them to gain real-world production skills while expanding the library of educational 3D experiences available through Mechdyne's getReal3D for Unity platform.

"Partnerships like this connect classroom learning to real clients, real production standards and real audiences, giving our students the chance to collaborate, build, test, and refine immersive experiences that can be used by educators and learners far beyond our campus," John Fillwalk, senior director of the IDIA Lab, said in the announcement. "We're grateful to Mechdyne for investing in this collaboration and helping extend the reach of the work our students and team create."

Experiences cover a range of topics

The partnership aims to reduce a common barrier to adopting immersive technology: access to relevant content. The curated library includes immersive, interactive experiences that explore historic and cultural sites, as well as scientific concepts.

Among the experiences available are Stonehenge, the Byodo-In Temple, Hadrian's Villa: The Antioineion, Newton's Cenotaph, Arabic Heritage Sites, the 1915 World's Fair and Pumapunku. These experiences are built for integration with getReal3D-enabled

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# Blackford Co. man accused of kidnapping woman

Douglas Walker  
 Muncie Star Press  
 USA TODAY NETWORK

HARTFORD CITY — A Blackford County man has been accused of kidnapping a woman who lives near him.

In addition to the kidnapping count — a Level 3 felony carrying up to 16 years in prison — 40-year-old Travis L. Fate of Montpelier is also charged with burglary, residential entry and

theft in Blackford Circuit Court.

According to court documents, Fate on Jan. 31 entered the woman's apartment in the 100 block of South Washington Street in Montpelier. The woman, who locked herself in a bathroom, said the intruder indicated he needed to "save her life."

Fate — still wearing a "headlamp," as described by the woman — was captured by police a short distance from her home.

Investigators said he showed the woman a pair of pliers while in her home.

While being questioned at the Blackford County Jail, Fate reportedly admitted to he had intended to take the woman from her home, saying he had "just had a feeling" he needed to save her from something.

"Mr. Fate claimed he had no idea why he did these things," an officer wrote.

Fate has received a May 19 trial date.

According to court records, the Montpelier man has been convicted of battery against a public safety official (four times), criminal trespass and resisting law enforcement.

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