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**GOOD MORNING: The Van Trump Report 2-6-20**

1 message

**The Van Trump Report** <reply@vantrumpreport-email.com>

Thu, Feb 6, 2020 at 5:30 AM

Reply-To: Jordan &lt;reply-fec41077766c067e-1142\_HTML-68584704-100003450-8@vantrumpreport-email.com&gt;

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"Life is like a game of cards. The hand you are dealt is determinism; the way you play it is free will." - **Jawaharlal Nehru**

**Thursday, February 6, 2020**[Printable Copy](#) or [Audio Version](#)

**Morning Summary:** Stocks bulls will be trying to add to the S&P 500's new all time closing high posted yesterday. Investors seem to be feeling more confident in the global health system's ability to keep the coronavirus under control, which is being helped along by news of a viable treatment for the illness. China will start testing Gilead's antiviral remdesivir drug to treat patients with severe cases of the virus in clinical trials on Thursday. China's moves this week to shore-up markets and stabilize its economy have also helped to ease fears about the economic toll and raising expectations that the government of the world's second largest economy will do whatever it takes to prevent a major blow to its GDP. Crude prices have also been on the rebound after trading below \$50 barrel earlier this week. An emergency summit of the OPEC+ committee yesterday ended in deadlock over committing to deeper oil production cuts with Russia reportedly being the biggest holdout. Russia reportedly prefers to just extend current supply cuts beyond the March expiration. The advisory committee is meeting again today. Since the

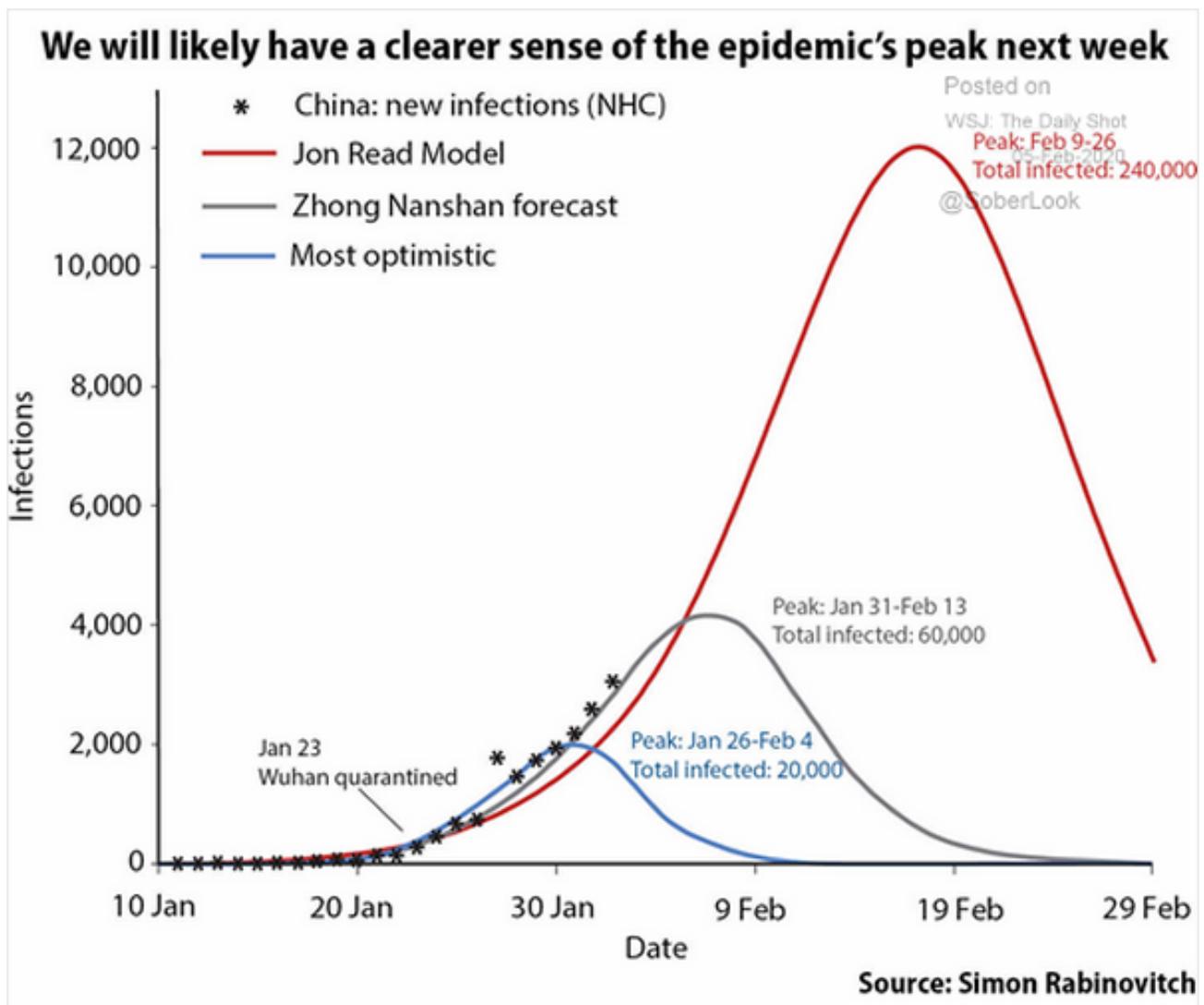
committee is only advisory, any decision would need to be ratified by a formal ministerial summit. The next one is scheduled for March 5-6 but delegates have said it may be moved forward if a production policy can be hashed out. Another slew of earnings will be reported today in what's shaping up to be a better-than-expected season for U.S. companies. Today's biggest releases include Abiomed, Activision, Bristol-Myers, Carlisle Companies, Cigna, Dunkin Brands, Estee Lauder, Kellogg, Nokia, Philip Morris, Regeneron, Sanofi, S&P Global, Skechers, Snap-On, T-Mobile, Twitter, Uber, Wynn Resorts, and Yum! Brands. U.S. economic data is very light with Productivity and Costs the only key release today. Economists and investors alike were pretty blown away by yesterday's ADP Employment Report which showed January job gains of +291,000, far above the +154,000 expected and raising expectations that Friday's official numbers will also deliver solid results. Turning to Washington, the U.S. Senate yesterday voted to acquit President Trump on articles of impeachment. The drama has not had any noticeable influence on stock markets but it will be taking up less room in the headlines now, making more room for what's sure to be an interesting Presidential race. I have personally moved to an underweight and underinvested position. I continue to hold just a handful of my favorite positions and have banked more profit and moved more cash to the sideline.

**Pay Attention... How China is Impacting the Energy Markets?** *Oil markets have been spooked by a recent report that Chinese demand has dropped by about three million barrels a day—roughly 20% of the nation's daily demand late last year and 3% of global consumption. Not everyone is convinced that a 20% drop in Chinese demand—if that is the current run-rate—is likely to be sustained. But this may be too sanguine, writes Nathaniel Taplin. The transport and industrial sectors together account for around 70% of China's petroleum demand, with the former now the main driver of growth. As long as factories get back to work over the next couple weeks—and trucks, ships, and planes get back to work shipping their goods—the overall hit to oil demand will probably remain manageable. But if this time frame proves optimistic and factory workers remain home for longer, the picture suddenly gets bleaker. (Source: The Wall Street Journal)*

**Is a Recession in the Mix?** *A new study from the MIT Sloan School of Management and State Street Associate says there's a 70% chance that a recession will occur in the next six months. The researches used a scientific approach initially developed to measure human skulls to determine how the relationship of four factors compares to prior recessions. The index currently stands at 76%. Looking at data back to 1916, the researchers found that once the index topped 70%, the likelihood of a recession rose to 70%. (Source: CNBC)*

**S&P Predicts Coronavirus Will Stabilize by April:** *The novel coronavirus outbreak has continued its global rampage, but experts are beginning to see signs of improvement in detection and treatment on the horizon. S&P Global says it expects the crisis will "stabilize globally in April 2020, with virtually no new transmissions in May. Our worst-case projection holds that the virus stops spreading in late May, and optimistically in March." The analysts say the economic hit for China will be felt most by industries exposed to*

household spending, "especially activities that take place outside the home," they wrote. The financial analytics company sees China's growth stabilizing later in 2020 and continuing to recover through early 2021, adding that "Relief measures including tax cuts and subsidies are likely." S&P analysts caution "if the disease is not swiftly brought under control, slower economic growth would exacerbate already weaker fiscal performance in many parts of the Asia-Pacific." Expectations for the outbreak's peak have already been moved back. Zhong Nanshan, who leads the special committee of China's State Committee on Health and is the epidemiologist who discovered the SARS coronavirus in 2003, predicted in January that coronavirus cases would hit their peak within 10 to 14 days of the initial outbreak (as shown in the graph below). Earlier this week he pushed back that forecast to mid-February. (Sources: Axios, Wall Street Journal)



# FARM TANK

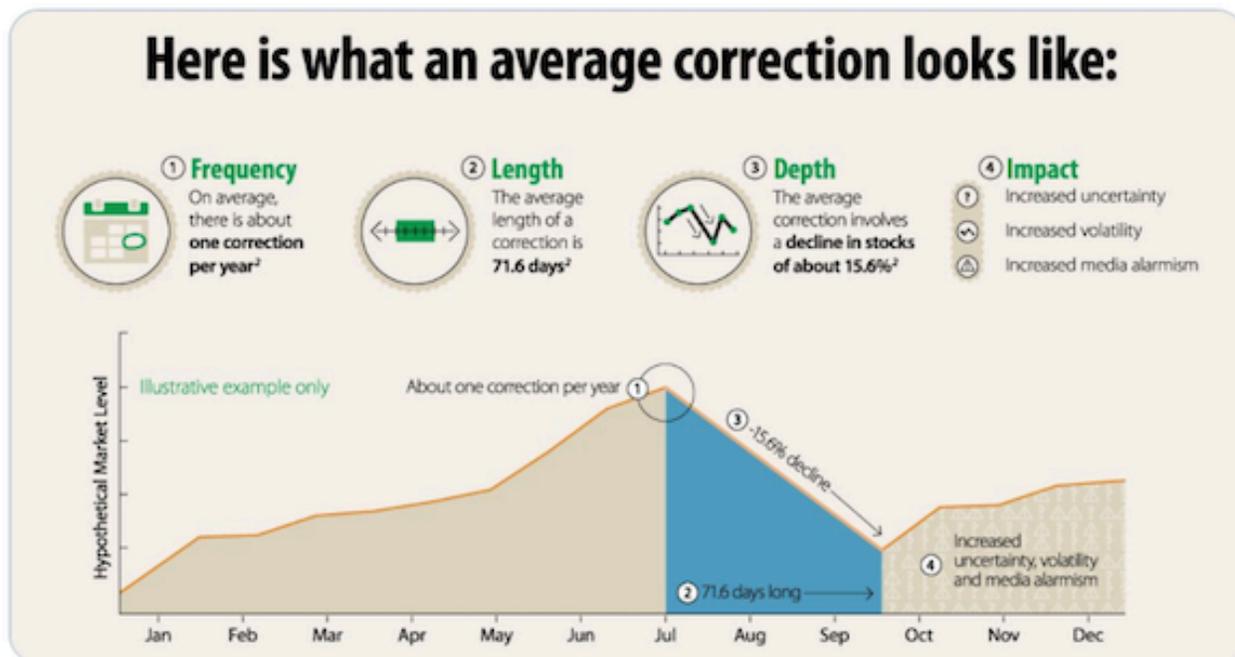
## Tweets of the Day



**Visual Capitalist** ✓  
@VisualCap



The Anatomy of a Market Correction  
(See full infographic: [visualcapitalist.com/anatomy-market...](http://visualcapitalist.com/anatomy-market...))





**Steve Burns**  
@SJosephBurns

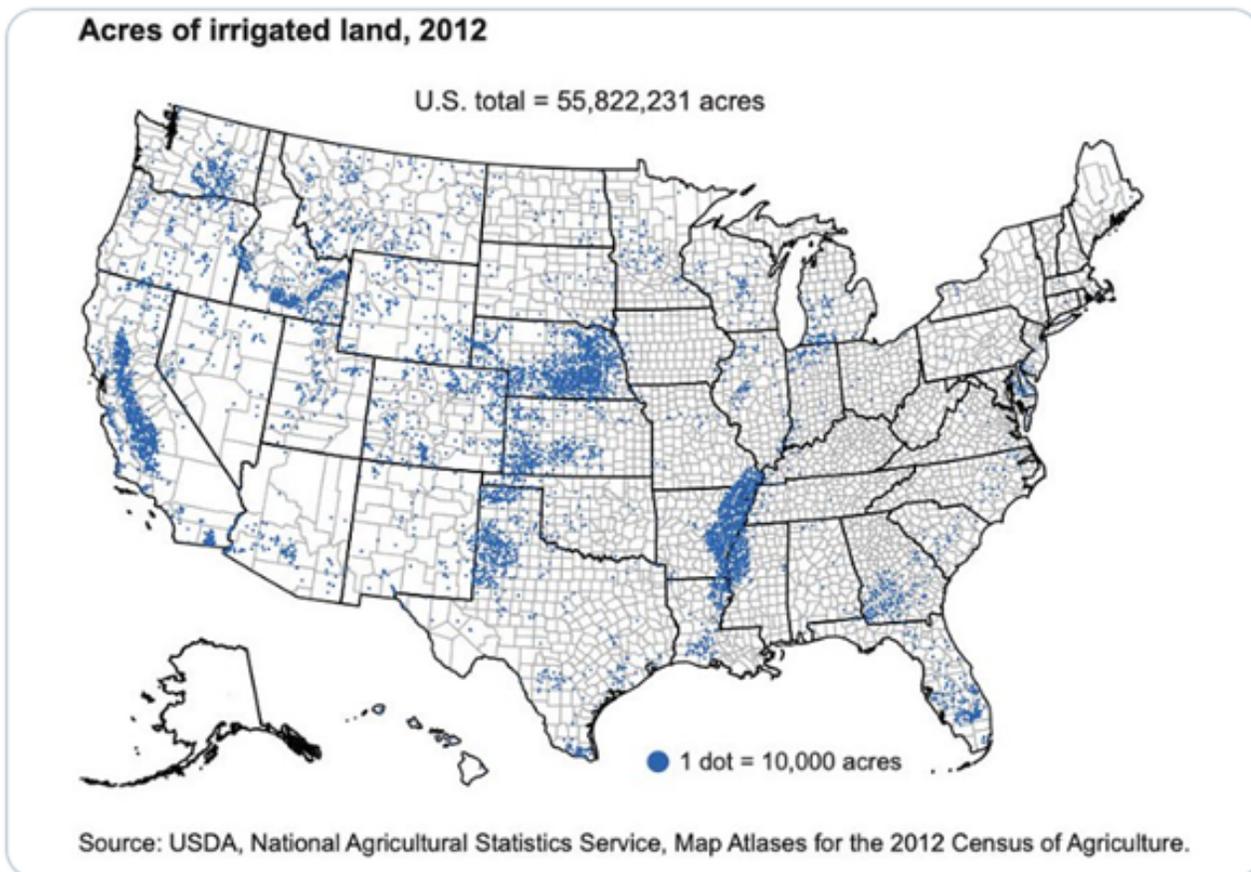


The key is to wait. Sometimes the  
hardest thing to do is to do nothing.

— *David Tepper* —



Five States—[#Nebraska](#), [#California](#), [#Arkansas](#), [#Texas](#), and [#Idaho](#)—account for just over half of the Nation’s irrigated acres, [@USDA\\_ERS](#)

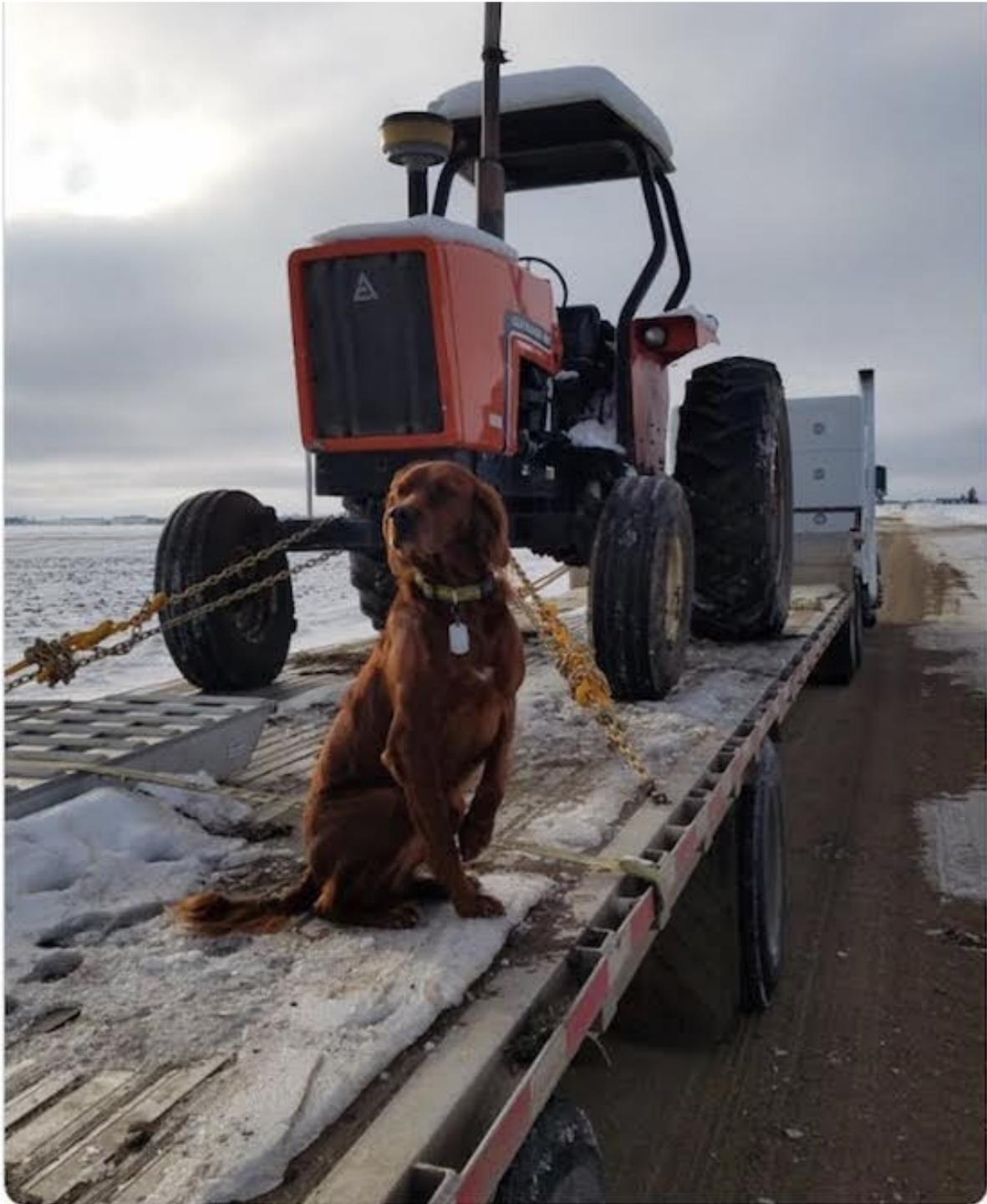


**Troy Homan**  
@simply\_gary



Every man needs to stop and take a moment of silent celebration after tapping on every chain and strap proclaiming "that's not going anywhere"







**Lee Mueller**  
@LeeJMueller



War on Rats.



Rat Hunting with the Dogs of War, Farming's Greatest Show on Legs



**Dry Creek Cattle Co.**  
@DryCattle



This boys pretty happy his cow calved!

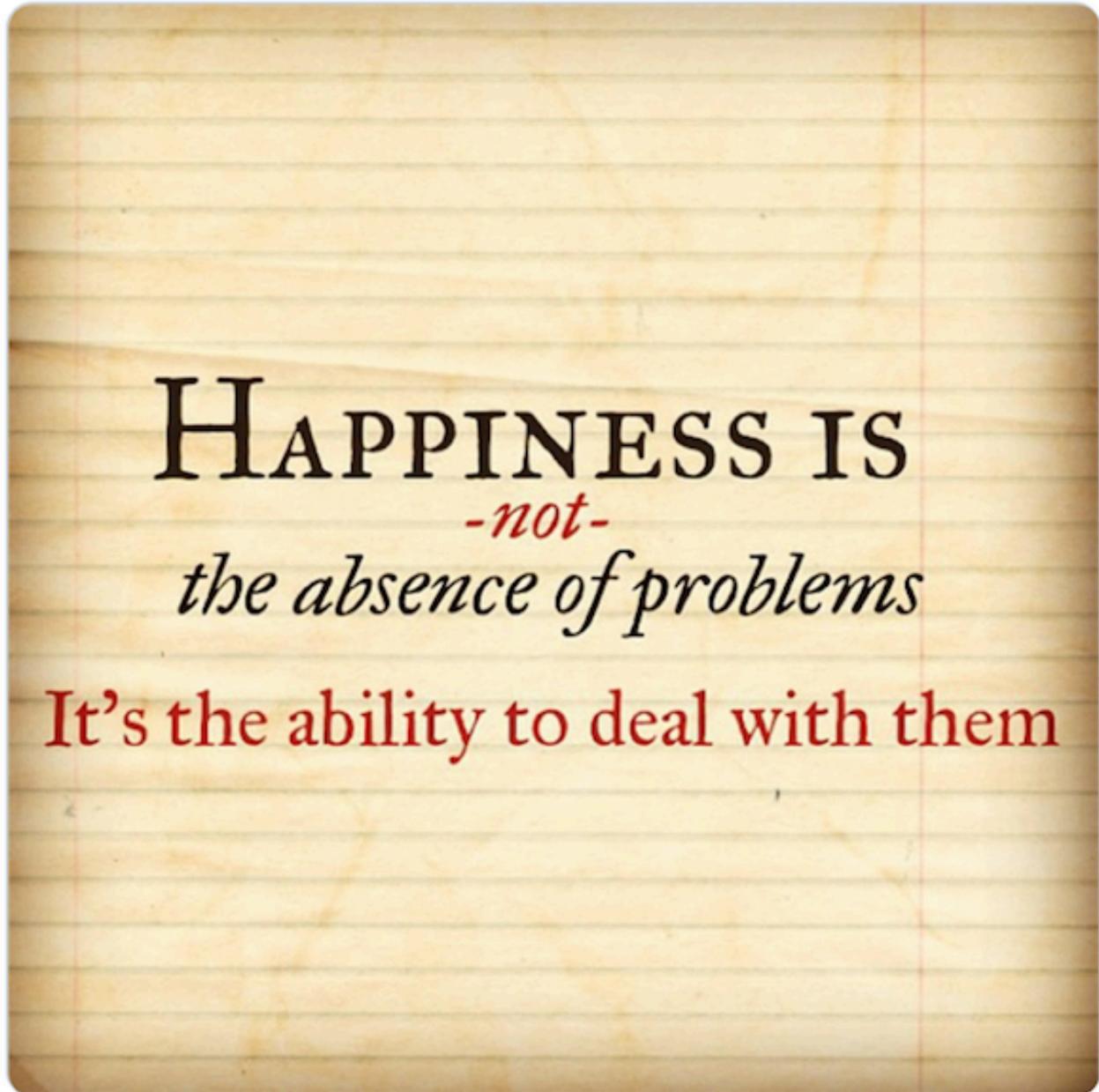




Think Different  
@LifeLimits

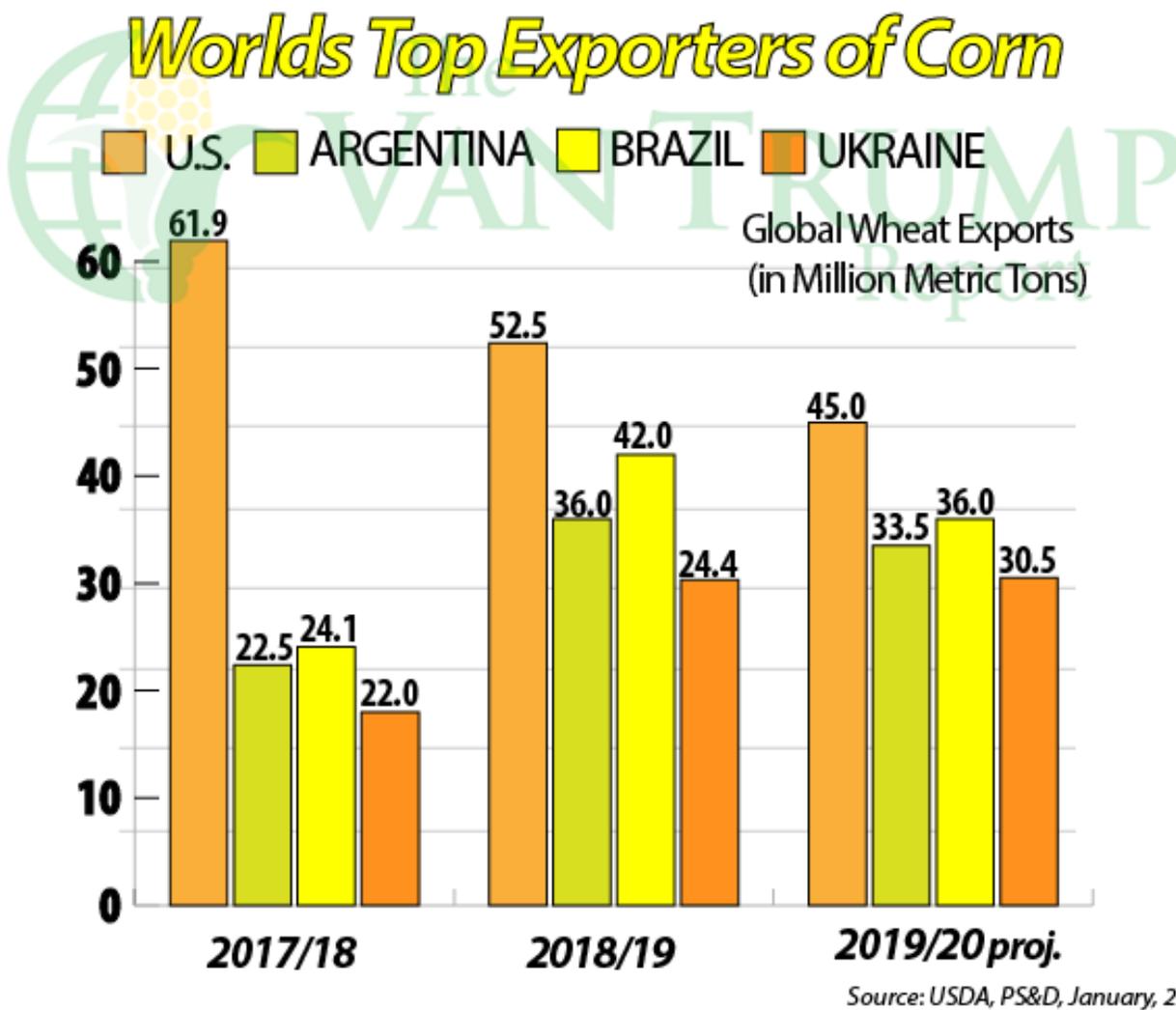


Choose happiness.



**Corn** traders are starting to prepare and make adjustments ahead of next Tuesday's monthly USDA supply and demand report. On the demand side of the equation, bulls are hoping to see the USDA bump exports a bit higher as U.S. exporters look to remain highly competitive in the global marketplace. There's a ton of debate about how the USDA is going to handle or interpret the "Phase 1"

trade agreement, will the Chinese promises somehow be counted into the equation or will the USDA wait until it sees more real confirmation. As for ethanol demand, it feels like most in the trade are thinking the USDA will leave it "unchanged". The USDA just made a large adjustment higher in January for feed and residual demand so it's doubtful the USDA makes another quick move, but if global livestock and protein demand is going to stay strong I have to imagine feed usage eventually ticks higher later in the year. Bottom-line, I think the demand side of the balance sheet is going to improve, I'm just not sure the USDA is going to pull that lever on Tuesday. I think the USDA might wait until later in the marketing year to get more aggressive with demand when they have a better understanding and more details about Chinese buying.

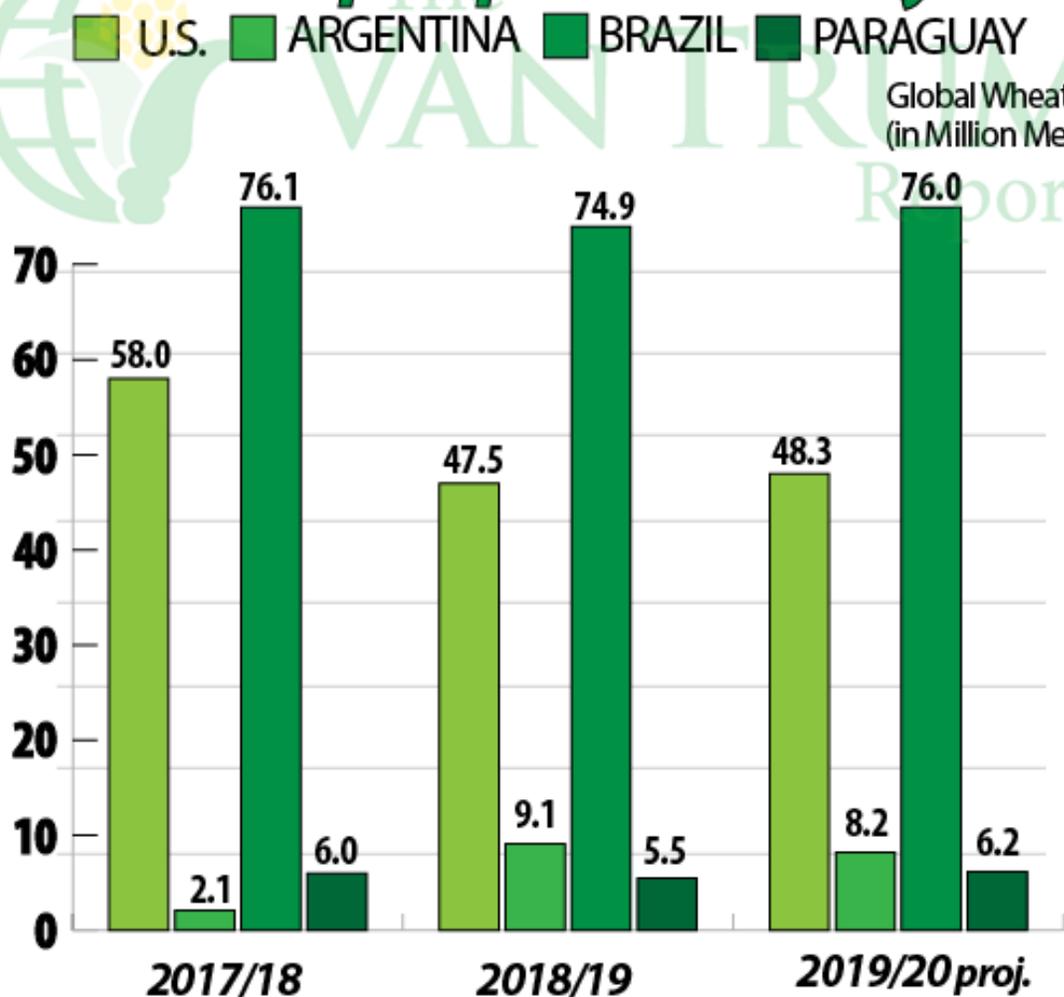


**Soybean** traders are currently debating Chinese demand, South American production, and next Tuesday's monthly USDA supply and demand report. The Chinese headlines have somewhat improved on rumor and talk of an unconfirmed treatment for the coronavirus, but this situation is still extremely fluid and a major "wild-card". South American weather has been mostly cooperative and crop estimates seem to be working themselves higher not lower. The harvest in Brazil is moving along and its exporters will soon be gaining even more competitiveness. In fact, there were several reports and rumors circulating yesterday that

Chinese importers like Cofco, Sinograin, and Wilmar have all been buying heavy doses of soybeans from Brazil the past few days. Here at home, the USDA is scheduled to release its latest supply and demand report next Tuesday, February 11th. Similar to corn, the trade is eager to see how the USDA is interpreting the "Phase 1" trade agreement. Bears, say if the USDA disregards the promises made in the trade deal as only talk, then the USDA could take a step towards reducing its U.S. export estimate. On the flip side, bulls believe, if the USDA elects to factor in the Chinese demand promises they could work their number higher. I'm of the belief the USDA might just take a "wait-and-see" approach and leave its export estimate "unchanged". I'm also not looking for much change to the USDA's current crush estimate. Net-net, I don't think we are going to see any sizeable adjustment to demand in next week's report. I'm a bit more worried about the numbers that will be released at the upcoming [USDA Ag Outlook Forum](#) scheduled for February 20-21. There's talk circulating amongst the bears of between +8 to +10 million more soybean acres in 2020. Bulls are hoping the promises of a massive surge in Chinese buying will work to offset these extra acres. As a spec, I would like to be a bull but am having a real problem pulling the trigger in the face of three big headwinds: Record production out of South America; a large jump in U.S. soybean acres compared to last year; and extreme fear and uncertainty inside the Chinese border regarding the coronavirus. These three major headwinds combined are just too large for me to ignore and or position myself against. As a producer, I think there will be better pricing opportunities later in the year.

# Worlds Top Exporters of Soybeans

Global Wheat Exports (in Million Metric Tons)

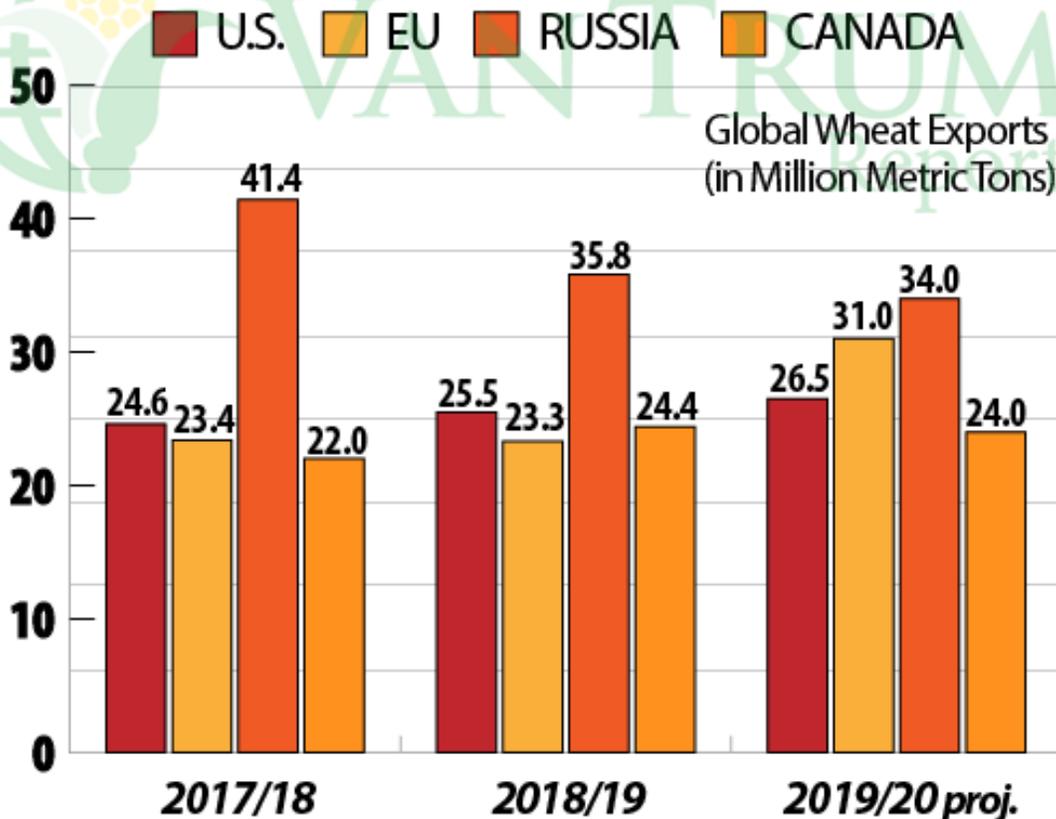


Source: USDA, PS&D, January, 2020

**Wheat** bulls are hoping to see the USDA tighten its domestic balance sheet in next Tuesday's monthly supply and demand report. Exports the past couple of months have been stronger than many might have anticipated and there's reason to argue the USDA could bump its current export estimate a hair higher. Similar to corn and soybeans, there's a lot of questions surrounding if, when, and how much U.S. wheat China will purchase in 2020 and how will the USDA factor this into its demand estimates. At the same time, bulls here at home are still pointing to record low winter wheat acres and perhaps even a reduction in spring wheat acres. Net-net, bulls believe we will eventually see U.S. wheat ending stocks fall to sub-900 million bushels, the lowest in over five years. As a spec, if we can get the U.S. balance sheet to further tighten at the same time the global economies start showing stronger signs of improvement, we could see more upside price appreciation. I think it still might be a bit early to ride the next wave higher so I remain on the sideline. As a producer, I will continue to wait for better opportunities.

# Worlds Top Exporters of Wheat

Global Wheat Exports (in Million Metric Tons)



Source: USDA, PS&D, January, 2020



**> U.S. Farm Income Expected to Slump as Government Aid Drops:** *U.S. net cash farm income will fall -11% this year as production costs rise and government aid programs set up to assist producers during the U.S.-China trade war wind down, according to a U.S. Department of Agriculture forecast issued on Wednesday. The drop, of \$13.1 billion in inflation-adjusted 2020 dollars, is expected as direct government farm payments are projected to plummet -36.7% following an estimated decline in payments from the Trump administration's trade aid programs. Data show struggles in the U.S. agricultural economy will continue as farm bankruptcies rise and producers face ever-mounting farm debt, prolonged low commodity prices, volatile weather patterns and a fatal pig disease that has decimated China's herd. However, net farm income is expected to tick up +1.4% in 2020, after adjusting for inflation, Litkowski said. The difference between net cash farm income and net farm income is based on how the agency accounts for farm income. Net cash income is recorded in the year a commodity such as corn, soybeans or pork is sold. Net farm income is for the year it was produced, and factors in such things as depreciation of assets, including farm equipment. Livestock farmers are expected to sell more animals and meat this year at higher prices, according to the USDA. But crop producers face a more complicated picture: corn growers are expected to get lower prices, and soybean growers could struggle with sales due to lower demand. The full report is available [HERE](#). (Source: Reuters)*

**> 'Giant' Soybean Logjam May Clog Brazil Ports After Wild Weather:** *Brazil,*

*the world's biggest soybean producer and exporter, is grappling with another spate of wild weather, leaving a vessel logjam at ports and causing harvest delays. Heavy rain is crimping Brazil's crop collection and starting to jam up vessels at the ports in Santos and Paranagua. Robust oilseed demand looms as China, the top buyer, picks up cargoes. A "giant" queue of vessels is expected at ports, though shipping delays may be temporary, according to a Bloomberg source. In the past two weeks, the volume of soybeans scheduled to ship from major ports doubled to 7 million metric tons, according to data from shipping agency Williams. Heavy rain at major ports probably will persist through the weekend, Celso Oliveira, a meteorologist at Somar Meteorologia in Sao Paulo, said in a phone interview. Conditions may improve on Feb. 9-10, while more precipitation is forecast for three days starting Feb. 11. Read more from [Bloomberg](#).*

**> Could the Democrat's Caucus Flop Dent Ethanol's Political Might?** *Oil refiners think the vote-counting debacle at the Iowa caucus could spell doom for the ethanol industry's political heft in future elections. "The other loser along with the Iowa caucus [Monday night] might be the death grip that ethanol ... has had on the body politic," said Stephen Brown, a long-time refining lobbyist. Iowa's traditional status as the leadoff hitter has driven presidential contenders to ensure they were on solid ground with the corn lobby on the Renewable Fuel Standard. Now Monday's chaos has ignited calls for Iowa to be bumped from its primary perch (and for scrapping the caucus format altogether). Such a change could sharply curtail the influence of biofuel producers and farmers in the major soybean- and corn-growing state. (Source: Politico)*

**> Bovine Kobuvirus, a New Cattle Virus, Detected in the U.S.:** *A cattle virus, first identified in Japan in 2003, has just been confirmed in U.S. cattle. News of the finding was published in medical journal, "Emerging Infectious Diseases." The virus is called "bovine kobuvirus" (BKV), and it is in the same family as viruses that cause head colds and sinus infections in humans, as well as polio. Researchers discovered it in the intestines of two calves that died after being infected. Leyi Wang, who led the study that confirmed the finding at the University of Illinois, urges continued surveillance to determine how widespread the virus might be in the U.S. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that after initially identifying BKV in Japan in 2003, the virus has since been reported in Thailand, Hungary, the Netherlands, Korea, Italy, Brazil, China and Egypt. Researchers haven't determined whether the cattle virus can be transmitted to people. Read more from [DTN](#).*

**> The Battle for Breakfast Begins March 2:** *That's when Wendy's enters the ring and debuts its highly anticipated menu for the increasingly competitive time slot. The launch comes six months after the fast food chain announced it wanted in on this growing category. The full menu consists of nine sandwiches. Three are on croissants, including two options with eggs (sausage, egg and Swiss cheese or*

*a bacon, egg and Swiss cheese) and a maple bacon chicken croissant. Similar egg sandwiches will also be sold on biscuits and classic buns. It's also selling new side dishes, like potato wedges and replacing its coffee blend. If all goes well, Wendy's predicts breakfast sales will encompass 10% of its daily sales. But it doesn't expect breakfast to be profitable until sometime next year. Wendy's has some 6,000 locations nationwide. Read more [HERE](#).*

**> Ancestry Laying Off Workers Amid Slowdown in Consumer DNA-Testing:** *Ancestry, the largest seller of at-home DNA tests for health and genealogy reports, is laying off about 100 people, approximately 6% of its total workforce. A blog post written by CEO and President Margo Georgiadis cites "a slowdown in demand across the entire DNA category" now that "most early adopters have entered the category." In the post, the company stressed that it is making a long-term commitment to the health-care side of its business, called Ancestry Health. A company spokesperson noted that the layoffs did not affect that group. Later this year, it plans to roll out a next-generation sequencing product to its customers to provide them with more detailed information about their potential health risks, the company previously announced. The news comes several weeks after 23andMe, the second-largest company in the space, laid off 14% of its staff — about 100 people — because sales of its tests were lower than expected. (Source: CNBC)*

**> Amazon Ordered 100,000 Electric Delivery Vehicles:** *Last September, Amazon ordered 100,000 electric delivery vehicles from the Michigan-based startup Rivian—the largest EV order ever placed—as part of a companywide goal to become carbon-neutral by 2040. Yesterday, it offered a glimpse inside the factory where the vans are being built. The vehicles are being designed from scratch and they've used virtual reality to test some of its features. Amazon's logistics software is built into the display screen to map each route. As with some other new vehicles, it has safety features including warnings about pedestrians and distracted driving. And here's an interesting fact - Amazon led a \$700 million funding round in Rivian in February 2019 and participated in another \$1.3 billion funding round in December, and so the large order serves an important second purpose: boosting Rivian's valuation—and thus the value of Amazon's investment. Read more from [Fast Company](#).*

**> Casper Prices IPO at \$12 a Share, Which is at the Low End of Estimates:** *Mattress company Casper on Wednesday evening priced its initial public offering at \$12 per share. At this price, the company would have a market value of \$476 million, excluding the underwriters' allotment, the report said. The online mattress retailer had cut its price range from \$17 to \$19 a share, to \$12 to \$13 a share, according to a Wednesday regulatory filing. Casper plans to list today on the New York Stock Exchange under the symbol "CSPR." Casper's latest round of funding valued the direct-to-consumer business at \$1.1 billion. But like many Silicon Valley-backed startups looking to go public, the company has faced scrutiny for its*

*lack of profitability and high costs to acquire new customers, and keep them. In the nine months ended Sept. 30, Casper reported a net loss of \$67.3 million and revenue of \$312.3 million. Learn more [HERE](#).*

**> Elon Musk's Advice on Hiring:** *Elon Musk has long been one of the most out-of-the-box thinkers in the technology world. And his comments on Twitter on Sunday suggest more executives need to think like him -- or face the possibility of missing out on talent. In a series of tweets on Sunday, Musk said that Tesla is looking to hire people who can help the company improve its artificial intelligence technology. But his job post mentioned something else that may have been overlooked: as technically sophisticated as the job may be, Musk called on anyone with any education to apply. "A PhD is definitely not required," he tweeted. Musk added that he doesn't "care if you even graduated high school." All he really wants, according to the tweet, is someone with a "deep understanding" of artificial intelligence. It was an important comment the Tesla chief has made several times in the past. Rather than focus too heavily on education, he'd rather Tesla focus on finding people who can do the best job. Read more [HERE](#).*

**> Study Finds People Lie to Seem More Honest:** *Believe it or not, people lie in order to maintain a good, honest reputation -- even if it hurts them to do so, or means they lose money. At least, this is what a team of scientists are suggesting, with evidence to prove it. A team of scientists from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the University of Chicago, and the University of California, Los Angeles just published a study that found that when people obtain extremely favorable outcomes, they anticipate other people's suspicious reactions and prefer lying and appearing honest over telling the truth and appearing as selfish liars. The researchers tested multiple scenarios, including lawyers claiming billable hours and students self-reporting gambling wins in exchange for money, and in each case similar outcomes were seen -- people lied to come across as a better person. Why do they do this? Choshen-Hillel believes its because people judge others negatively when they report extreme outcomes. "People are so concerned they seem dishonest that they would behave dishonest to keep their reputation clean," she told CNN. Read more [HERE](#).*

**> Are These the Dumbest Criminals Ever?** *A Florida traffic stop turned into a surprise narcotics bust after police found what looked to be a bag full of drugs in the car. The clue? It was labeled "Bag Full Of Drugs." A Florida Highway Patrol trooper made the stop after observing a car going 25 miles per hour over the limit Saturday, the Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Office said. A Sheriff's K-9 arrived at the scene and alerted police to the presence of contraband inside. That's when police said they found the narcotics -- there were approximately 75 grams of methamphetamine, 1.36 kilograms of GHB, 1 gram of cocaine, 3.6 grams of fentanyl, 15 MDMA tablets and drug paraphernalia. "Note to self- do not traffic your illegal narcotics in bags labeled 'Bag Full Of Drugs,'" a Facebook post from*

*the Sheriff's office read. "Our K-9's can read." (Source: Newser)*





**West central Minnesota** - *Things are plenty wet up here at the moment. We were unable to finish our fieldwork this fall and are hoping the weather is good enough to get us in the field by early March. I was wanting to go corn on corn but if I can't get in the field to finish, we will probably have to do beans. With only 6-7" of frost in the ground, we could be back out there soon with a break. We marketed aggressively last year and had to buy a few bushels back as yields were down a bit last season. I am hearing a bunch of guys have jumped on the hemp train, as our state has opened the door. I'm guessing most are looking at CBD, which seems to still have a lot of bugs to work out. It sounds like a lot of folks have got their eyes on the money but not yet on the process of having a market in place before you grow, getting good seed, and then managing the crop. It will be interesting to see how it works out up here.*

**South Central Wisconsin** - *I am looking to strip-till my corn on corn and my lower-yielding fields to try to increase yields. My goals are to warm the soil up sooner and get nutrients right next to the seed. Most of the ground that needs the bump is higher in P and K. I have an old sprayer I would use for the tank, trailer, pump, and Raven, and I have a big semi tanker tender. So it's cost-effective to be liquid instead of dry.*

**Northern Kansas** - *My brother and I are getting older and we are looking to slowly start phasing out of the farm. 15 years ago I would have been singing a different tune. We have sold a few pieces of ground for our retirement but most of the farm will go to the kids. I don't know if you have a lot of guys that do this but we got rid of nearly every piece of equipment and now we pay for guys to custom plant and harvest. When you put pencil to paper it's actually a little better deal to custom farm especially with the cost of combines and planter tractors. Several years back we took our combine to Deere for service and walked out with a \$43,000 bill. If I could give these young farmers advice, put pencil to paper when it comes to having your farm custom done. I know it's not as much fun when you're younger to watch someone else but it's the best decision we have made on our farm in the last 5 years.*



**neuro mining**

As we age, it gets harder and harder to create new neural pathways in the brain. It's the reason kids find it so easy to learn new things, but as adults it often gets more difficult. Doing brain teasers and solving riddles can be an important part of keeping our brain healthy. The more connections we can form, the better our brain will be. I hope this helps provide a little daily fun and exercise. The answer to each riddle or puzzle will be located at the bottom of the report.

**TODAY'S RIDDLE:** You see a boat filled with people. It has not sunk, but when you look again you don't see a single person on the boat. Why?



**FROM MY PERSPECTIVE**

*Kevin Van Trump*

### Best Weather Apps for 2020

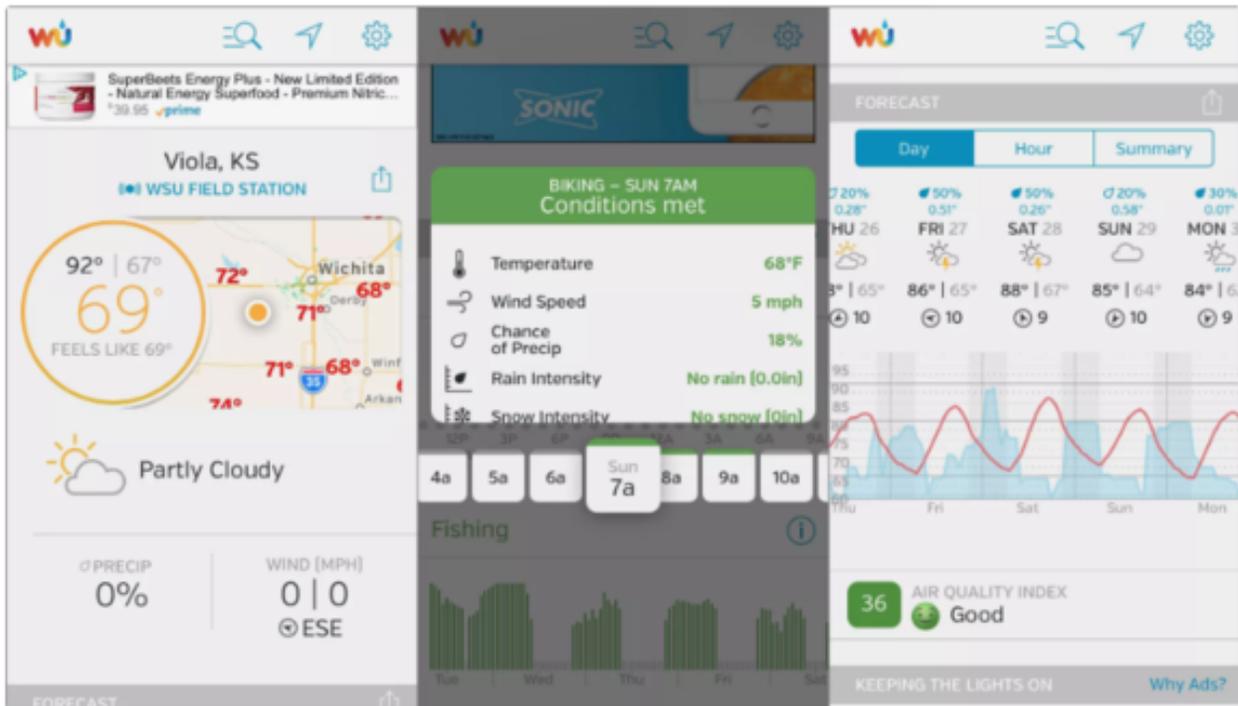
Weather plays a huge role in determining our day to day decision making, so you need a weather app you can trust, understand and quickly navigate through. It can be a bit overwhelming trying to differentiate between all the offerings on the market and it becomes almost impossible to keep up with all the latest bells and whistles. Whichever app you choose, make sure it has a few key essentials that are easily accessible, including "current conditions," an easy to read "five-day forecast," and also some kind of detailed information such as radar, precipitation and wind speeds. Above all, they had to be accurate! Below are a few of the Top Picks for 2020...

**AccuWeather:** *AccuWeather is a beast of a weather app and is often a Top 10 most downloaded weather app in app stores. Farmers will appreciate the MinuteCast, which is accessible on the main screen and offers a very intense look at the next two hours. Everything you need to know right now including*

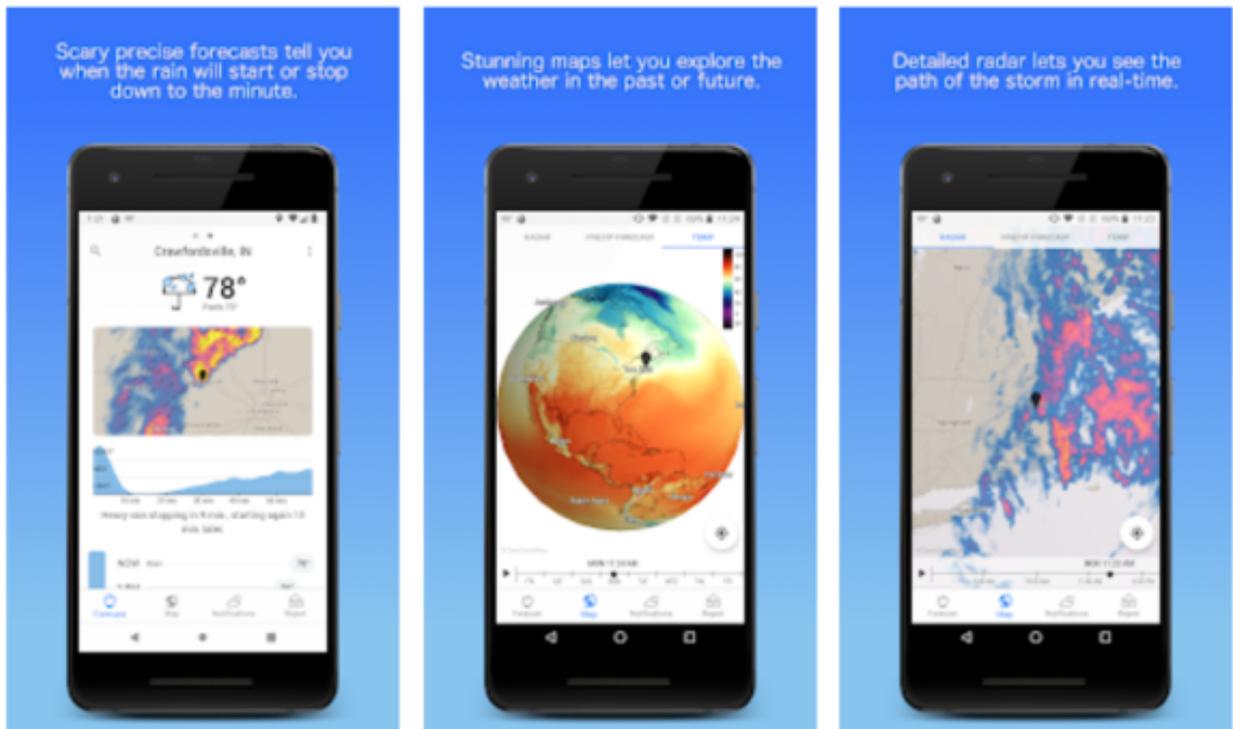
*the temperature, what it feels like, and the high and low for today will also be found on the primary screen. Some weather apps have you scroll all over to find these things, so it's nice that this app puts them right there at the top. (Available on both iOS and Google Play [Free, Platinum Upgrade \$3.99])*



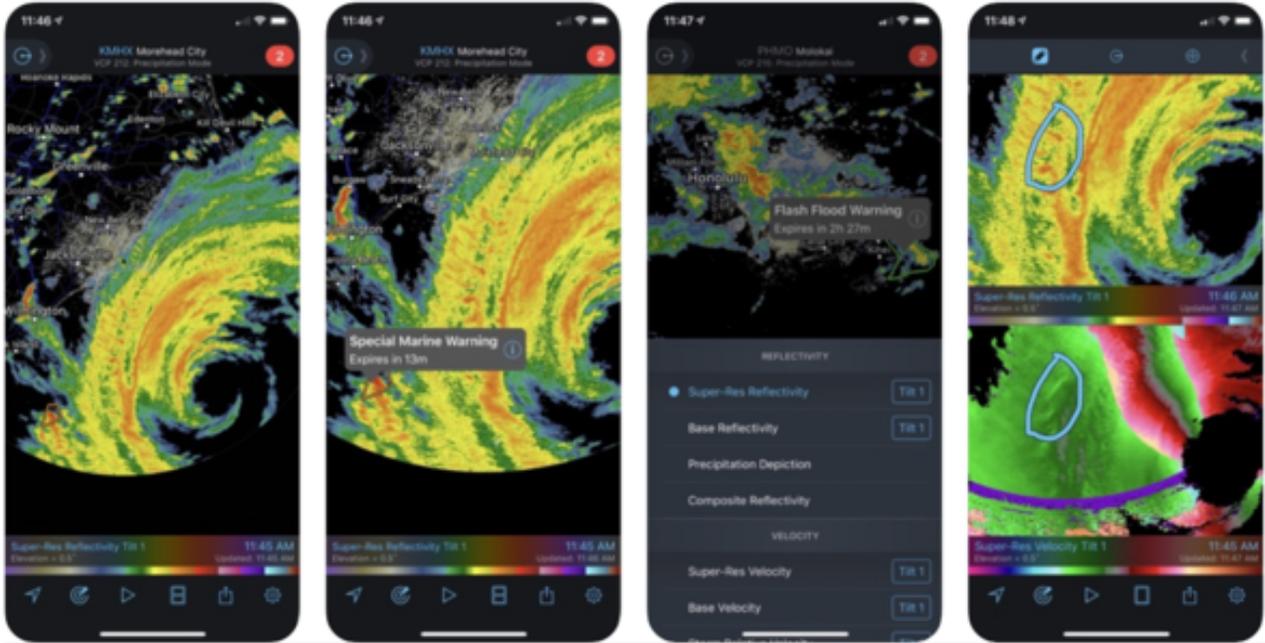
**Weather Underground:** *Weather Underground is a great weather app all around, but its Smart Forecasts are what sets it apart. Choose multiple weather conditions like rain, wind, temperature, and air pollution or anything else you consider ideal for a specific outdoor task, and this app will show you when is the best time to go outside and do it. This is the perfect app if you're in need of knowing when to get an application down before the rains or how much time you have to work before you get muddled in. Touted as the world's most accurate weather service, Weather Underground gathers its data from hundreds of thousands of personal weather stations all around the world. It includes an interactive map with different views for displaying temperature, radar, satellite, severe weather alerts, heat maps, webcams, hurricanes, and more. (Available on both iOS and Google Play [Free, \$1.99/year subscription to remove ads])*



**Dark Sky:** *Dark Sky can tell you when it's going to rain, how bad it's going to get, and when the sun's going to come out. This is an excellent weather app to download primarily because of its stunning, easy-to-understand interface. It shows you accurate, minute-by-minute forecasts from their own weather service through excellent visuals. One of the features I like most is that Dark Sky lets you literally scan the globe by swiping and pinching to find the most intense weather spots. It's always visible by way of a transparent layer just beneath the screen which puts a whole new spin on weather apps by turning the radar into the forecast, allowing you to track storms for a 12-day span as they develop and dissipate. If you have an Apple Watch, you can integrate the latest Dark Sky version with your wearable device for added convenience. Keep in mind, it's the #1 paid app on the App Store. (Available on iOS and Google Play [\$3.99])*



**RadarScope:** *Radarscope is easily one of the best weather apps with radar, and t's the go-to app for both professional and amateur storm chasers. If your looking for next-level weather information, you won't be disappointed as it delivers comprehensive data on upcoming storms and various other weather patterns. Having access to the National Weather Service data, NEXRAD data and 233 radar points, RadarScope will be the first to let you know when a dark cloud is forming overhead. Members of the Spotter Network and AllisonHouse can log in with their membership for additional exclusive information. (Available on both iOS and Google Play [at \$9.99])*



**Weather Bug:** *WeatherBug is easy to use and provides forecasts for your every need, from storm warnings to pollen levels. Their weather network delivers the fastest alerts and the best real-time forecasts which are current, hourly and 10-day. This app has 18 different weather maps, including Doppler radar, lightning, wind, temperature, alerts, pressure, and humidity. You can also track almost any conditions up to the minute with Spark Lightning Alerts, Global Fire Data and Winter weather's 10-day forecast and real-time alerts. (Available on iOS [Free, \$2.99/year subscription to remove ads])*



## **Why the Star Betelgeuse Has Astronomers on the Edge of Their Seats**

Don't freak out if you walk outside early one morning and see a mysterious glowing orb in the sky. What may appear to be an extra moon - or maybe a spaceship - is probably just an exploding star. A red supergiant known as Betelgeuse has been dimming at a rapid rate, which has led some scientists to believe the star is about to go supernova.

Betelgeuse, pronounced "BET-tal-jooos" (just like the movie Beetlejuice), is a red supergiant star located about 642 light-years from Earth. It's the alpha star - that is the brightest star - of the constellation Orion the Hunter, one of the most prominent constellations in the sky at this time of year. The red-colored star is estimated to be between nine and ten million years old, meaning it is likely near the end of its life. All supergiant stars end their lives in a spectacular core collapse explosion called a supernova, which for Betelgeuse, could come any day now - or 10,000 years from now! No one really knows.

The star's brightness faded by more than half in the final months of 2019 and is currently the faintest that astronomers have ever observed. The star's brightness is known to vary, usually following a pretty regular cycle of around 5.9 years. Within that cycle, several smaller ones have also been known to occur. It's possible that these cycles have all coincided and are currently causing the exceptional faintness. There is also speculation that the extraordinary dimming may be due in part to expelled gas and dust clouds that partially obscure the star.

Betelgeuse going supernova is obviously another theory about what's causing the star to fade but there is just not enough science on the phenomenon for astronomers know for sure. Scientists have never witnessed the lead-up to a supernova event. NASA has been trying to get the word out about the possibility though, in order to prevent panic in the event we do wake up to what looks like an extra moon in the sky. The glowing mass would be the third brightest object in the sky, after the Sun and the full moon, and likely be visible day and night, possibly for months.

If Betelgeuse goes supernova during the northern hemisphere's winter months, it will be one of the most spectacular astronomical events that most of us will ever witness here in North America and other countries in the northern hemisphere. However, if it were to happen during our summer months, when the sun is shining close to the Orion constellation, the explosion itself might not result in much of a show in our part of the world. Keep in mind that when/if the supernova event is visible from Earth, it means we'd be watching what happened some 642 years ago, as that is how long it takes the light from Betelgeuse to reach us. With that in mind, a Betelgeuse explosion is nothing we need to be worried about as far as damage to Earth.

While 642 light-years is an incomprehensible distance, it's actually pretty close as far as stars go, which makes it extremely valuable to scientists. In fact, it's the only star other than our Sun on which we can see surface details. The star has been a red supergiant for about 40,000 years and its explosion is inevitable. Massive stars burn huge amounts of nuclear fuel at their cores. When one starts to run out of fuel, the core begins to cool, leading to a drop in core pressure. Eventually, gravity wins out and causes the star to suddenly collapse in on itself, resulting in a massive explosion that we call a supernova. Usually a very dense core is left behind, along with an expanding cloud of hot gas called a nebula. A supernova of a star more than about 10 times the size of our sun may leave behind the densest objects in the universe—black holes.

In 2020, if Betelgeuse were to go supernova, our first surefire signature would come in the form of high-energy neutrinos flooding our neutrino detectors all over the world. A few hours later, the light will first arrive in a spike, followed by a gradual brightening over a little more than a week, which will fall off in stages over the coming months before gradually declining for years. It will gradually fade out of existence, with the supernova remnant visible only through telescopes.

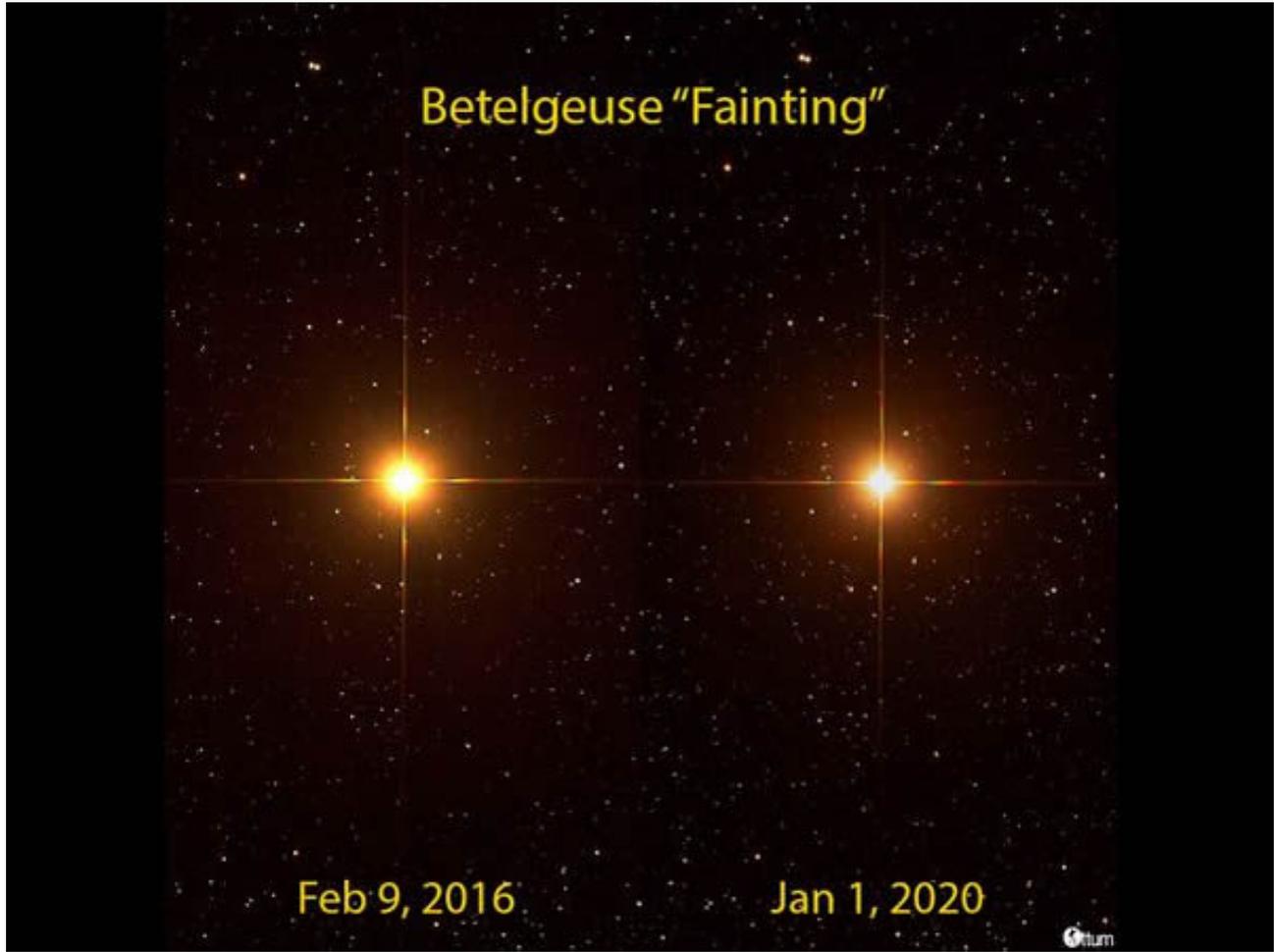
Astronomers believe that about two or three supernovas occur each century in galaxies like our own Milky Way. Because the universe contains so many galaxies, astronomers observe a few hundred supernovas per year outside our galaxy. Space dust blocks our view of most of the supernovas within the Milky Way. These exploding stars are the building blocks of the universe. Stars generate the chemical elements needed to make everything. At their cores, stars convert simple elements like hydrogen into heavier elements, such as carbon and nitrogen, which are the elements needed for life. When they explode, those elements are scattered across the universe, eventually forming new stars and planets, and who knows what else.

Needless to say, the amount of information scientists could learn about our universe from Betelgeuse going supernova would be unprecedented. While we have no idea when it could happen, we at least know what to expect if it does! (Sources: The Atlantic, Universe Today, Forbes, NASA)





The constellation Orion as it would appear if Betelgeuse went supernova in the very near future. The star would shine approximately as brightly as the full Moon. [-] WIKIMEDIA COMMONS USER HENRYKUS / CELESTIA





### **Great Story: Leo Fender, From Radio Repairman to Guitar Visionary**

Guitar maker Fender just recently announced an ownership change, with longtime investor Servco Pacific now a majority stakeholder in the company after acquiring shares from co-investment partner TPG Growth. While Servco and TPG aren't exactly household names, Fender is one of the most recognized guitar names in the world and another example of a great American success story. The company's most well-known products are without a doubt the Stratocaster, the Telecaster, and the Precision Bass, all of which revolutionized not just guitar design but also music itself.

Born in 1909, Leo Fender grew up in Southern California where his parents owned an orange grove. Fender was more interested in electronics than fruit, though. His uncle owned an automotive-electric shop where a teenage Fender became fascinated with a radio his uncle had built from spare parts. While in high school, Fender started his own radio repair business in his parent's house. In college, he studied accounting but continued tinkering with radios and other electronics.

Fender never once took an electronics course but his self-education ended up serving him well. By 1938, having lost several accounting jobs due to the Depression, he and his wife moved back to Fender's hometown of Fullerton,

California, where he decided to start a radio repair business with a loan of \$600. His Fender Radio Service quickly built a strong following among musicians and band leaders who turned to him for public address systems, which he built himself.

With his steady stream of musician clients, he also began dabbling in amplifier and instrument repair. In the early 1940s, he met Clayton Kauffman, aka Doc Kauffman, a lap steel guitar and electric guitar engineer that had worked for Rickenbacker, the company credited with making the first electric guitars. Fender and Kauffman launched the K & F Manufacturing Corp. and began manufacturing Hawaiian lap steel guitars and amplifiers - sold as sets - in 1945. By the end of the venture's first year, Fender was convinced that manufacturing instruments and amplifiers would be much more profitable than repairing them and decided to fully concentrate on that side of the business. Kauffman disagreed, however, and the two parted ways in early 1946.

The company was renamed Fender Electric Instrument Company and produced its first real commercial success with hardwood amplifiers, dubbed "woodie amps", that ended up setting the gold standard for guitar tone throughout the 60s and 70s. Fender also kept experimenting with guitars and worked up a solid-body prototype that would eventually become the Telecaster, one of the most popular electric guitars in music history.

The Telecaster, introduced in 1951, was the first mass-produced solid-body electric guitar ever sold. The guitar's bolted-on neck allowed for the instrument's body and neck to be milled and finished separately, and for the final assembling to be done quickly and cheaply by unskilled workers. Fender's attention to tone was what really set the Telecaster apart. Unlike any guitar that came before it, the Telecaster had a bright, clean, and cutting sound, with a prominent high end, thick midrange, and bass perfectly suited to the western swing style. This was Fender's initial target market and the Telecaster was quickly adopted by the twang-focused players. But the Tele also caught the attention and admiration of guitarists across a wide range of musical genres, particularly Rock 'n' Roll, R&B, and Country. Its long list of fans includes music legends Bob Dylan, Vince Gill, George Harrison, Waylon Jennings, Keith Richards, and Bruce Springsteen, just to name a few.

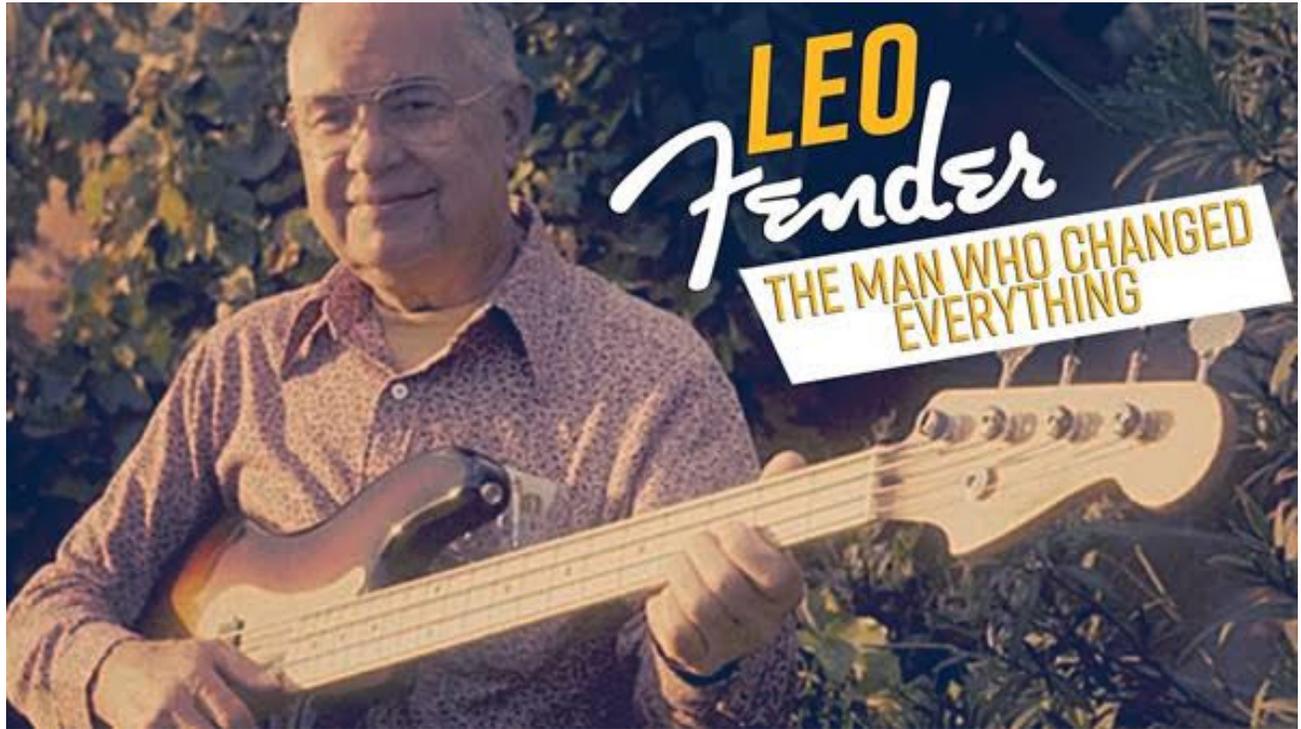
Fender introduced another game-changing instrument the same year as the Tele - the Precision Bass. While the so-called P Bass may be lesser-known outside musical circles, the electric bass's design forever changed the way music is made. Before its introduction, bands relied on the traditional upright bass to round out their rhythm sections. For those not familiar, an upright bass is one of the largest stringed instruments in the music world, averaging about 6 feet in height. For a small touring ensemble, it was terribly impractical. But the P Bass, with its similar size and styling to an electric guitar, freed musicians from lugging around a clunky upright bass. It was also fretted for more precise playing and could be easily

amplified. The new design allowed for smaller groups of musicians to play and be heard, and paved the way for the modern rock combo.

Following the success of the Telecaster, Fender introduced yet another revolutionary electric guitar - the Stratocaster. It is a contoured double-cutaway guitar, with an extended top "horn" shape for balance like the Precision Bass guitar. It differed from the Tele's less comfortable square-edged design and allowed players to more easily reach higher frets, in turn exploring new sounds. Fender came up with the new design based on customer input, many of which didn't like the Telecaster's harsh edges. The guitar also featured the Fender synchronized tremolo (or "vibrato") bridge, a new innovation that allowed guitarists to bend strings more easily. One of the most famous examples of how this system revolutionized rock music is Jimmy Hendrix's Woodstock performance of "[The Star Spangled Banner](#)." Hendrix's screaming, psychedelic version of the American anthem set the course for the future of Rock 'n' Roll and instantly elevated the Stratocaster to its iconic status.

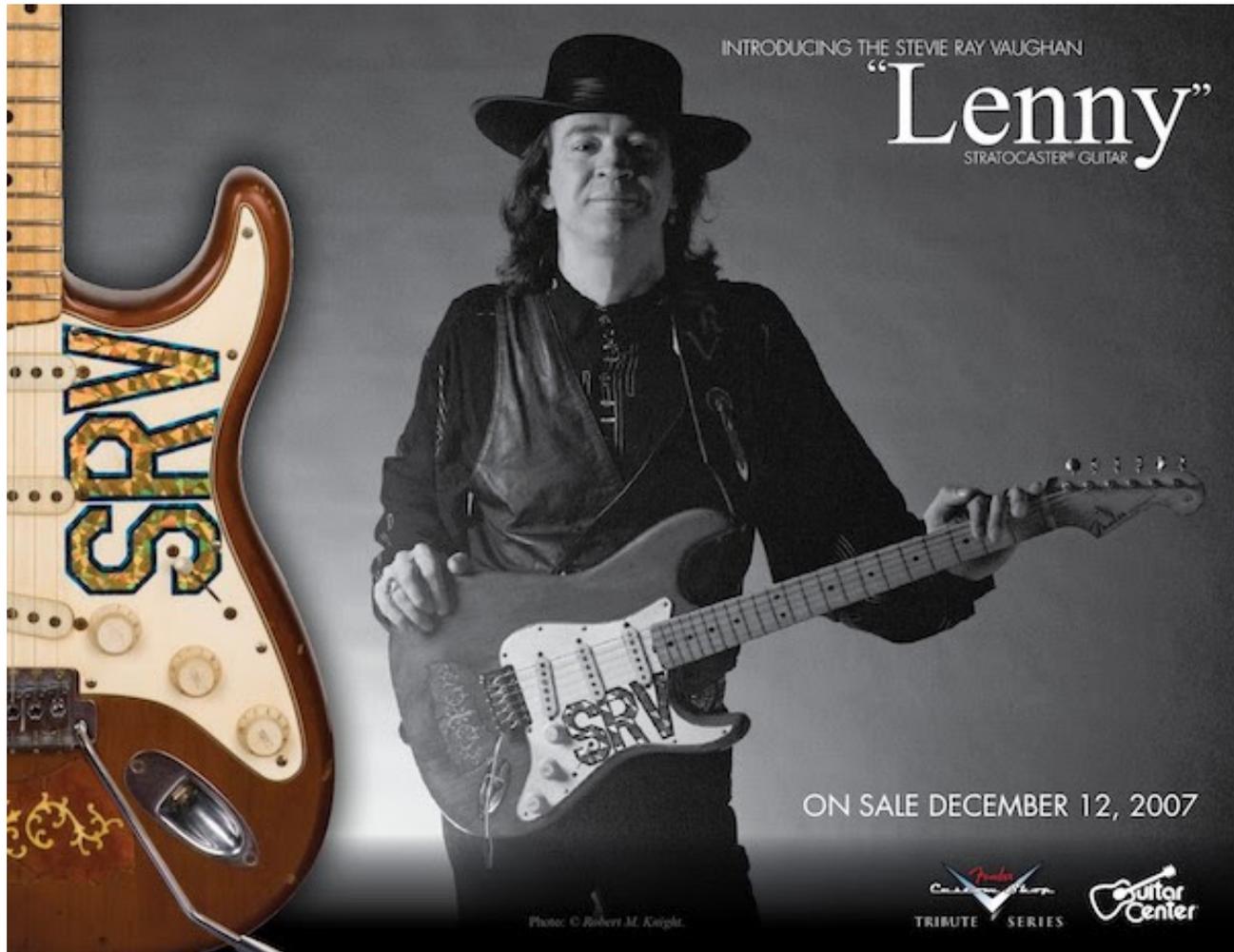
In the 1950s, Leo Fender contracted a streptococcal sinus infection that impaired his health. He decided to wind up his business affairs and sold the Fender company to CBS in 1965 for a whopping \$13 million (\$106 million in today's dollars), which is two million more than they paid for the Yankees a year earlier! He regained his health shortly thereafter and went on to start a couple of other musical instrument ventures, including Music Man, which made the StingRay bass, and G&L Musical Products. Fender passed away in 1991 after a long battle with Parkinson's disease, but his legacy obviously extends well beyond his life.

What I find most fascinating about Fender's story is that he didn't even play guitar. He dabbled at piano and saxophone but considered himself to be entirely lacking in musical talent. His real love was electronics and in pursuing that, he just so happened to become a music legend. I always find it amazing how some people become legendary in a space they could have never imagined. (Sources: Fender, Reverb, GuitarPlayer, Wikipedia)





Jimi Hendrix famously played the guitar above at Woodstock back in 1969. Paul Allen paid +\$2 million for it to be placed at the Experience Music Project in Seattle, Jimi Hendrix's hometown.



Stevie Ray Vaughan's Stratocaster "Lenny" was named after his wife, who bought him this circa 1965 Strat for his birthday in 1980. After Stevie died in a helicopter crash in 1990, Stevie's brother Jimmy donated the guitar, which was auctioned off for +\$750,000.

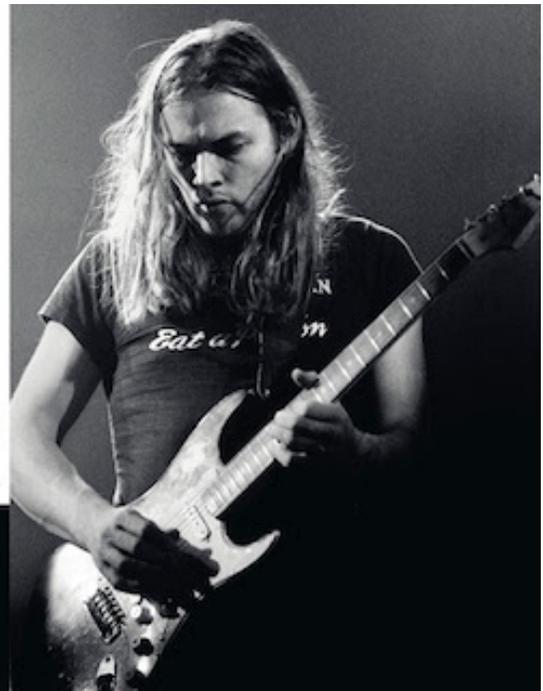


"Blackie" pictured above is probably Eric Clapton's most iconic guitar. As his story goes, Clapton bought six Stratocaster's in a guitar shop in Texas. He then gave three away (to Harrison, Townshend, and Winwood) and pulled apart the other three to build Blackie, a guitar he used for the next 15 years. Like many of his guitars, Clapton auctioned this instrument to raise money for the Crossroads Rehab Centre, it went for +\$1 million!



# DAVID GILMOUR

**Set to Auction Off Famed  
Black Strat' and Other Guitars  
for Charity**

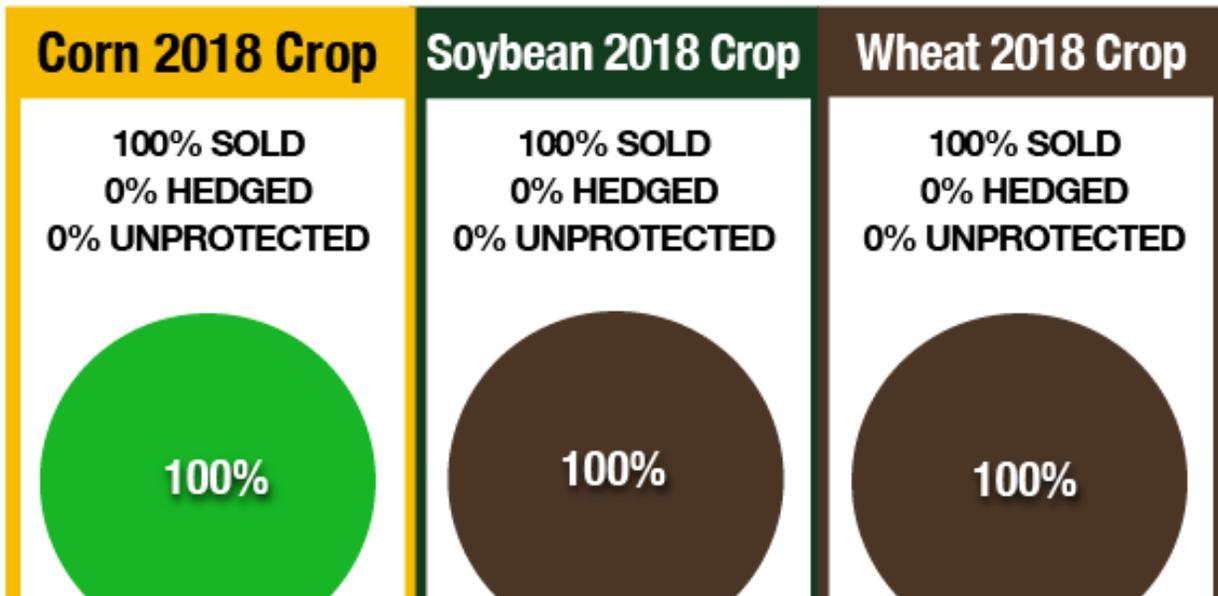


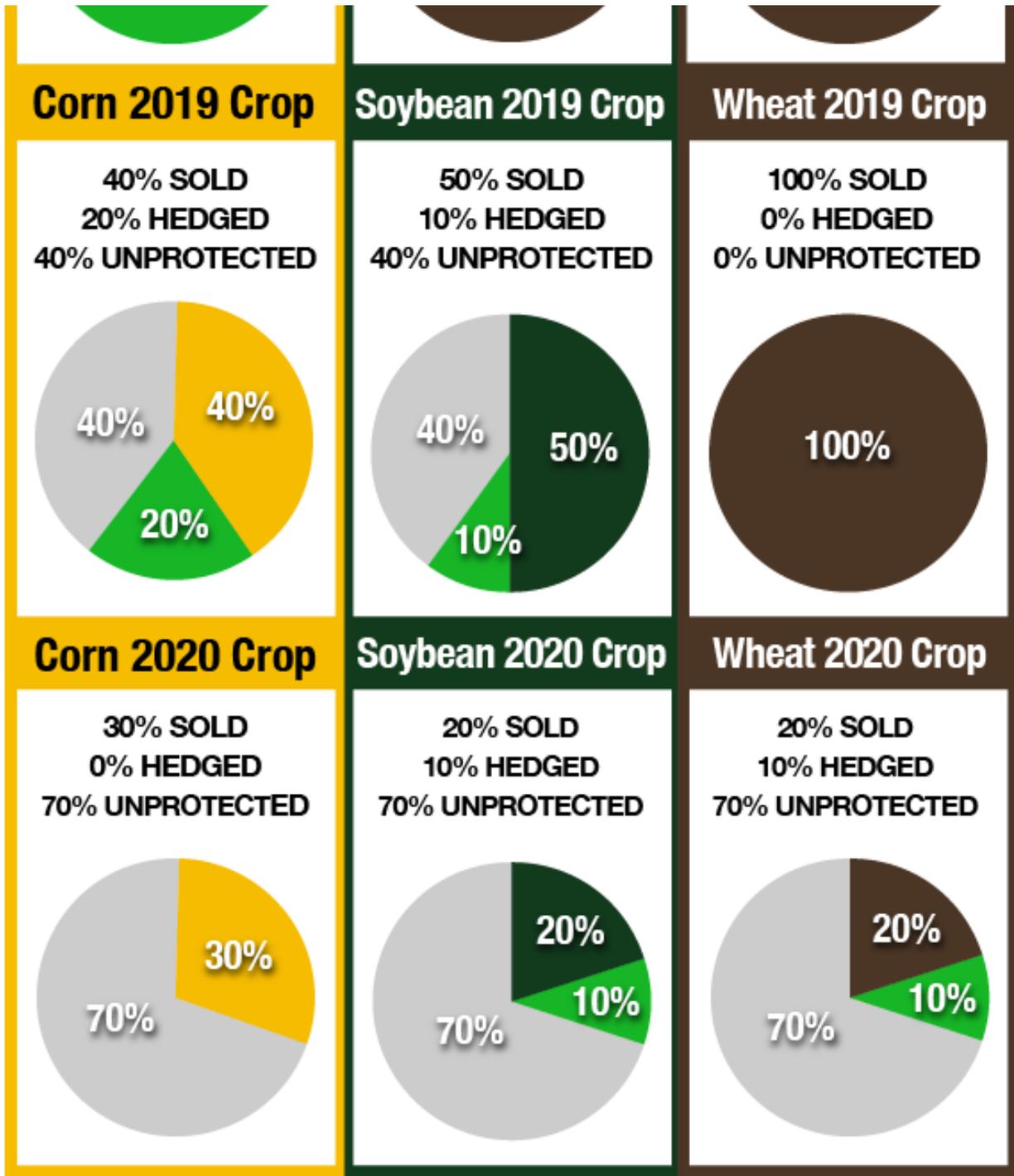
A 1969 black Fender Stratocaster, owned by legendary Pink Floyd guitarist David Gilmour, called "The Black Strat," sold last year at auction for \$3.975 million to media mogul and Indianapolis Colts owner Jim Isray. "The Black Strat" is as valuable as it is due to the recordings Gilmour used it on, including the albums The Dark Side of the Moon, Wish You Were Here, Animals, and The Wall.

**ANSWER to riddle:** A map.

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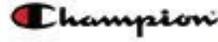
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