

June 29, 2021

RE: Support for Balderson-Craig Amendment # 244

TO MEMBERS OF THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

The undersigned organizations are writing in strong support of the Balderson-Craig Amendment # 244 to the “INVEST in America Act” (H.R. 3684), which would help modernize the Farm-Related Restricted Commercial Driver’s License (CDL) or more commonly referred to as the “Seasonal Ag CDL” program. This has been an essential seasonal program for farm-related service industries since 1992. Our industries have a very strong transportation safety record and it has not been diminished since these federal regulations have been in place. The Seasonal Ag CDL program has helped promote economic growth for America’s agricultural industries serving the essential needs of farmers during the busy planting and harvesting seasons. Due to challenging weather events as well as the increase in crop production diversification over the past several decades it is necessary to modernize the federal regulations that provide a framework for these states administered programs. The temporary shutdown of the state Department of Motor Vehicles offices throughout the nation during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic also caused major disruptions for farm-related service industries and their rural communities. This critical seasonal CDL program is currently authorized in 24 states.

Farm-related service industries include farm retail outlets and suppliers, agrichemical businesses, custom harvesters and livestock feeders. These industries provide essential products and services to American farmers, provide well-paying jobs for their rural communities, and contribute billions to the U.S. economy. Seasonal Ag CDL drivers are hired for “just in time” delivery of agricultural products during “peak seasons” with many of these employees being retired farmers, farm workers, or college students raised on a farm with experience operating heavy agricultural equipment. Our industries cannot afford the overhead of maintaining an exclusive workforce of full-time commercial drivers due to the seasonal nature of agricultural production and transportation is incidental to the primary business purpose. To address safety concerns, only drivers with a clean driving record (i.e. no convictions for any type of motor vehicle) are eligible to receive a farm-related restricted CDL, must have held a motor vehicle license for at least one year, medically qualified, included in drug / alcohol testing program, and complete a driver qualification file. In addition, these drivers are only allowed to operate within 150 mile-radius of the place of business or the farm currently being served. In addition, no hazardous materials endorsements are allowed.

Farm-related service industries that hire these seasonal drivers have not been able to fully utilize them in certain areas of the country due to several factors. For example, the Midwest over the past several years has experienced severe inclement weather, including heavy rains. During these extended periods of rain or other inclement weather, the seasonal drivers remain idle and not able to drive to deliver product as the farmer’s soil is too wet for ground application equipment and could cause excessive soil compaction. However, even with the weather delays where the seasonal driver is idle it still counts towards the current 180-day limit.

Another issue relates to the changing agricultural production seasons due to climate variability. For example, in the state of Minnesota the weather in early April 2021 was warmer and not as wet as previous years which allowed the agricultural industry to get an earlier than usual start on spring planting. However, many farm-related service industries were not able to hire seasonal drivers because the timing overlapped with the 12-month period from last year's spring season that started later due to the weather. The state of Minnesota did not believe they had the ability to issue an emergency waiver for seasonal ag CDLs due to the 12-month period restriction and needed FMCSA authorization. Our industries believe the 12-month seasonal period needs to restart each calendar year beginning on January 1 to prevent any overlap of seasons from year to year.

The Balderson-Craig Amendment # 244 would do the following:

- Ensure the new 12-month seasons restart each calendar year on January 1 to prevent any overlap of seasons from the previous year.

Thank you for your support for America's agricultural industry, and we hope you will support the Balderson-Craig Amendment.

Sincerely,

Agribusiness Association of Iowa
AgriBusiness Association of Kentucky
Agribusiness Council of Indiana
Agricultural Council of Arkansas
Agricultural Food & Transporters Conference
Agricultural Retailers Association
American Cotton Producers
American Farm Bureau Federation
American Feed Industry Association
American Honey Producers Association
American Sheep Industry Association
American Soybean Association
Catfish Farmers of Arkansas
Cooperative Network
Equipment Dealers Association
Far West Agribusiness Association
Florida Fertilizer & Agrichemical Association
Georgia Agribusiness Council
Hawaii Aquaculture and Aquaponics Association
Illinois Fertilizer & Chemical Association
Kansas Agribusiness Retailers Association
Kansas Grain and Feed Association
Louisiana Ag Industries Association

Maine Aquaculture Association
Michigan Agri-Business Association
Minnesota Crop Production Retailers
Minnesota Grain and Feed Association
Missouri Agribusiness Association
Montana Agricultural Business Association
National Aquaculture Association
National Cattlemen's Beef Association
National Cotton Council
National Cotton Ginners' Association
National Council of Farmer Cooperatives
National Grain and Feed Association
National Oilseed Processors Association
National Onion Association
Nebraska Agri-Business Association
Nebraska Cooperative Council
Nebraska Grain and Feed Association
North American Millers' Association
North Dakota Grain Dealers Association
Northeast Agribusiness and Feed Alliance
Ohio AgriBusiness Association
Oklahoma Agribusiness Retailers Association
Pacific Northwest Grain & Feed Association
Rocky Mountain Agribusiness Association
Southern Crop Production Association
South Dakota Agri-Business Association
South Dakota Grain & Feed Association
Tennessee Agricultural Production Association
Texas Ag Industries Association
The Fertilizer Institute
United Fresh Produce Association
U.S. Custom Harvesters
United States Trout Farmers Association
US Rice Producers Association
United States Cattlemen's Association
Virginia Agribusiness Council
Wisconsin Agri-Business Association