

December 20, 2023

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Mayorkas:

On behalf of the agriculture and food input supply chain, we request the immediate opening of the El Paso and Eagle Pass international rail crossings. The closure of the rail crossings is rippling back into the U.S. supply chain and having negative impacts on the U.S. economy.

We understand Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and its more than 60,000 employees have a dual mission of safeguarding our borders and enhancing the nation's economic prosperity through trade facilitation. While we are sympathetic to the humanitarian needs on the U.S./Mexico border, the interconnectedness of the North American supply chain means the closure of rail crossings causes backups on the rail system as far north as the U.S./Canada border and hurts our economy.

Our understanding is that it is possible for CBP to operate a rail crossing with as few as five employees, and we strongly urge you to allocate CBP staff to the international rail crossings to allow products to resume flowing. The Union Pacific Railway estimates \$200 million in economic activity is lost every day the rail crossings are closed.

For agriculture, nearly two-thirds of all U.S. agricultural exports to Mexico move via rail. It was our second largest export market in 2022 with \$28.5 billion in sales, and this year exports to Mexico have been a bright spot in a relatively down year for overall U.S. agricultural exports. Unfortunately, the crossing closures are causing exports to be lost. Each day the crossings are closed we estimate almost 1 million bushels of grain exports are potentially lost along with export potential for many other agricultural products. Each additional day of closures results in rail carriers having to idle trains or reroute them in illogical ways to try and serve customers, all of which adds friction within the supply chain. We are aware of grain trains sitting at origin in at least six states that are unable to move, and we expect this number to grow. We have also heard of customers in Mexico telling U.S. suppliers they will begin to look to other countries if the U.S. cannot provide a resilient and reliable supply chain.

It must be noted that the majority of these exports will become human or animal food in Mexico. To needlessly block these shipments creates a real threat of food inflation and increased food insecurity in Mexico. Regrettably, we must inform you that Mexico's livestock and poultry industry is already running low on feed. If the crossings are not immediately reopened, Mexican livestock and poultry producers will need to begin making decisions that could include depopulating animals for humanitarian reasons.

It is hard to understand how CBP would allow this to happen to the food chain of our neighbor and one of our closest trading partners. It is our firm belief that if food insecurity in Mexico increases, the migrant crisis could actually worsen with more attempts to cross the U.S. border.

We understand there is a migrant crisis, but a supply chain and potential food security crisis in Mexico can be avoided by reopening the international crossings. We urge you to take immediate action.

Sincerely,

Associations

Agricultural Retailers Association
Agriculture Transportation Coalition – AgTC
American Chemistry Council
American Feed Industry Association
American Malting Barley Association
American Pulse Association
American Soybean Association
AmericanHort
Consumer Brands Association
Corn Refiners Association
Fresh Produce Association of the Americas
Growth Energy
International Fresh Produce Association
Leather and Hide Council of America
Meat Import Council of America
Meat Institute
Midwest Dry Bean Coalition
National Aquaculture Association.
National Association of State Departments of Agriculture
National Association of Wheat Growers
National Barley Growers Association
National Corn Growers Association
National Cotton Council
National Council of Farmers Cooperatives
National Grain and Feed Association
National Milk Producers Federation
National Oilseed Processors Association
National Pecan Federation
National Sorghum Producers
North American Export Grain Association
North American Millers' Association
North American Renderers Association
North Central Bean Dealers
Northharvest Bean Growers Association
Pet Food Institute
Renewable Fuels Association
Soy Transportation Coalition
The Fertilizer Institute
U.S. Dairy Export Council
U.S. Dry Bean Council
U.S. Meat Export Federation
US Pea and Lentil Trade Association
US Rice Producers Association
U.S. Wheat Associates
USA Dry Pea and Lentil Council
USA Rice

CC:

U.S. Customs and Border Protection

Secretary Tom Vilsack, U.S. Department of Agriculture

U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry

U.S. House Committee on Agriculture

U.S. House Committee on Appropriations

U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

U.S. House Committee on Homeland Security

U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation

U.S. House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

U.S. Senate Committee on Finance

U.S. House Committee on Ways and Means