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## **Wisconsin Farm Bureau to testify in support of river improvement plan at La Crosse hearing**

### **Upgrades needed for farm profitability and trade competitiveness**

MADISON, June 9, 2004—The Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation will testify in support of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' recommendation for Congress to fund lock and dam improvements on the Mississippi and Illinois rivers during a public hearing that will be held in La Crosse today.

"The Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation strongly supports the Army Corps of Engineers' decision to ask Congress to provide the necessary funds to make improvements to the lock and dam systems on these two rivers," said Jeff Lyon, WFBF Director of Governmental Relations.

"Farm Bureau believes the initial phase recommendation calling for seven new 1,200-foot locks and five 600-foot extensions to existing 600-foot chambers at a cost of \$2.4 billion is essential to the profitability of production agriculture in the Upper Midwest," said Lyon. "The lock systems on the Mississippi and Illinois rivers are badly in need of upgrades due to the age of the systems and because today's barges have become larger than what the current lock and dams can hold. The current locks, built in the 1930s, are too small to accommodate a typical barge tow of 15 barges. "

"The system on the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers is critical for the competitive and efficient movement of over 60 percent of our nation's grain exports," said Lyon. "With expanding trade, the inland waterway infrastructure is vitally important to competitively and reliably deliver our products to those markets."

The Farm Bureau said USDA is projecting a 50 percent increase in corn exports over the next decade on the Upper Mississippi and Illinois Rivers.

The initial rebuilding phase would affect on locks at Peoria and LaGrange on the Illinois River, and Locks 20-25 on the Mississippi River from Canton, Missouri to Winfield, Missouri (just above St. Louis). This group of locks and dams are the bottleneck areas that slow barge traffic coming down from Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota.

These improvements are critical for producers on the upper end of the two rivers who must pay higher fees to ship corn to markets down river. As more corn is being produced than what is needed to feed livestock in the Upper Midwest, it's become more important to have these two rivers in shape to move agricultural products efficiently, added Lyon.

The Farm Bureau said river transportation is also a benefit to the environment. A medium-sized tow can carry the same tonnage as 870 trucks. Water transportation is cheaper and emits up to 60 percent fewer pollutants than other forms of transportation.

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