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More than 1 million acres of U.S. cropland ravaged by floods

CHICAGO/COLUMBUS, Neb. (Reuters) - At least 1 million acres (405,000 hectares) of U.S. farmland were flooded after the "bomb cyclone" storm left wide swaths of nine major grain producing states under water this month, satellite data analyzed by Gro Intelligence for Reuters showed. Farms from the Dakotas to Missouri and beyond have been under water for a week or more, possibly impeding planting and damaging soil. The floods, which came just weeks before planting season starts in the Midwest, will likely reduce corn, wheat and soy production this year.

"There's thousands of acres that won't be able to be planted," Ryan Sonderup, 36, of Fullerton, Nebraska, who has been farming for 18 years, said in a recent interview.

"If we had straight sunshine now until May and June, maybe it can be done, but I don't see how that soil gets back with expected rainfall."

Spring floods could yet impact an even bigger area of cropland. The U.S. government's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has warned of what could be an "unprecedented flood season" as it forecasts heavy spring rains. Rivers may swell further as a deep snow pack in northern growing areas melts.

The bomb cyclone of mid-March was the latest blow to farmers suffering from years of falling income and lower exports because of the U.S.-China trade war.

Fields are strewn with everything from silt and sand to tires and some may not even be farmed this year. The water has also destroyed billions of dollars of old crops that were in storage, as well as damaging roads and railways.

Justin Mensik, a fifth-generation farmer of corn and soybeans in Morse Bluff, Nebraska, said rebuilding roads was the first priority. Then farmers would need to bring in fertilizer trucks and then test soil before seeding, Mensik said.

The flood "left a lot of silt and sand and mud in our fields, now we're not too sure if we're going to be able to get a good crop this year with all the new mud and junk that's just laying here," Mensik told Reuters.

CORN CONCERN

For farmers, "the biggest concern right now is corn planting," said Aaron Saeugling, an agriculture expert at Iowa State University who does outreach with farmers. "There is just not going to be enough time to move a lot of that debris."

To be fully covered by crop insurance, Iowa farmers must plant corn by May 31 and soybeans by June 15, as yields decline dramatically when planted any later. Deadlines vary state by state. The insurance helps ensure a minimum price farmers will receive when they book sales for their crops.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) forecast on Friday farmers would increase corn plantings by 4.1 percent from last year, but the estimate did not account for the flooding.

Nearly 1.1 million acres of cropland and more than 84,000 acres of pastureland in the U.S. Midwest had flood water on it for at least seven days between March 8 and March 21, according to a preliminary analysis of government and satellite data by New-York based Gro Intelligence at the request of Reuters. The extent of the flooding had previously not been made public.

The flooded acreage represents less than 1 percent of U.S. land used to grow corn, soybeans, wheat, rice, cotton, sorghum and barley. In 2018, some 240 million total acres of these crops were planted in the United States, USDA data shows.

Iowa, the top U.S. corn and No. 2 soy producing state, had the most water, covering 474,271 acres, followed by Missouri with 203,188 acres, according to Gro Intelligence. That was in line with estimates given to Reuters this week by government officials in Iowa and Missouri.



FILE PHOTO: Paddocks at Washington County Fairgrounds are shown underwater due to flooding in Arlington, Nebraska, U.S., March 21, 2019. REUTERS/Humeyra Pamuk -File Photo



The west side of downtown area is flooded from the Missouri River in Parkville Missouri

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Memorial Hermann to partner with new, non-profit generic drug company to lower costs

Memorial Hermann Health System has partnered with a new generic drug company formed to combat “artificially high” pharmaceutical prices and ease chronic drug shortages, the drug company announced Monday.

Utah-based Civica Rx launched its generic drug initiative a year ago with strong Houston roots. The idea behind the venture is to allow hospital systems to “create their own priorities” in needed medications.

Such generic versions of the medications remain difficult to obtain because of price or availability or both, Heather Wall, chief commercial officer for Civica Rx, said in an interview on Monday.

“We’re tackling the drugs that we’ve seen significant price increases over the past few years,” she said.

Price hikes, often dramatic, can come from a lack of competition, especially among drugs that have fallen out of mass production. But Wall said that just because a drug is elusive does not mean it is not needed.

Typically there are about 200 drugs on shortage lists any given year.

When there is not enough of a certain drug in the supply chain, it can drive up the price to “artificially high” levels, which in turn forces providers and, ultimately, patients to pay more, Wall said.

Memorial Hermann is one of 12 health systems across the country to enter partnerships with Civica Rx. The Houston-based system will be considered a founding member of what is predicted to be a growing network of hospitals nationwide, Wall said.

There are 750 U.S. hospitals now participating, the company said.

“Creating a consistent and stable supply of generic drugs not only ensures that we can continue delivering on our promise to always provide safe, high-quality care tailored to our patients’ needs, but it also allows us to tackle the dramatic increases in U.S. health care costs that affect everyone. Our industry is consistently experiencing pharmaceutical shortages for commonly used drugs. These shortages result in health care organizations having to pay inflated pricing to secure appropriate supplies to adequately care for patients — pricing that ultimately gets passed along to the consumer,” Chuck Stokes, CEO of Memorial

Hermann Health System, said Monday in a statement.

Civica Rx will make generic versions of targeted drugs directly or subcontract the process, the company said. Currently it is scheduled to make 14 hospital-administered drugs by midyear, Wall said. The names of those drugs were not disclosed.

RELATED: Drugmakers may have to post prices in TV ads

The company was formed last January under the guidance of seven major hospital systems and three philanthropies to establish a framework and business model.

Among the philanthropies are the Houston-based Laura and John Arnold Foundation, which gave \$1 million in seed money as well as access to \$9 million more in loans, Wall said.

“The early success of Civica Rx gives you a sense of how much frustration there was within hospital systems in regards to accessing a steady and affordable supply of generic medications,” said Dr. Mark Miller, vice president of health care for the Laura and John Arnold Foundation, in an email sent Monday. He called the burgeoning venture a “step in the right direction.”

Also part of the original governing body are HCA Healthcare, which operates 15 hospitals in the Houston area, and Catholic Health Initiatives, which includes the St. Luke’s health network in the region.

Memorial Hermann will now join them.



RELATED: Is bigger better? Memorial Hermann and Baylor Scott & White merger raises questions

In October, Memorial Hermann unveiled plans to merge with the Baylor Scott & White health network to form the largest nonprofit health care system in Texas and one of the largest in the nation. Wall said Monday it was not clear if the Baylor Scott & White system would also join with Civica Rx.

The collaboration between hospital and drug maker is part of a larger trend of unusual health care couplings to create access outside the usual boundaries. Take for instance,

the plan announced last year that three business giants, Amazon, Berkshire Hathaway and JPMorgan Chase, would form an independent health care company for their U.S. employees.

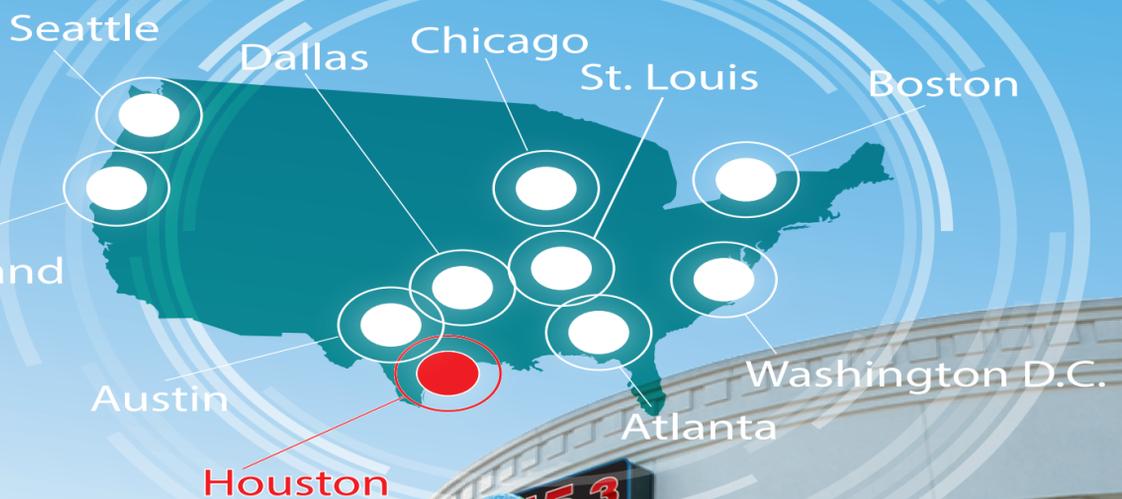
More recently, the CVS drugstore chain received approval to buy Aetna, the nation’s third-largest health insurance company, in a \$69 billion deal that many say could transform the way millions of people get basic medical care.



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Editor's Choice



Democratic 2020 U.S. presidential candidate Beto O'Rourke poses for a picture with supporters during a kickoff rally on the streets of El Paso



A photographer takes pictures of the decor ahead of the Bal de la Rose in Monaco, March 30, 2019. Sebastien Nogier/Pool via REUTERS



Pope Francis waves as he leaves after visiting Caritas headquarters in Rabat, Morocco, March 30, 2019. REUTERS/Remo Casilli



Katie Melua arrives for the annual German film and television awards 'Golden Camera' ('Die Goldene Kamera') of German TV magazine 'HoerZu' in Berlin, Germany, March 30, 2019. REUTERS/Axel Schmidt



Tottenham Hotspur Stadium Test Event - Tottenham Hotspur Legends v Inter Forever



FILE PHOTO: An Airbus A400M aircraft flies during a display on the first day of the 52nd Paris Air Show at Le Bourget airport near Paris



Lang Lang arrives for the annual German film and television awards 'Golden Camera' ('Die Goldene Kamera') of German TV magazine 'HoerZu' in Berlin, Germany, March 30, 2019. REUTERS/Axel Schmidt



Soccer Football - Serie A - Juventus v Empoli - Allianz Stadium, Turin, Italy - March 30, 2019 Juventus' Federico Bernardeschi is helped to his feet by Empoli's Giovanni Di Lorenzo REUTERS/Massimo Pinca

Why High Blood Pressure Is Called A “Silent Killer”



Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

Most of the time, high blood pressure (HBP, or hypertension) has no obvious symptoms to indicate that something is wrong. The best ways to protect yourself are being aware of the risks and making changes that matter.

A few facts to be aware of:

- Many people with high blood pressure don't even know they have it. Often the signs and symptoms are misunderstood.
- High blood pressure develops slowly over time and can be related to many causes.
- High blood pressure cannot be cured. But it can be managed effectively through lifestyle changes and, when needed, medication.

Know your numbers
Know where you stand by measuring your blood pressure.

BLOOD PRESSURE CATEGORY	Normal (mm Hg)	High (mm Hg)	Healthy (mm Hg)
NORMAL	LESS THAN 120	and	LESS THAN 80
ELEVATED	120-130	and	LESS THAN 80
HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION) STAGE 1	130-139	or	80-89
HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION) STAGE 2	140 OR HIGHER	or	90 OR HIGHER
HYPERTENSIVE CRISIS	HIGHER THAN 180	and/or	HIGHER THAN 120

Recognize your risks

Be aware of your risk factors – the physical and lifestyle attributes that can make you more likely to develop high blood pressure.

Awareness of your risks can help you identify positive changes that you can make. Do all you can to avoid the serious problems that can result from your blood pressure being too high for too long. (Courtesy <https://www.heart.org>)

Related

Which foods can help lower blood sugar?

When a person has diabetes, either their body does not produce enough insulin, or it cannot use the insulin correctly, so glucose accumulates in the blood. High levels of blood glucose can cause a range of symptoms, from exhaustion to heart disease.

One way to control blood sugar is to eat a healthful diet. Generally, foods and drinks that the body absorbs slowly are best because they do not cause spikes and dips in blood sugar.

Here is a list of blood pressure lowering

foods that can help: Whole wheat bread, Fruits, Sweet potatoes and yams, Oatmeal and oat bran, Nuts, Legumes (beans) Garlic, Cold-water fish and Yogurt.

Alternative methods

The glycemic index (GI) measures the effects of specific foods on blood sugar levels. People looking to control their levels should pick foods with low or medium GI scores.

A person can also pair foods with low and high GI scores to ensure that a meal is balanced.



Cold water fish. Cod does not contain carbohydrates and may reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

Other ways to lower blood sugar levels
Eating a healthful, well-balanced diet is key. Additional strategies to help lower or manage blood sugar levels include: staying hydrated by drinking plenty of

clear liquids, exercising, regularly eating small portions more frequently, not skipping meals, managing or reducing stress, maintaining a healthy body weight or losing weight, if necessary.

People with diabetes may also need to take medications and measure their blood sugar regularly to reduce the risk of potentially dangerous symptoms and complications.

Speak with a doctor about how to incorporate a healthful diet into a diabetes care plan. (Courtesy <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com>)



Whole wheat or pumpernickel bread



Oatmeal



Vegetables for people with diabetes

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Psychedelic medicine is having a moment. Just weeks after the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved Johnson & Johnson's ketamine-like nasal spray for depression, a group of European technology investors just got together for the largest-ever private financing round for a psychedelic medicine biotech company, ATAI.

Psychedelic medicine involves research and investigations into mind-altering substances to treat mental illnesses including addiction, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. After recreational use of psychedelics became popular in the 1960s, the U.S. government classified most of them "drugs of abuse" with no real medical value. However, recent clinical studies show mounting evidence that some psychedelics can help patients with certain mental illnesses, either in combination with traditional therapies or in cases where nothing else has worked.



The illegal drugs of the '60's are going mainstream.

Now health and technology investors are paying attention.

German company ATAI Life Sciences announced on Tuesday that it has raised more than \$40 million in new financing. The round valued the company at \$240 million, according to a person familiar, making it both the biggest round and the most valuable company in the young space. (There are well established nonprofits, like MAPS in California, but relatively few for-profit ventures.) ATAI is also targeting a potential initial public offering for the end of this year, the person said, which would draw further attention.

ATAI is currently funding clinical trials for what it refers to as "formerly stigmatized compounds," including psilocybin, the active compound in psychedelic mushrooms, and arketamine, a different variant of ketamine from the one Johnson & Johnson researched, as potential treatments for depression. Its portfolio also includes a technology arm called Innoplexus, which it describes as delivering "big data and AI solutions" to big pharma and biotech



OVERVIEW

Psychedelic substances were once viewed as "drugs of abuse," but now regulators and investors are coming around to their potential therapeutic uses.

Federal regulators just approved a variant of ketamine to treat depression after years of clinical studies. And now, a group of European investors have come together to fund new targets to treat mental health disorders, including arketamine (another variant of ketamine) and psychedelic mushrooms.

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

companies, as well as its own drug development.

ATAI is also the largest investor in a start-up called Compass Pathways, which is setting itself up to be the first legal provider of psilocybin. ATAI invested alongside Peter Thiel, the iconoclastic Silicon Valley investor and Facebook board member who's increasingly dabbling in health and biotech. ATAI co-founders Lars Wilde and Florian Brand are both affiliated with Compass; a third founder, Christian Angermayer, is a

German entrepreneur and investor.



The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved Johnson & Johnson's ket-

amine-like nasal spray for depression. 'A regulatory path forward'

Biotech investors believe that psychedelic medicine will experience a revival in the wake of recent research studies as well as some early signals of support from regulators.

Last year, for example, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) gave Compass a "Breakthrough Therapy" designation for its research into psilocybin for depression, allowing legal clinical trials to start. The

FDA also expedited the approval process for esketamine, which is derived from the anesthetic ketamine, because many patients with depression don't respond to normal treatments.

Adding further legitimacy to the space, Johnson & Johnson, the pharma giant, puts years of investment into studying into the benefits and potential side effects of esketamine. Its approval by the FDA represented the first new drug for depression in decades, although the medical establishment has stressed that more research is needed to better understand the long-term use of ketamine.

"A decision (like that) by FDA is the ultimate signal for investors," said Brad Loncar, a biotech investor with Loncar Investments, who specializes in cancer and rare disease. "It shows that there's a regulatory path forward for this class of drugs, which typically causes a flood of investment in the area."



U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Others say that private investment in the space needs to be coupled with research into their social impact, as well as programs to support and guide patients.

"People are getting behind psychedelic-assisted therapies because they are desperate for real solutions that actually work, and for many, this treatment does," said Liana Gillooly, a development officer at MAPS, a non-profit investigating the therapeutic uses of psychedelics, with an early focus on MDMA as a potential treatment for PTSD. But Gillooly said that funding needs to be set aside for "safe contexts" for these treatments to be administered, and not just for-profit drug development.

ATAI's funding, which totals \$43 million, comes from Michael Auerbach's New York-based Subversive Capital, but also includes investors ranging from Apeiron Investment Group, which is Angermayer's family office; Bail Capital, a private equity firm; and Efreem Kamen, founder of the health care fund Pura Vida Investments. Prior investors include billionaire investor Mike Novogratz and the Icelandic businessman Thor Bjorgolfsson. (Courtesy <https://www.cnbc.com>)

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