

Agricultural exporters want DOT to address shipping challenges

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

Nearly 300 groups representing agricultural exporters, farmers and ranchers are appealing to the U.S. Department of Transportation to intervene in “predatory and unreasonable” practices by ocean carriers.

In a letter to U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg, the groups said carriers are declining to ship U.S. agricultural commodity exports from U.S. ports and imposing hundreds of millions of dollars in punitive charges already determined to be unreasonable by the Federal Maritime Commission.

“The burden on hardworking exporters, manufacturers, farmers, ranchers and our rural communities is overwhelming. We urge the Department of Transportation to utilize all existing authorities to remedy the challenges experienced by U.S. agricultural exporters,” they said.

The groups said the ocean shipping industry, which once had dozens of carriers, has consolidated over the last three decades. A result of that consolidation is complete reliance on less than a dozen foreign carriers to deliver U.S. agricul-



Associated Press File

Terminal 18 at the Port of Seattle. A group of nearly 300 groups representing ag exporters, farmers and ranchers are asking the Department of Transportation to intervene in the practices of ocean carriers.

tural products overseas.

“The tenuous nature of this arrangement is evident as VOCCs (vessel-operating common carriers) are delivering massive volumes of imported shipments to U.S. ports and then electing to leave

without refilling empty containers with American goods and products.

The lucrative freight rates paid by the import cargo, combined with congestion and delay at ports on the West and East Coasts are leading VOCCs to immediately return empty containers to their overseas ports of origin, they said.

“The situation is exacerbated by carriers’ failure to provide accurate notice to our exporters of arrival/departure and cargo loading times, and then imposing draconian financial penalties on the exporters for ‘missing’ those loading windows — a practice that the FMC has found to be unreasonable,” they said.

Foreign markets are critical to American farmers and ranchers with more than 20% of agricultural production going abroad. It is cost prohibitive for producers to rework the supply chain and find alternative means of fulfilling their overseas contracts, they said.

“This impossibility coupled with significant pricing increases explains estimates of nearly \$1.5 billion in lost agriculture exports. These losses come on the heels of trade conflict and pandemic that have wiped away markets globally,” they said.

Idaho plans negotiated rulemaking for new hemp law

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

Idaho’s first rulemaking session on hemp production will be next month.

The Legislature and Gov. Brad Little recently authorized hemp production and research, making Idaho the last state to legalize the crop.

House Bill 126 calls for the Idaho State Department of Agriculture to submit a hemp plan to USDA by Sept. 1. The agency also must develop administrative rules through negotiations with would-be growers, processors and other stakeholders. The Legislature will have a chance to weigh in on the rules ahead of the 2022 growing season.

At least two rulemaking sessions are expected, ISDA Deputy Director Chanel Tewalt said.

Dates for meetings in June and possibly July are to be set through required public-notice procedures. When the rulemaking sessions are listed, ISDA will update its website and notify stakeholders.

Tewalt said the department already is fielding many calls and emails from interested stakeholders. They include prospective growers and processors, and “a lot of folks who have expressed interest in sharing their experience in other states.

“Rulemaking is a very open process and is open to a variety of stakeholders,” she said. “And for ag producers, it’s not uncommon for them to produce across state lines.”

Negotiated rulemaking sessions will cover topics such as how ISDA will maintain information about hemp growers and their production sites, how it



Hemp plant

will plan for inspection and disposal procedures, hemp sampling and testing, and fees, Tewalt said.

“I anticipate a strong discussion around fees, and establishing fees that are sufficient to have a program but that also are appropriate to producers,” she said.

Braden Jensen, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation deputy director of governmental affairs, said the organization “will be monitoring and participating in the negotiated rulemaking process as this goes forward....”

The Farm Bureau wants to make sure the rules align with House Bill 126 and the expectation of the Legislature, he said.

He said the number of farmers and processors planning to get involved with hemp in Idaho is not yet known, partly because “a lot of people would like to understand the rules framework and expectations before they even would commit.”

Any state rule that is more stringent than the federal rule must be specified as such.

To be notified of the upcoming virtual meetings email rulesinfo@isda.idaho.gov.

Some Idaho groundwater users may see curtailments

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

Some groundwater users in the Eastern Snake River Plain may see curtailments this irrigation season due to lower runoff.

Idaho Department of Water Resources Director Gary Spackman on April 30 issued an order predicting 40,500-acre-foot shortfall to senior surface water rights in the Eastern Snake Plain for the 2021 irrigation season.

The department will issue a subsequent order identifying which junior groundwater users are subject to curtailment.

Idaho has prioritized replenishing the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer for more than a decade. Some recovery has occurred due to state-sponsored and private



Capital Press File

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recharge, and by groundwater users reducing demand. But senior right holders often still experience shortfalls because the aquifer needs further replenishment.

Spackman at the start of each season issues an order determining any shortfall to senior surface water right holders and obligations of junior groundwater pump-

ers to curtail usage or mitigate for depletions. The order reflects snowpack, runoff, reservoir carry-over storage and aquifer condition.



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