

April 30, 2025

Honorable Members of Congress,

The U.S. agriculture industry, represented by the groups below, appreciates the opportunity to provide input as you begin the process of reauthorizing our nation's highway and surface transportation programs.

A robust transportation system is essential to agriculture and Rural America's continued prosperity and economic vitality. The next surface transportation reauthorization bill will provide Congress an opportunity to address many pressing issues that significantly impact America's agricultural industry and the rural communities where farmers, ranchers, loggers, agribusiness partners, and more call home. This includes setting the level and direction of road and bridge investment and modernizing trucking regulations to ensure both safety and flexibility. We look forward to working with you in the development of this bill and individual provisions, including those noted below.

Passing an on-time reauthorization. – The U.S. agriculture community strongly supports reauthorizing our surface transportation programs ahead of the current bill's expiration in September 2026. Ensuring continuity in transportation infrastructure funding and development is critical for maintaining and enhancing the efficiency of agricultural transportation.

Providing sufficient and sustainable funding. – American agriculture knows the importance of providing our federal road and bridge programs with sufficient funding and supports the work of Congress to meet this need. We further recognize the fiscal challenges facing our surface transportation programs, and we look forward to working with Congress and others to ensure the Highway Trust Fund is equitably and sustainably funded by all types of vehicles (gas, diesel, biodiesel, ethanol, natural gas, electric, etc.).

Supporting roads and bridges, including first- and last-mile connections. – For the agricultural industry, a strong highway network offers benefits that enhance efficiency, reduce costs, and improve connectivity between the farm and market. We are encouraged by the statements from Congressional transportation leaders that this next bill will focus investment on traditional road and bridge infrastructure.

We further encourage you to consider ways to increase investment in first- and last-mile connections. These frequently used local roads are the links between farms, agribusinesses and crop input providers, grain elevators and other key agricultural facilities and the long-distance transportation modes such as major highways, rail lines, and waterway networks. Improving these connections to and from key markets while furthering the strengths of each mode of transportation enhances the competitiveness of American agriculture.

Modernizing truck weight policies. - The current Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW) limit for Federal Interstate Highways of 80,000 lbs. on five axles was established in 1982, prior to advancements in braking technology and other truck safety features. Outdated federal weight restrictions have led to drivers bypassing interstate highways and hauling on local roads because many states have higher limits for local roads. Importantly, the low weight limit for interstate highways decreases trucking productivity significantly. For example, a GVW limit of 80,000 lbs. limits payloads to about 50,000 lbs. because empty trucks weigh approximately 30,000 lbs. If the weight limit were 91,000 lbs. the payload would be approximately 61,000 lbs., a 22 percent increase in productivity for one of America's most important industries. That would have a significant impact on economic growth for all industries reliant on transportation.

We encourage Congress to enact a GVW Limit Pilot Program, which would create a safety data collection program for 6-axle vehicles through a multi-year pilot program for states to increase truck weights on federal interstate highways up to 91,000 lbs. on six axles. Further we support legislatively establishing a 10 percent axle weight variance for dry bulk.

Addressing challenges facing agricultural trucking. - Agriculture relies on commercial drivers for timely delivery up and down the supply chain. From farm supplies that enable agricultural production on farms, to the delivery of farm products to storage and points of use, and lastly to customers. Commercial truck traffic plays a crucial role in the nation's well-being. However, the trucking industry perpetually faces a capacity shortage and higher shipping costs due partly to regulatory burdens from hours-of-service regulations and electronic logging device requirements that can limit drivers' flexibility and productivity.

- Add reforms to the Farm-Related Restricted Commercial Driver's License (CDL) program: Including online renewals and permitting the use of certain Class A commercial vehicles for eligible agribusinesses. This will streamline the licensing process and allow more flexibility in vehicle usage for agricultural purposes.
- Amend hours-of-service rules: Eliminate "planting and harvesting" seasonal provisions and authorize a pilot program for farm supply transporters operating up to a 200-air mile radius. This will provide agricultural truckers with more consistent and practical regulations that reflect the unique demands of farming.
- Direct the U.S. Department of Transportation to proceed with regulations to allow 18- to 20-year-old commercial motor vehicle (CMV) drivers to operate across state lines if data shows they drive to the same safety standards as other CMV drivers.

Livestock haulers exemption to hours of-service regulations - Livestock haulers were exempt from hours-of-service regulations for more than two years during the COVID-19 emergency declaration. These specialized haulers needed flexibility during a time of major disruptions in the animal protein supply chain, and they maintained a high level of safety while alleviating supply chain challenges. Flexibility continues to be necessary due to the demands associated with livestock care, labor challenges, driver shortages, and supply chain concerns. A full hours-of-service exemption to livestock haulers would provide the

livestock industry the flexibility to ensure animal protein is available to consumers, and livestock haulers proved for over two years they can do so safely.

Ensuring the continued viability of truck transportation. – In addition to maintaining the usability of trucking for farmers and others across the agricultural sector, the upcoming highway reauthorization provides an opportunity for Congress to take action on key policy areas that directly connect with the viability of truck transportation as a whole. The ability for trucking companies, farmers, rural families, and others to purchase the vehicles they need, be they diesel-powered heavy-duty trucks and heavy-duty pickups or gas powered passenger vehicles, is essential to agriculture and rural America. Similarly, ensuring that lawsuit abuse does not unduly restrict access to the trucking industry is necessary as freight owners such as small farmers are increasingly impacted by nuclear verdicts.

- Prevent the elimination of internal combustion engine-powered motor vehicles sales, maintaining consumer vehicle choice.
- Maintaining current motor carrier insurance requirements and holding motor carriers and freight owners harmless from excessive litigation. Jury awards exceeding \$10 million are becoming more common and unnecessarily leading to higher freight rates and insurance premiums.

Streamline infrastructure project delivery and reduce mandates. –Congress has made important and necessary improvements in simplifying and streamlining the project permitting and review processes, including the One Federal Decision process and setting goals for project reviews. However, those provisions are often underutilized by smaller rural projects because of the additional costs and mandates that come with federal funding. As stewards of the land, the agriculture sector understands the importance of considering environmental impacts, but we also know the important need to efficiently make decisions. We encourage Congress to adopt common-sense reforms to the environmental and project review process while also expanding opportunities for transportation projects in rural areas to access federal funds in a way that avoids undue requirements and costs.

Conclusion

The upcoming surface transportation reauthorization bill represents an important opportunity to address transportation challenges impacting agriculture to ensure the continued prosperity and growth of rural communities and America's agricultural industry. By supporting the recommendations outlined above, Congress can play a pivotal role in enhancing the efficiency, safety, and competitiveness of agricultural transportation. Together, we can pave the way for a resilient and adaptable transportation network that meets the needs of our agricultural sector and strengthens the nation's economy.

Thank you for your attention and consideration of these critical issues.

Sincerely,

Agricultural Retailers Association
Agriculture Transportation Coalition. AgTC
American Beekeeping Federation
American Cotton Shippers Association
American Farm Bureau Federation
American Feed Industry Association
AmericanHort
American Livestock Markets & Dealers Association
American Sheep Industry Association
American Soybean Association
American Sugar Alliance
Consumer Brands Association
Corn Refiners Association
Forest Resources Association
Fresh Produce Association of the Americas
Hardwood Federation
International Fresh Produce Association
Livestock Marketing Association
Meat Institute
National Aquaculture Association
National Association of Wheat Growers
National Cattlemen's Beef Association
National Corn Growers Association
National Cotton Council
National Council of Farmer Cooperatives
National Grain and Feed Association
National Grange
National Milk Producers Federation
National Potato Council
National Sorghum Producers
North American Millers' Association
North American Renderers Association
Pet Food Institute
Soy Transportation Coalition
Specialty Soya and Grains Alliance
The Fertilizer Institute
USA Rice
U.S. Meat Export Federation
U.S. Peanut Federation