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The Safe & Efficient Transportation Act: Correcting National Truck Weight Inefficiency

The Washington State potato industry produced approximately 20 percent, or 8.1 billion pounds, of the total US potato crop last year. Our potatoes feed millions of people around the globe, and thousands of jobs in Washington rely on potato planting, harvesting, packing and processing. Economists estimate the annual economic impact of Washington potato production, packing and processing at approximately \$3 billion – making potatoes one of the most important value-added agricultural commodities in the state.

Washington State Potato Growers at Productivity Disadvantage Due to Truck Weights

Approximately 21 percent, or 1.7 billion pounds, of Washington State potatoes will be packed specifically as fresh potatoes and sold in the United States and abroad. Potatoes are a perishable commodity, and therefore our members primarily utilize trucks to move products to market.

Potato growers in Washington State – and many others in the Northwest – face difficulty getting products to consumers. The Pacific Northwest states all have higher interstate weight limits, enabling our potato growers to efficiently move product by truck throughout the region. But our potatoes are shipped throughout the U.S., and other states have lower weight limits. Because of this discrepancy, Washington state potato growers must use more trucks than necessary to ship products out of the Pacific Northwest. For example, if growers ship products to California, they must utilize more trucks, fuel, and vehicle miles than they really need.

U.S. truck weight regulation must be adjusted to correct this inefficiency. The current federal weight limit and aforementioned weight discrepancies not only cost time and money; they also force our industry to use more fuel, and travel more vehicle miles, than necessary.

Washington State Potato Growers Support “Safe & Efficient Transportation Act” (H.R. 763)

We support SETA because overwhelming evidence shows that this legislation would make truck shipments nationwide safer, greener and more efficient. SETA is a carefully crafted proposal that gives states the option to selectively raise weight limits on interstates within their borders. Higher interstate weight limits already work in the Pacific Northwest, and we believe other states should have the option to adjust their own interstate limits to fit the needs of motorists and commerce.

Key Provisions of SETA:

- States would be free to set interstate weight limits of up to 97,000 pounds—but only for vehicles equipped with six axles instead of the typical five.
- The required sixth axle would maintain braking capacity and the current distribution of weight per tire without changing the size of the truck. The 97,000-pound, six-axle vehicles outlined in SETA are just as safe as trucks currently traveling on the Interstate System. The U.S. DOT¹ and Transportation Research Board² both determined that these vehicles do not lose stopping or handling capability.
- While the additional axle maintains vehicle safety performance and minimizes pavement wear, a user fee for six-axle units would fund vital bridge repair.

- SETA would effectively help address the safety, economic and environmental challenges facing our nation's freight transportation network. It would also reduce federal spending – saving \$2.4 billion in pavement restoration costs over 20 years, according to the U.S. DOT's Comprehensive Size and Weight Study.

SETA Allows Washington State Potato Growers to Make Shipments Safer, Greener and More Productive.

Washington State potato growers can ship 820 50-pound cartons of potatoes in a typical 53-foot truck weighing 80,000 pounds (the federal weight limit). Under SETA, growers could ship another 188 cartons (or 9,400 pounds) in each truck – yielding the following benefits:

- **Safer Roads / Reduced Infrastructural Impact: Cut number of trucks necessary to ship Washington State potatoes.**
Growers could consolidate freight on fewer trucks – utilizing fewer trucks to meet demand.
- **Safer Roads: Eliminate vehicle miles traveled to deliver potatoes.**
The biggest single factor in the number of truck accidents is vehicle miles traveled. By moving freight on fewer trucks, potato growers could eliminate many vehicle miles traveled each year – making highways safer.
- **Greener Shipping: Reduce fuel use and emissions associated with our products.**
SETA would make our shipments more sustainable and reduce our industry's carbon footprint.

The Washington State Potato Commission requests that you modernize U.S. truck regulations by including SETA (H.R. 763) in the Highway Reauthorization proposal. The legislation will benefit the American economy, consumers, motorists and the environment.

¹ USDOT, *Size & Weight Study*, 2000

² Transportation Research Board, *Special Report 267*, 2002