

Agriculture groups support Senate shipping reform bill

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

The Ag Transportation Coalition and groups representing the U.S. meat and dairy industries are supporting a bill introduced in the U.S. Senate to ease export shipping backlogs and boost U.S. agricultural exports.

The Ocean Shipping Reform Act, S.3580, was introduced by Sens. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., and John Thune, R-S.D. The legislation would make it harder for ocean carriers to unreasonably refuse goods ready to export at ports and give the Federal Maritime Commission greater rulemaking authority to regulate harmful practices by carriers.

The coalition said the transportation crisis for U.S. agricultural products has become increasingly dire.

"The damage to our farmers and processors is getting worse, we are losing customers in foreign markets," the coalition said in a letter urging Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer and Sen-



Julie Anna Potts



Krysta Harden



Jim Mulhern

ate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell to advance the bill.

A recent survey by the coalition found, on average, 22% of U.S. agriculture foreign sales could not be completed due to ocean carrier practices. Those practices included exorbitant freight rates, declined booking requests, unreasonable freight and demurrage/detention charges and failure to communicate schedules in a timely manner.

The House recently overwhelmingly passed the Ocean Shipping Reform Act of 2021, the coalition pointed out.

"It is essential the Senate also pass legislation to allow U.S. agriculture to remain viable," it said.

National Milk Producers Federation and the U.S.

Dairy Export Council said the legislation would help alleviate delays and disruptions at U.S. ports that have been a critical part of the export supply chain challenges plaguing U.S. exporters.

"The supply chain challenges that have beset American exporters pose significant difficulties for U.S. dairy producers, causing over \$1.3 billion in export losses for our sector during the first three quarters of 2021," said Jim Mulhern, president and CEO of NMPPF.

"We are committed to working with the senators and their colleagues in Congress as legislation moves forward to ensure that a final law delivers the changes our exporters most urgently need to see, he said."

Krysta Harden, president and CEO of the U.S. Dairy Export Council, said the legislation address many of the

challenges dairy exporters have faced including securing export vessel bookings and combatting unfair detention and demurrage charges.

"When we can't export our products, we not only jeopardize our foreign customer relationships and markets, but we also lose value-added opportunities that create jobs and investment in the United States," she said.

The North American Meat Institute said the inability of shippers to deliver their products on schedule affects the reliability of American exports and decreases export values and market share.

"The problems at our ports include delays of shipments of American made goods to overseas trading partners due to the unreasonable practices of foreign-owned ocean carriers," said Julie Anna Potts, the Meat Institute's president and CEO.

"These delays are a huge cost to meat and poultry companies as their perishable products await transport," she said.

Idaho ag welcomes state income tax relief

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

BOISE — Idaho Gov. Brad Little on Feb. 4 signed House Bill 436, which reduces the top corporate and individual income tax rate from 6.5% to 6% and provides a tax rebate, moves applauded by most of the state's farmers.

"I am grateful for any income tax relief we can get," said Sid Freeman, who farms west of Caldwell. "However, I would prefer to see relief in property taxes," which are "consistent year-in, year out, whether we make money or we don't."

A lower state income tax rate "is going to put a little bit more money back into our pockets," he said. "With the exponential increase in our production costs for this coming year, we may not even notice it."

University of Idaho agricultural economist Garth Taylor said most farmers take income in a form other than a wage or salary. Their income tax liability thus varies based on factors such as the type of income earned.

Jared Asumendi, managing partner with Nampa tax and accounting firm Asumendi & Kicheloe, said if an ag producer elects to have a partnership or S-corporation pay income tax, the state corporate rate applies. If not, income flows to the shareholder or partner as an individual.

"So it's really just what they decided to do," Asumendi said. "If you pay the tax at the entity level, the benefit is that you can deduct it at the federal level."

Idaho's rate cut "puts more money in the farmer's pocket," he said. "Every percent they can save on paying tax to the state of Idaho is more money into

the operation for increased productivity and increased wages."

Food Producers of Idaho, which represents some 45 agriculture organizations, supports the legislation.

The Idaho Dairymen's Association supports it even though income tax rates often impact that industry less than many in the larger economy, said Rick Naerebout, the association's CEO.

Many dairy operations use cash accounting, he said. For example, a dairy producer could prepay an expense one year and defer income into the next, which is useful if a good year is expected to be followed by a decline.

"State and federal governments recognize the volatility in commodities and in agricultural production and have given ag producers the benefit of cash accounting," Naerebout said. "Governments recognize we have good years and bad years, and it is their way of giving ag producers a tool to try to manage that and take some of the risk out of food production."

The association supports HB 436 because of its broader implications.

"From a high level, we are always going to be supportive of reducing tax rates," Naerebout said. A lower state income tax rate "benefits employees and those who work in the dairy industry."

HB 436 consolidates individual rates into four brackets with 1%, 3%, 4.5% and 6% rates retroactive to Jan. 1. Two rates are fractionally lower. A 5.5% bracket is eliminated.

The bill's fiscal impact statement says new rates provide \$251 million in ongoing relief starting in the July 1 fiscal year, partly offset by \$94 million from the state tax relief fund.

'Plant sunscreen,' long used by apple growers, gets upgrade

By SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN
Capital Press

JUNCTION CITY, Ore. — Solbere, a natural, protective coating that apple growers have long been spraying on orchards to prevent fruit from sunburning, is getting upgraded.

Current research and development, underway in the Willamette Valley since 2018, is aimed at creating what company scientists call "Solbere 2.0" — an improved formula designed to simultaneously prevent plants from sunburning, maximize growth and increase carbon capture. The company is working toward expanding its use into other crops.

"The newer technology got a lot of science poured into it. The apple sunburn technology, that was your 1.0. This

is your 2.0 product, and we're continuing to make improvements," said George Baker, co-founder and president of Solbere.

Baker is also the owner of ORCAL, a pesticide manufacturing company, and founder of the nonprofit CO2 Solved Foundation.

Since 1999, Baker has manufactured a variety of "plant sunscreen" products made primarily from water and calcium carbonate, ground from the common white rock known as calcite.

Baker's invention was based on the ancient Greek practice of applying white calcite clay on grape vines, olives and fig trees to keep them from getting sun-scalded.

Around 2010, Baker realized the products could be fine-tuned for second-

ary benefits.

Baker partnered with Cliff Fairchild, professor emeritus in Oregon State University's Physics Department, to invent Solbere.

Their aim was to create a similar but separate product that would not only prevent sunburn but also make photosynthesis — the biological process by which plants convert light into chemical energy — more efficient.

Plants, on average, convert only 1% of the sunlight that hits them into energy for growth.

Photosynthesis takes place within a plant's chloroplasts, which contain chlorophyll. When a plant is under heat or direct sunlight, the chloroplasts move to the sides of cells to avoid sunburn, limiting photosynthesis.

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