# Farm Progress From 45Z to E15


## 45Z to E15

In early June I traveled to southeast Iowa to celebrate my mother's 97th birthday at the farm. What a blessing! The weather was perfect and the crops looked great across the state. If anything, the soil moisture level was a little "too wet." As I departed, I was chased away by 3-4 inches of rain and southern Iowa tributaries were running "bank to bank".

This year I took a couple of extra days to meet with biofuel experts in Nebraska and Iowa. I ended my stay with the **ContinuumAg TopSoil Summit** (see new Continuum profile here) on June 10th, where the keynote speakers were **former Secretary of Agriculture** (and **former Iowa Governor**), Tom Vilsack and **current CEO of the Renewable Fuels Association**, Geoff Cooper.

## About Biofuels, RVOs and RINs – "All Systems Go"

Biofuel producers and supply chain participants we met at the summit (both renewable diesel and ethanol participants) communicated favorable conditions in their ecosystems following the record Renewable Volume Obligations (RVO) volumes finalized for 2026 and 2027, and the corresponding improvement in Renewable Identification Number (RIN 4&6) market pricing YTD in 2026. Their comments echoed the sentiments of public company CEOs on recent Q1 2026 earnings calls and in presentations and fireside chats at recent stock conferences. **Times are good for renewable diesel and ethanol producers after two years of subpar returns** (while energy and agriculture policy objectives have been further clarified for low carbon intensity (CI) grain producers).

## About ContinuumAg and the TopSoil Summit – *"Farmers First"*

**We first profiled CEO Mitchell Hora and ContinuumAg in 2023** (see here) when the potential for 45Z-related benefits first emerged for farmers to grow low carbon intensity (CI) grain feedstocks for renewable biofuels. The legislative and administrative pathway for farmers to achieving grain price premiums from biofuel producers has taken far longer than anticipated.

Throughout**, Mitchell and his organization have been tireless voices for farmers.** While much has been accomplished to date, key approvals from Washington DC administrators are required before farmers can expect reliable financial returns. Those bottlenecks should be cleared by this fall to make way for low CI grain price premiums. Farmers have been CI scoring their grain output for a couple of years now.

The tone of many farmers at the Summit was one of fatigue and **"Show Me the Money."** The message from Mitchell and many guest speakers was to stay the course, **"We are Built for This."**

**On June 26th, the USDA released its revised GREET Model for CI scoring and finalized rules for approved regenerative practices for farmers to certify their grain production volumes in anticipation of achieving premium pricing from ethanol producers. (See USDA announcement here and Continuum Ag youtube here).**

**One setback in the announced rules was language requiring "mass balance" vs "book and claim" grain handling. In our opinion, this will severely limit volumes of low CI corn delivered to the ethanol producers** due to increased transportation costs. Fortunately, Mitchell, progressive farmers, **ContinuumAg,** and others can push for changes in subsequent years.


## Takeaways from Secretary Vilsack's Message – "Be a PITA" – Pain in the …

Former USDA Secretary, Tom Vilsack delivered a powerful bipartisan message **encouraging farmers to continue lobbying for family farm objectives (such as 45Z, E15 and SAF from ethanol) in Washington DC.**

He shared how the 45Z sausage was made and identified some of his late term, bipartisan efforts to see the survival of 45Z benefits originally outlined in the Biden era IRA (which survived into the OBBB).

I expected more politics in the speech (see here) but was impressed by **his genuine focus on preserving family farm succession through growing future markets** for commodity grain producers. His comments dovetailed perfectly with the opportunities outlined by Geoff Cooper at the Renewable Fuels Association.

## Takeaways from Geoff Cooper's – Renewable Fuels Association Message

**The Renewable Fuels Association** is the primary voice of the US ethanol industry. Cooper outlined the entire scope of the domestic ethanol industry in his presentation (see here). He made interesting points on the cost of ethanol production relative to traditional fuel sources in light of recent Strait of Hormuz constraints and elevated gasoline prices.

He shared perspectives on national security, energy security and food security as policy objectives related to 45Z implementation.

Cooper described the biggest near-term opportunity for the ethanol industry (and for corn farmers) in the **national adoption of year-round E15 choices for consumers** (vs. the 10% limitations facilitated by 35-year-old EPA driven legislation).

In 2025, Iowans enjoyed $0.20-$0.40 per gallon gasoline cost savings by **choosing "E15" at the pump** (an option chosen by over 27% of total statewide gasoline purchases in that year). **A national E15 bill has cleared the US House and now requires Senate approval before the current Trump administration signs it into law.**

## Measurement, Recording and Verification (MRV) Voices at the Summit – TICC Industry Participants

For years, Oaklins Capital Alliance has been calling attention to the need for an MRV ecosystem of intermediaries to validate the soil health or regenerative agriculture outcomes achieved by growers. TICC (testing, inspection, certification and compliance) providers have established a strategy and framework for carbon intensity (CI) scoring.

Representatives of **ContinuumAg** (software services for calculating CI scores with farmer owned data), **EcoEngineers** (certifiers and auditors of CI scores), **Michelson & Co** (aggregators and brokers of verified 45Z tax credits), **Christianson CPAs and Consultants** (experts on ethanol benchmarking and Energy Attribution Credits (EAC), and **AON Corporation** (risk management insurers of 45Z tax credits), conducted a panel discussion of grower data management, documentation, and attestation - critical ingredients to satisfy downstream requirements for 45Z tax credit buyers and regulators.

In short, this was an in-depth description of bureaucratic "red tape" at its finest, as the need for "sporadic" on-farm audits was introduced and discussed (much to the groans of the farmers in attendance).



## Resilience vs. Regenerative Nomenclature – Beyond Subsidies

A comment from **Aon Corporation** caught our attention at the Summit.  AON entered this market expecting to study tangible yield (resilience) results from the progressive growing methods incentivized by 45Z legislation (reduced tillage, increased cover crop adoption, improved nitrogen management, etc.).  They anticipated the ability to document actuarially significant improvements in resilience by year ten.

**Instead, it has taken only four years to document improved resilience from progressive farming methods.  AON will be introducing improved crop insurance rates for more resilient practices going forward**.  That creates "free market" incentives (not just government subsidized incentives) for farmers implementing more resilient (regenerative) methods.

**Most farmers at the TopSoil Summit and most farmers who will score low CI grain for biofuel feedstocks, have been pursuing soil health improvements for years.  Now, the insurance industry has enough data to charge different crop protection rates for different farming methods (instead of using a "one size fits all" rate structure).**

## Regenerative Farmer Panel

All of that discussion about policy and "red tape" was necessary and useful, but the best insights were shared by **Andy Bensend (WI), Hans Riensche (IA) and John Carroll (US & Brazil)** on the farmer insights panel.

The panel shared thoughts on "adoption & adaptation" that everyone in attendance could appreciate. Advice included: start small, test continually, "fail forward", do something, keep adapting, and be proactive - in the face of uncertainties like global competition, changing economics, changing policies and – wait for it – ***AI.***




## VM Agritech – New Product Highlights for Curezin®

Conference sponsor **VM Agritech** highlighted the commercial availability of **Curezin** ®, its newly approved, EPA-labeled, broad-spectrum fungicide and micronutrient formulation designed for crop protection and nutrition programs.

**VM Agritech has been busy since the US EPA approved its formulation in late 2025.** Curezin® has addressable market opportunities across many specialty and row crop applications and across all geographies. Current efforts are to obtain product certifications across multiple regulatory territories while continuing to prove efficacy in the field (after many years of proven trials).

**VM Agritech and Curezin® fit our CAC model of "doing old things better."** We have had an opportunity to monitor their "bootstrapped" corporate development and look forward to their continued success in the future. See more about [VM Agritech here](#).

## 2026 Topsoil Summit Takeaways

**(1) Most grain farmers remain challenged for profitability for a 3rd straight year.**

**(2) Biofuel producers are already reaping benefits of 45Z legislation.**

**(3) Farmers need final clarifications from agencies to monetize 45Z benefits.**

**(4) E15 legislation is critical to expand the TAM for farmers and ethanol producers.**

**(5) TICC is alive and well in the agriculture ecosystem.**

**(6) AI is already in play in agriculture.**

**(7) *"Farmers First"* – Farmers and ranchers still feed America and the world, while increasingly contributing to energy independence of the United States of America!**

# Oaklins | CAPITAL ALLIANCE

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