

Agriculture Hours-of-Service Exemption

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The agricultural hours-of-service (ag HOS) exemption is vital to the efficiency of American agricultural production and should be maintained through the transportation reauthorization debate scheduled for the 111th Congress.

Background

The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) exempted agricultural carriers from the hours-of-service regulations if they operated only within a 100-mile radius of their central bases of operation. The exemption only applies to agricultural commodities going from harvest to the first point of processing within a 100 mile radius of the farming operation.

The flexibility provided by this exemption is needed in the agricultural industry to “finish the job” during busy planting and harvest work periods, when seasons and weather patterns do not comply with normal work schedules. Elimination of this exemption would not only increase agricultural operating costs and reduce transportation efficiency, but it may also create safety issues during harvest and planting seasons if producers are required to hire more temporary and possibly less-experienced drivers.

Current Status

A recent study by the U.S. Department of Transportation’s (USDOT) Volpe National Transportation Systems Center found that crash rates, violations and out-of-service rates for the agricultural industry have increased since 2005. As a result, the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance (CVSA) has recently been distributing letters and other material alleging trucking safety issues in the agricultural industry and calling for a repeal of the ag HOS exemption.

The facts do not support the assertion that “data indicated an alarming trend” regarding safety issues for agricultural trucking operations. There are no known safety issues related to the ag HOS exemption. In addition, each state has the authority to modify or eliminate the exemption in the event that safety issues are identified.

The agriculture industry is dedicated to educating its members about the importance of safety, particularly during planting and harvesting. Truck safety is one very important component of these educational campaigns. NAWG has actively promoted the “Manager’s Guide to Safe Trucking During Agricultural Planting and Harvest Season” – a guidebook that educates truck drivers and their managers in the agricultural industry about the importance of safe operation during agriculture’s busy seasons and gives them active strategies that can be applied.

NAWG will continue working with USDOT and Congress to ensure both the safety of our highways and the ability of wheat producers to operate safely and efficiently.

National Association of Wheat Growers

415 Second St. NE, Suite 300, Washington DC 20002 • (202) 547-7800

www.wheatworld.org