

# Farmdoc Website Scores

URBANA, ILL.

**A** University of Illinois Extension website focusing on agricultural marketing, finance, management, law, policy, and other issues is drawing about 250,000 page requests each month, and a special report on ethanol has generated significant interest.

"The ethanol report alone was downloaded 33,000 to 35,000 times in the first three weeks following its posting," said Robert Hauser, head of the Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics which oversees the website.

"Corn-Based Ethanol in Illinois and the United States" ([http://www.farmdoc.uiuc.edu/policy/research\\_reports/ethanol\\_report/index.html](http://www.farmdoc.uiuc.edu/policy/research_reports/ethanol_report/index.html)) includes nine chapters whose authors include members of the department and other departments in the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences. Chapters range from ethanol economics at the local level to the use of distillers dried grains in livestock feed to ethanol policy and politics.

"The goal of the report is to provide objective information to Illinois stakeholders, cutting through the emotion, political, and economic self-interests that often dominate discussions about ethanol production and use," explained Hauser, who wrote the report's introduction and co-authored another chapter.

In existence for several years, the farmdoc (Farm Decision Outreach Central) website has steadily gained in usage by producers and others interested in the agriculture sector, said

Scott Irwin, a professor in the Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics who oversees the website.

"Typically, the site has in excess of 30,000 unique visitors each month," he said. "We have an e-mail subscriber list of over 6,000 people."

A relatively new feature is a blog; FarmGate (<http://www.farmgate.uiuc.edu>), which itself generated almost 90,000 page requests in November. The new site uses weblog—"blog"—technology to integrate, synthesize, and summarize information, much like a digital county agent, Irwin added.

"To date, over 500 posts on a wide array of topics have been published at Farmgate," he said. "The posts feature material from dozens of universities and USDA agencies. We find that posts on our blog are re-published at several other high-volume ag websites."

The farmdoc project, Irwin said, represents a new way of meeting the outreach mission at the University of Illinois.

"The project website has become an extremely popular 'one-stop source' of farm-level information for producers and others in the agricultural industry across the United States and around the world," he said. Extension field staff, commodity organizations, and farm organizations also rely extensively on the comprehensive and current information available at the site.

"The farmdoc project has received several state and national awards for excellence." Δ