



SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

523 East Capitol Avenue

Pierre, SD 57501

Phone: 605-773-5425 / Fax: 605-773-5926

<http://sdda.sd.gov>

October 20, 2015

Senator John Thune

Chairman

Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation

560 Dirksen Senate Office Building

Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Thune,

Thank you for your continued advocacy on behalf of South Dakota agriculture. As you know, our agriculture industry in the state is highly dependent on rail transportation to move products to markets around the world. We face a potentially disastrous situation should the December 31, 2015 deadline for implementation of Positive Train Control (PTC) not be extended in the coming weeks.

A fully functioning rail infrastructure is vital to serve South Dakota's agriculture industry. As a land locked state, South Dakota relies almost exclusively on rail and truck transportation to move commodities to national and international markets. Rail is also used to bring important inputs, like fertilizers, into the state.

In the absence of an extension of the implementation deadline for PTC, railroads will no longer be able to carry chemicals that are toxic-by-inhalation, such as anhydrous ammonia, an important fertilizer for many South Dakota crops, on lines that have not fully implemented PTC. Additionally, some railroads are interpreting current statute to read that they will not be able to legally operate on any lines without PTC technology, regardless of what the train may be carrying. Under this interpretation, railroads would be prevented from carrying non-toxic commodities, like corn or soybeans.

Without question, should the PTC deadline not be extended, South Dakota producers' access to vital inputs like fertilizer will be severely curtailed. The potential also exists that, without an extension, no agricultural products would be able to be shipped from South Dakota via rail. Losing access to important fertilizers and potentially all markets outside of the state would have significant negative consequences for South Dakota's producers, their families and the countless families that rely on them to provide food every day.

I applaud the work you have done as chairman of the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee this year – both passing legislation through the Senate that would reform the Surface Transportation Board and passing through committee a common-sense

extension of the PTC deadline with accountability metrics to ensure freight and commuter railroads will be able to comply with this incredibly complex safety requirement.

Certainly, we must do all we can to ensure that we are transporting products safely, but the current deadline for implementation of PTC has proved to be unworkable for railroads across the country and will have unprecedented impacts on the agriculture industry in South Dakota. It is imperative that Congress extend the PTC deadline in the coming weeks to avert any disruption or economic harm that would come from rail service being altered or completely shut down.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Lucas Lentsch". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lucas Lentsch
South Dakota Secretary of Agriculture