

December 17, 2021

The Honorable Mike Connor
Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works
108 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-0108

Dear Assistant Secretary Connor:

As leaders of state departments of agriculture, we request your support in prioritizing funding for the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program (NESP) – utilizing the \$2.5 billion provided in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) for inland waterway projects.

Farmers in our states are global leaders in producing soybeans, corn, and other agricultural products. They depend upon a well-maintained multi-modal transportation system for market access and global competitiveness. The inland waterway system, including the inventory of locks and dams, is an essential link in this supply chain – capable of transporting agricultural or other freight in an economical, reliable, environmentally sustainable, and safe manner.

The NESP program was included in the December 2020 Inland and Intracoastal Waterways Twenty-Year Capital Investment Strategy (CIS) developed by the Army Corps of Engineers and the Inland Waterways User Board. The IIJA recommends that funding priority be provided to projects included in the CIS. The CIS recommends that Tiers A and B construction projects should be funded to completion, which includes Lock and Dam #25 (Tier A), LaGrange Lock and Dam (Tier A), and Lock and Dam #24 (Tier B). Nearly every bushel of soybeans, corn, or other agricultural commodities loaded onto a barge along the Mississippi River from the states of Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, and Wisconsin will need to transit Lock and Dam #24 and #25 en route to export facilities near the Gulf of Mexico. Similarly, LaGrange Lock and Dam is an essential link in the supply chain for the Illinois interior.

Many of the locks and dams throughout the upper Mississippi River region were opened over 80 years ago and provide only a single, 600 ft. X 110 ft. lock chamber. Construction at the above-mentioned locks and dams would result in a new 1,200 ft. X 110 ft. lock chamber being built adjacent to the existing 600 ft. X 110 ft. lock chamber. This would enable a typical fifteen barge tow – transporting over 800,000 bushels of soybeans or corn – to transit the lock in one single pass (a 30-45 minute process) compared to disassembling the barge tow into two sections, which results in two passes (a two hour process). In addition, a second lock will provide needed resiliency and redundancy, allowing a key link in the supply chain to remain operational if one of the lock chambers was closed.

The challenges confronting our national and global supply chain serve as a reminder that a breakdown or interruption at one critical location can have a significant impact on a range of industries and the broader economy. For the farmers in our states, a major failure at a single lock and dam would significantly inhibit their ability to meet the demand of their international customers.

Inland waterway stakeholders have demonstrated a willingness to invest their own resources to advance these important infrastructure projects. Several years ago, the navigation industry proposed and achieved a 45 percent increase in their commercial diesel user fee to provide additional investment to improving the inland waterways system. Farmer organizations, including the United Soybean Board, the Soy Transportation Coalition, the Illinois Soybean Association, the Iowa Soybean Association, the Iowa Corn Promotion Board, the Minnesota Soybean Research and Promotion Council, and the Missouri Soybean Merchandising Council recently partnered together to raise \$1 million to help underwrite the cost of pre-engineering and design expenses to encourage the NESP program to proceed. We applaud these farmer organizations for their dedication and encourage the Army Corps of Engineers to collaborate with them on this important effort.

As our nation proceeds with enacting the IJA investment plan, we request the inland waterway system, and Lock and Dam #25, LaGrange Lock and Dam, and Lock and Dam #24 be among the specific projects to receive funding. This will help position farmers in our states to remain competitive in the 21st century.

Sincerely,



Mike Naig
Iowa Secretary of Agriculture



Chris Chinn
Missouri Director of Agriculture



Thom Petersen
Minnesota Commissioner of Agriculture



Randy Romanski
Wisconsin Secretary of Agriculture



Jerry Costello
Illinois Director of Agriculture