

June 23, 2011

The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-146A, United States Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128, United States Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Harold Rogers
Chairman
House Committee on Appropriations
H-307, U.S. Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Norm Dicks
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen Inouye and Rogers and Ranking Members Cochran and Dicks:

The undersigned organizations represent agricultural producers, processors, crop input suppliers, exporters and other agricultural interests that rely on the entire Mississippi River system and share concern about the impact recent floods in the Midwest will have on the river system. To deal with the historic high water levels and the resulting damage, additional resources are urgently needed for dredging and inland waterway repairs.

A modern and efficient inland waterways transportation system is vital to maintaining U.S. agricultural competitiveness in the world market. As the U.S. system continues to face delays and closures attributable to low drafts and crumbling locks and dams, our competitors are increasing expenditures on their own transport infrastructures, thereby eroding the competitive advantage long enjoyed by the United States.

The river and its tributaries comprise more than 14,000 miles of navigable waterways—making it a natural distribution system that covers a wide stretch of the continental United States. About 413 million tons of domestic and international cargo is moved annually on the Lower Mississippi River. Louisiana ports exported about \$13.4 billion worth of agricultural products in 2009, including grain harvested in the Midwest and shipped via barge for export to world markets. Proper maintenance and modernization of that system is critical to the long term viability of U.S. agricultural exports.

The Obama Administration has set a goal of doubling exports within the next five years. To meet that goal, however, the United States needs to make wise investments in its export capacity and not restrict one of the most productive arteries of export and trade. USDA is forecasting a near-record \$127 billion of agricultural exports for 2011. Without appropriate emergency support for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers efforts impacted by the floods, U.S. export goals for 2011 will become unobtainable.

Commerce has already been slowed by the high currents that are accumulating silt on the river bottoms; river pilots continue to impose draft restrictions, one-way traffic, and daytime only hours as a result of the high current situation. The conditions even caused a tanker to run aground on June 14 at the mouth of the Mississippi River in Louisiana.

We respectfully ask that you help keep this vital artery functioning by ensuring the Corps of Engineers has the resources it needs to maintain and modernize navigation on the Mississippi River and tributary system. We look forward to working with you on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Agricultural Retailers Association

American Farm Bureau Federation

American Soybean Association

The Fertilizer Institute

National Association of State Departments of Agriculture

National Association of Wheat Growers

National Council of Farmer Cooperatives

National Oilseed Processors Association

National Barley Growers Association

National Corn Growers Association

National Grain and Feed Association

North American Equipment Dealers Association

North American Export Grain Association

Renewable Fuels Association

USA Rice Federation

CC: House Appropriations Committee; House Agriculture Committee; House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee; Senate Appropriations Committee; Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee; Senate Environment and Public Works Committee