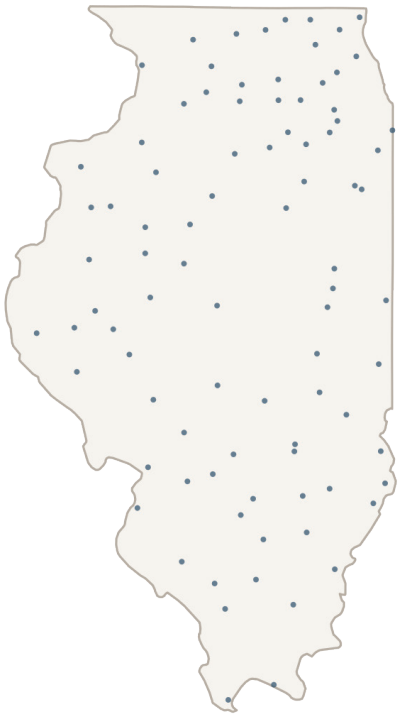
ILLINOIS

According to the 2020 Illinois Aviation Economic Impact Analysis, airports in Illinois contribute over $95.5 billion to the state's total economic output.

Aviation by the Numbers

According to FAA data, Illinois is home to 88 public-use general aviation airports, 23,394 pilots, and 8,120 registered aircraft.



Number of Jobs

According to the 2020 Illinois Aviation Economic Impact Analysis, airports support over 492,000 jobs in Illinois and over $32.6 billion in labor income.

Economic Impact

According to the same study, airports in Illinois support $95.5 billion in total economic impact.

According to FAA data, Illinois is home to 94 repair stations, 15 FAA-approved pilot schools, 9,904 student pilots, and 4,293 flight instructors.

There are 87 fixed-base operators in the state according to the AC-U-KWIK directory.

According to the University Aviation Association, flight departments in Illinois include College of DuPage in Glen Ellyn, Institute of Aviation at Parkland College in Savoy, Kishwaukee College in Malta, Lewis and Clark Community College in Godfrey, Lewis University in Romeoville, Lincoln Land Community College in Springfield, Quincy University in Quincy, Rock Valley College in Rockford, Southern Illinois University—Carbondale in Carbondale, Southwestern Illinois College in Belleville, and Waubonsee Community College in Sugar Grove.

Illinois: Agricultural Aviation and Sustainable Fuel

Some of the most demanding flying in America happens a few feet above Illinois farm fields. Aerial application—crop dusting, in the older phrase—is general aviation doing farm work, providing speed and access, especially when fields are too wet, crops are too tall, or the available treatment window is too short for equipment on the ground. Agricultural aircraft are built for an unusually demanding operating cycle, frequently making dozens of takeoffs and landings in a day from small airports and rural landing strips. Under one industry comparison based on a twelve-hour spraying day, an agricultural aircraft can treat roughly 1,800 acres, compared with about 450 acres for a ground rig, while avoiding damage caused by driving through the crop.

The crops those aircraft protect could also help supply aviation's next generation of fuel. Illinois is one of the country's leading producers of soybeans, corn, and ethanol, giving it a substantial feedstock and production base for sustainable aviation fuel. Through the alcohol-to-jet process, ethanol can be converted into a drop-in aviation fuel compatible with existing aircraft and fueling infrastructure. The lifecycle emissions benefit depends on feedstocks and production, but using SAF can reduce carbon emissions by as much as 80 percent compared to petroleum jet fuel.



Illinois was among the first states to establish a purchase credit specifically for sustainable aviation fuel, providing $1.50 per gallon for qualifying SAF sold to or used by an air carrier in the state. To qualify, the fuel must achieve at least a 50 percent lifecycle greenhouse-gas reduction. Private investment has begun to follow. Crysalis Biosciences is developing a $239.5 million project at a former ethanol facility in Sauget, and Avina Clean Hydrogen has announced an $820 million southwest Illinois facility designed to produce as much as 120 million gallons of SAF annually.

Behind both ends of that chain sits Illinois research and testing. Argonne National Laboratory developed the GREET model used to evaluate the lifecycle energy use and emissions of transportation fuels. The University of Illinois operates a Center for Sustainable Aviation, while Southern Illinois University Edwardsville hosts the National Corn-to-Ethanol Research Center, a pilot-scale facility supporting the development and commercialization of biofuels and other biotechnologies. In Sugar Grove, Falex Corporation manufactures instruments used to test the physical and performance characteristics of fuels and lubricants, including equipment for evaluating jet-fuel stability.

Clayton Stambaugh, Deputy Director of Aeronautics for the Illinois Department of Transportation, said "Illinois's multimodal transportation infrastructure, robust aviation industry, leading science and research organizations, and top U.S. feedstock production are fertile grounds at the forefront of sustainable aviation fuel. Illinois is poised to grow and move such fuel for the nation and the world."