

May 3, 2013

**To: Members of the United States Senate**

The undersigned national organizations whose members represent the vast majority of the agricultural production; farm input and supply; meat and poultry; grain handler, processor and exporter; and other agribusiness sectors urge you to support expeditious passage of S. 601, the Water Resources Development Act of 2013 (WRDA).

Enactment of a new WRDA bill is overdue, and we commend the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee for unanimously approving the bill in April in a true bipartisan effort. Among other things, S. 601 would mandate important reforms and efficiencies to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Civil Works programs and policies.

America's inland waterways and ports long have provided U.S. farmers, ranchers and agribusinesses with a strong comparative advantage, enhancing our ability to efficiently and competitively serve domestic and global markets, as well as to secure essential crop inputs for production of grains, oilseeds and other agricultural commodities. By far the lowest cost and most environmentally sustainable transportation mode, inland waterway transportation costs are two to three times less than other modes, translating into an annual savings of \$7 billion. Further, the Upper Mississippi and Illinois River System typically accounts for 60 percent of the volume of U.S. grain and oilseed exports. These exports and other navigation activity support more than 400,000 jobs. Meanwhile, more than 95 percent of U.S. agricultural exports and imports transit through U.S. harbors.

However, the inland waterways system now risks becoming a potential detriment rather than a comparative strength. A staggering 57 percent of the locks on the Upper Mississippi and Illinois River System were built in the 1930s with a projected 50-year lifespan, and are in desperate need of modernization and expansion. Of those, 26 percent are more than 70 years old. The 2013 infrastructure report card issued by the American Society of Civil Engineers gave the inland waterways a D- grade.

Improving the inland waterway and port infrastructure also would contribute to the need to enhance U.S. transportation capacity, relieve growing congestion on U.S. highways and foster a more competitive U.S. transportation system by disciplining rates of other modes.

While enactment of S. 601 represents an important step, we urge the addition of two key provisions during Senate floor consideration. First, we recommend that the remaining costs for completing the Olmsted lock and dam on the Ohio River be financed through federal funds. Second, we urge that the Senate adopt the increase in the barge diesel fuel user fee – an increase supported by both barge carriers and their customers, including agricultural shippers – to provide the financial wherewithal to actually initiate and complete lock projects that would be authorized by S. 601. Both of these provisions are essential to the rehabilitation and maintenance of the inland waterways system.

The time to act is now, and we hope we can count on you to support speedy enactment of S. 601 and the adoption of the two aforementioned additional provisions. Doing so will put America's inland waterways and port infrastructure on a solid and sustainable foundation to contribute to U.S. economic growth, jobs and global competitiveness for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Agricultural Retailers Association  
American Farm Bureau Federation  
American Feed Industry Association  
American Soybean Association  
Corn Refiners Association  
National Association of Wheat Growers  
National Barley Growers Association  
National Chicken Council  
National Corn Growers Association  
National Cotton Council  
National Council of Farmer Cooperatives  
National Farmers Union  
National Grain and Feed Association  
National Oilseed Processors Association  
National Sunflower Association  
National Turkey Federation  
North American Export Grain Association  
Pet Food Institute  
The Fertilizer Institute  
U.S. Canola Association  
U.S. Poultry & Egg Association