

March 24, 2015

The Honorable John Thune
Chairman
Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee
U.S. Senate
254 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Nelson
Ranking Member
Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee
U.S. Senate
254 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member:

The undersigned agricultural producer and agribusiness organizations commend you for introducing common-sense and much-needed legislation, S. 808, that would reauthorize the federal Surface Transportation Board (STB).

The rail system in the United States has tremendous importance to the agriculture industry. Rail transportation provides a vital mode shipping agricultural products across the nation so farmers and agribusinesses can meet the demands of a growing domestic and global population. When issues arise between rail companies and shippers requiring oversight by the STB, it is imperative the STB be equipped with the proper tools to provide this oversight. The legislation you have introduced would make important contributions in this regard.

The legislation provides many common-sense reforms that will improve the STB. These reforms include the strengthening of the independence of the STB and improving how it functions (including allowing much-needed ongoing dialogue amongst board members); requiring more transparency concerning the status of STB proceedings and the nature and disposition of complaints brought before the agency; and providing for a voluntary arbitration process to resolve disputes involving unreasonable rail rates, unreasonable rail practices and rail carriers' common-carrier service obligations. We particularly commend you for including in S. 808 language expressly authorizing the STB to initiate an investigation of rail practices – except for rate complaints – on its own initiative, without having to wait for the filing of a formal complaint by a freight rail user or group of users, which can be a difficult and costly process.

This legislation represents an important and necessary step in making it possible for agricultural and other users of freight rail service to secure the meaningful, intended safeguards and protections embodied in the Staggers Rail Act of 1980. We commend you for your leadership, and look forward to continuing to work with you and the Committee in securing enactment of S. 808 in the current Congress.

Sincerely,

Agribusiness Association of Iowa
Agribusiness Council of Indiana
Agricultural Retailers Association
American Farm Bureau Federation
American Soybean Association
Corn Refiners Association
Grain and Feed Association of Illinois
Institute of Shortening and Edible Oils
Kansas Grain and Feed Association
Michigan Agri-Business Association
Michigan Bean Shippers
Minnesota Grain and Feed Association
Missouri Agribusiness Association
Montana Grain Elevators Association
National Association of Wheat Growers
National Barley Growers Association
National Corn Growers Association
National Council of Farmer Cooperatives
National Grain and Feed Association
National Oilseed Processors Association
National Pasta Association
National Sunflower Association
Nebraska Grain and Feed Association
North American Millers' Association
North Dakota Grain Dealers Association
Northeast Agribusiness and Feed Alliance
Oklahoma Grain and Feed Association
Ohio AgriBusiness Association
Rocky Mountain Agribusiness Association
South Dakota Grain & Feed Association
Texas Grain & Feed Association
The Fertilizer Institute
USA Rice Federation
US Canola Association
Wisconsin Agri-Business Association

cc: All Members of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee