

ASA Salutes Reopening of South Louisiana Port to Maximum Draft Vessels

On Sept. 12, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the American Soybean Association (ASA) was relieved to learn that vessels up to 47 feet draft were again being permitted to navigate the Mississippi River at the port in south Louisiana. This allowed Panamax and larger sized ships, those capable of holding 55,000 tons or more of soybeans, to safely resume export activities.

"The competitiveness of U.S. soybean exports depends heavily on the economic efficiency of the Mississippi River and Panamax ships," said ASA President Bob Metz, a soybean producer from West Browns Valley, S.D. "Reopening the port to deep draft vessels is a significant development in the effort to put the Center Gulf back in business."

Half the value of the \$18 billion U.S. soybean crop is exported each year as whole soybeans, soy meal, soy oil and other value-added soy products. In 2004, the Port District of New Orleans was responsible for 15.7 million metric tons of whole soybean exports, which represented more than 62 percent of all U.S. whole soybeans exported. The Port also shipped more than 1.8 million metric tons of soybean meal, which represented nearly 45 percent of all U.S. soy meal exported.

"Soybean producers extend a special thanks to the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Coast Guard, Department of Transportation, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Agriculture and all of the local officials involved in the incident command structure who are working so closely with our industry to re-establish marine transportation in the region," Metz said.

River traffic gradually increased as it was determined vessels could safely navigate the channel. Shallow draft traffic, like barges and tow boats, and ship traffic with up to a draft depth of 39 feet, had earlier been cleared for navigation, allowing some grain elevators to resume off-loading of barges and loading of ships. But two unidentified underwater obstructions in the bar channel at the mouth of Southwest Pass of the Mississippi River had to be cleared before the Army Corps of Engineers and the Coast Guard could authorize access to vessels requiring more than 39 feet of depth.

"ASA also extend thanks to all the men and women working in the port operating the tugboats, tow boats and barges, the ships, the grain elevators and terminal loading facilities, and the utility crews that either have or will soon restore electrical service in the

area," Metz said. "We know many of you are dealing with overwhelming personal challenges and making great sacrifices

to do your jobs. We salute your patriotism and your fortitude during these trying times."

Thousands of jobs in south Louisiana and throughout the country depend on the economic activity created by the production and transportation of bulk agricultural commodities. Soybeans are the highest value U.S. agricultural export. Top soybean customers include China, Japan, the European Union, Mexico, Taiwan, Korea and Indonesia.

"The focus now is on reinstalling navigational aids that were destroyed or carried away during the hurricane," Metz said. "The Coast Guard has prioritized their work with regard to repairing aids to navigation. Soon the system of markers, buoys and lights will be restored so that unrestricted river traffic will be allowed."



ASA President Bob Metz

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