

Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

On behalf of the Illinois Farm Bureau, I'm pleased to highlight the critical role that rural regional ports play — not only in our transportation system, but in the long-term success of Illinois agriculture and the rural communities we serve.

Illinois is one of the nation's top producers and exporters of agricultural products. Each year, millions of tons of corn, soybeans, and other commodities move from our farms to domestic processors and international markets. The efficiency and competitiveness of that system depend heavily on the strength of our multimodal transportation network, and that's where our rural regional ports come in.

These ports are the critical link between farm production to the global marketplace. These facilities are essential to getting Illinois grain, livestock feed, and fertilizer where they need to go, efficiently, affordably, and reliably.

For farmers, these ports mean options and opportunities. They reduce transportation costs, ease the strain on rural roads, and provide market flexibility when river levels, rail service, or export dynamics shift. To put it simply, they strengthen the resilience of our supply chain, which is something every farm family understands the value of.

But the importance of these rural ports goes beyond logistics. They are economic engines for rural Illinois.

Investment in port facilities creates local jobs, attracts agribusiness, and supports industries that keep our small towns vibrant. Every barge that loads at a rural port helps sustain local economies, from truck drivers and grain handlers to welders, mechanics, and equipment dealers.

For the Illinois Farm Bureau, rural regional ports are strategic partners in advancing our policy goals.

We share a commitment to improving infrastructure, expanding market access, and supporting rural economic vitality. Working together, we can advocate for state and federal investments in waterways, locks and dams, intermodal facilities, and first-mile/last-mile improvements that make a real difference for our members.

There's also an environmental advantage to waterborne transportation. Barges move more product per gallon of fuel than any other mode. By shifting freight from road to river, we reduce emissions and extend the life of our rural roads and bridges — an issue that's front and center for our counties and townships.

In many ways, these partnerships reflect the best of Illinois agriculture innovation, efficiency, and collaboration.

When our farmers and our ports work together, we ensure that Illinois remains a national and global leader in agricultural exports.

Rural regional ports are more than infrastructure — they are strategic partners helping to secure

the future of Illinois agriculture.

They connect our rural communities to the world, strengthen local economies, and help every bushel produced in this state reach its highest possible value.

Together, Illinois Farm Bureau and our port partners can continue to make sure that the success of Illinois agriculture flows — from the heartland to the world.

Thank you.