

# Farm groups call for ag transportation bill

By Sierra Dawn McClain  
Capital Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Farm groups are pressing Congress to pass a new bill that would make transporting agricultural goods easier.

Advocates say the Haulers of Agriculture and Livestock Safety, or HAULS, Act of 2020, would help accommodate seasonal spikes in the transportation of food, fiber, live animals and other agricultural commodities.

“Ag is a unique segment of the transportation sector. It involves a lot of perishable goods, and in some cases, live animals like chickens, pigs and cattle. We need more flexibility and common-sense legislation,” Andrew Walmsley, director of congressional relations at the American Farm Bureau Federation, told the Capital Press.

The HAULS Act, if passed, would do three main things.

First, it would eliminate “planting and harvesting periods” requirements that exist under current law. Advocates say these requirements are outdated and constrict drivers under



Maegan Murray/EO Media Group File/Capital Press

Advocates say the Haulers of Agriculture and Livestock Safety, or HAULS, Act of 2020, would make transporting agricultural goods safer and easier.

the false assumption that agricultural products only need to be moved during certain times of the year.

Many states have already adopted exemptions, but some exemptions are temporary, and some states still operate under the rules. The HAULS Act would accommodate year-round transportation nationwide.

Second, the bill would build in extra time — 150 air-miles worth, typically equivalent to a few hours — for drivers. Under existing law, drivers are required to stop and rest once they’ve used up their hours, even if that means they stop just short of their destination with a load of live animals in their truck. “It doesn’t make sense.

You can’t just shut down after 15 hours and sit there for 10 hours to rest with a full load of cattle. It’s not like boxes of T-shirts or televisions,” said Walmsley.

Exemptions already exist on the front end — in other words, extra time is built in on the loading side for animals or commodities — but this bill would

build in extra time for off-loading, too.

More than 100 farm organizations support the bill.

“(The) legislation allows producers like myself to continue to keep the supply of fresh American lamb running, while ensuring the safety and welfare of our sheep and lambs during transport,”

Benny Cox, president of the American Sheep Industry Association, said in a statement.

Marty Smith, president of the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, said the bill will relieve livestock haulers and producers who have for years been “unduly burdened.”

Third, the HAULS Act would broaden the definition of an “agricultural commodity” to match modern agricultural sectors and on-farm processing standards.

The bill faces opposition from truckers’ unions and labor groups, who say workers should not have to drive additional hours when tired. Advocates respond the bill still encourages driver safety, but builds in flexibility.

Legislative experts say the bill, which was introduced by U.S. Sen. Deb Fischer, R-Neb., has bipartisan support, but has been stalled because of COVID-19, the election and other priorities.

Walmsley of the Farm Bureau said his organization will continue to advocate the bill this session — and if need be, again in January.

## BURNS

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the majority of what was cleaned out through fire a year ago. Moeller said 942 acres of pile burning was done last year, compared to just 167 acres of prescribed burning.

He said Forest Service personnel conducting the burns will move to do so if the right conditions are met but added it’s unlikely there will be much burned this year.

“The weather will not be conducive, likely, this fall to do those,” Moeller said.

Fargo explained the high number of acres listed to potentially be burned by what he termed “good fire” is partly for planning purposes.

“We want to have a lot of opportunities out there, if conditions are right, for a prescribed fire,” he said. “That would be the simple explanation for why there are so many acres on board, so that we have multiple opportunities across the landscape.”

Several groups give their input when areas to receive



Mark Moeller/U.S. Forest Service

A prescribed burn takes place in the Puderbaugh fire unit in 2018. Puderbaugh is among five fire units in Wallowa County, totaling nearly 11,500 acres, under consideration for prescribed burning this fall, though it’s unlikely all of that acreage will indeed be burned. The U.S. Forest Service also has plans for large burns in Baker and Union counties.

prescribed burns are recommended, including area fire management officers, Forest Service leadership and partners such as Oregon Smoke Management.

The Northeast Oregon District is coming off one of the best summers in recent history with just

253.5 acres burned and just more than 10 in Wallowa County, according to the Oregon Department of Forestry. That, though, doesn’t mean the prescribed burns should stop.

“The way our fuel management and prescribed fires program looks at the

resources is over the long term — over a five-, 10-, 15-, 20-year and more period,” Fargo said, “and anticipating that the vegetation will continue to grow, and in the absence of beneficial fire, (there will) be conditions that are primed for more destructive fires.”

## LOGGING

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left in a few hours.”

For several days, it was touch and go for the couple, not knowing whether the fire — which got within one mile of their property — would continue marching toward them or be redirected by winds. They stayed with family and friends for a few nights.

“I was on the phone constantly with folks from Guistina, Cascade Timber Consulting and Weyerhaeuser,” Hufford said. “And then my crew got called to help fight fires. We have eight guys counting myself and most have been with us a long time.”

Hufford said the fire set his company back 30 years in terms of equipment.

“We lost our best, newest and fastest equipment,” Hufford said. “Our yarder was a 1999 and was 70 feet tall. Now, we’re using a backup that was made in 1987 and is 50-foot tall. It’s OK as a backup, but it’s pretty old to be using every day.”

A new yarder costs about \$1.2 million, plus another \$10,000 for rigging.

Also lost was a stroker, valued at \$500,000, a shovel (excavator) valued at \$400,000 and a sky car valued at \$100,000.

“Now, we don’t have any backup equipment,” Hufford said. “We have insur-



Pete Sikora/Contributed Photo

A timber faller provided by one of Giustina Resource’s logging contractors work to remove snags from the Holiday Farm Fire east of Eugene. Many timber companies have been impacted by wildfires this year.

ance, but we are waiting to hear how that plays out. It will probably take six to eight weeks to get it figured out. This could put us out of business, but I think we will survive.”

### On the fire lines

Hufford said his crew was off work for a couple days and then they got called to help fight fires.

“Nobody knew what was going on those two days,” Hufford said.

Hufford’s crew fought the fire for seven days on property owned by Camp-

bell Global above Cougar Reservoir.

“It was so smoky,” Hufford said. “We were on the front line of the fire and at one point, we were told to get out now.”

Hufford said that Brett Graham of Sweet Home brought in a bulldozer and cut several miles of fire line. Hufford said the fire kept producing sparks or embers that were carried by the wind to start new fires. His crew worked from his 1,000-gallon fire truck.

Hufford said that in addition to the loss of equip-

ment, huge log decks were destroyed.

“Nobody thinks about that, but there were lots of logs that had already been harvested and were decked up waiting to be hauled,” Hufford said. “Lots of hours went into building those decks and they were worth a lot of money.”

Hufford said he isn’t sure if he will be paid for that loss.

“The cutters who felled the trees also don’t know if they will get paid,” Hufford said.

Hufford said he has considered “getting out of logging,” but he doesn’t know what he would do instead.

“A lot will depend on whether we will be allowed to salvage the trees,” Hufford said. “There is a two- to three-year window to do that. There’s also the long-term question of whether there will be enough seedlings to replant since there have been about seven million acres burned in California, Oregon and Washington.”

Hufford said that even when the fire is deemed out, it may be difficult to work.

“Our yarder needs strong trees or stumps to anchor to so it won’t tip over,” Hufford said. “And, for cutters and choker setters, there is no underbrush to hold rocks and stuff from sliding. This winter, rain could make things really slick since there isn’t any grass left.”

The cause of the Hol-

iday Farm Fire remains unknown, but at its peak, the fire had a 260-mile perimeter. The blaze consumed more than 500 structures. The Holiday Farm Fire was one of three major fire complexes that started on Labor Day.

The Beachie Creek Fire that began in the Opal Creek Wilderness Area and the Lionshead Fire that was blown into the Santiam Canyon from Central Oregon devastated the towns along the North Santiam River at the same time the Holiday Farm Fire was blasting Linn and Lane county.

### Freres battles back

The Freres family has operated mills and tree farms for nearly 100 years in the Lyons area. They lost 7,500 acres of timber lands, but according to company president Rob Freres, did not lose any logging equipment, although contractors working for them did.

“The owner of Skycar Logging lost three pieces

of equipment,” Freres said. “He is of retirement age and decided to not purchase new equipment, but another company lost a couple pieces of equipment, ordered new equipment while the fires were still burning and has already received them.”

The Freres family has operated businesses in the Santiam Canyon since 1922 and posted a message on the internet that they plan to begin salvage logging immediately.

“We are putting seven logging sites into company grounds this week and next,” Freres said. “We plan to stay there this year and into the next.”

Freres said there is a two-year window to salvage the burned timber. The company plans to harvest as much as it would typically harvest in a year’s time in the next few months.

It is important to harvest quickly, the company notes because the prime wood retains its quality for just a short time.



Liz Meyer/Contributed Photo

Community Kindness of Eastern Oregon is expanding its store’s physical footprint, taking over the space next to the nonprofit thrift store at 1315 Adams Ave., La Grande.

## STORE

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online. Meyer said this helps keep track of inventory, and the website will be updated frequently with new selections. Online purchases are for pickup only and must be retrieved by the next business day.

“We will sell to anyone who can pick up their purchase at our physical location the next day we are open,” he said. “Basically, we are mainly selling to

local people. We want to be sure to keep our sales as local as possible. Our items have been donated locally and we really do try to offer them back to our local community.”

The move online also will help the store gain more exposure in the community, Meyer said, which means more growth and more ways for the nonprofit to stay true to its motto: “Serving our Community through Acts of Kindness, Integrity and Love.”

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