



GRAIN TRANSPORTATION REPORT

Shipper and Exporter Assistance Program
Transportation and Marketing Division
Agricultural Marketing Service
United States Department of Agriculture

September 29, 1997

Mississippi River Lock Closure Slows Grain Traffic. On August 14, 1997, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) closed the main 1,200-foot chamber at Mississippi River Locks and Dam Number 27 (Locks 27) for scheduled repairs and maintenance. Locks 27, the last lock on the Mississippi River for export grain, is one of the few Mississippi River locks equipped with an auxiliary chamber that can be used to handle traffic during the closure of the main chamber. The Locks 27 auxiliary chamber is 600 feet long. The shorter chamber has slowed traffic transiting the locks to a 3 day wait. A typical 15 barge tow on the Upper Mississippi River is approximately 1,200 feet long. For that tow to transit the auxiliary chamber, it is disassembled, or "cut", into two sections. A helper tow boat then pushes the two sections, one at a time, through the lock. The helper tow boat is necessary due to the lack of tow hauling machinery at the auxiliary chamber. After passing through the lock, the barges are reassembled. During the last six years, Locks 27 has handled an average 40 million tons of grain annually with most going to New Orleans, Louisiana, where 64 million tons of grain are exported each year. The USACE has indicated that the main chamber will re-open mid to late October, during peak corn and soybean harvest.

Texas Commission Schedules Hearings On UP Safety Procedures. The Railroad Commission of Texas has scheduled hearings for October 3, to discuss the Union Pacific Railroad's (UP) safety and service problems in the state of Texas. The UP has experienced a significant number of fatal accidents in which nine people died during a 3-month span. Rail service provided by UP, has deteriorated to shippers and receivers who are experiencing excessive delays, especially in the Houston Port area. The hearings are scheduled to be held in Fort Worth, El Paso and San Antonio.

Weekly Grain Export Inspections. USDA's Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA) reports grain inspections for the week ended September 18, 1997, totaled 75.356 million bushels, and increase of 16.5 percent from the previous year, but a decline of 4.3 percent from the preceding week. Weekly export grain inspections performed by GIPSA have surpassed those from last year for five out of the last six weeks.

BNSF Proposes Cut In Free Time. The Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) is proposing to reduce the free time allowed to load grain cars from 48 hours to 24 hours, before demurrage charges are assessed. The BNSF reported that the change was needed to expedite railcar loading during peak demand from October through March. The proposal would also eliminate weekend exemptions, which will require elevator operators to staff grain loading facilities on weekends. Shippers have voiced opposition to the proposed rule change.

River Situation. At the Melvin Price Locks and Dam during the previous 24 hours ending midnight Sunday (Sept. 28), 10 tows with 122 barges passed upbound, and 8 tows with 106 barges passed in the downbound direction. On Monday (Sept. 29), at 6:00 a.m., there were six tows waiting to go upbound, and none waiting to go downbound. Locks and Dam Number 27 continues to undergo maintenance to the main 1,200 foot lock chamber. Towing companies are currently experiencing a delay of nearly 53 hours to transit through the auxiliary lock. In addition, tows must employ their own work boat when transiting Locks Number 27. In the Columbia River Basin on Friday (Sept. 26), 6 vessels were at berth loading, while 7 waited.

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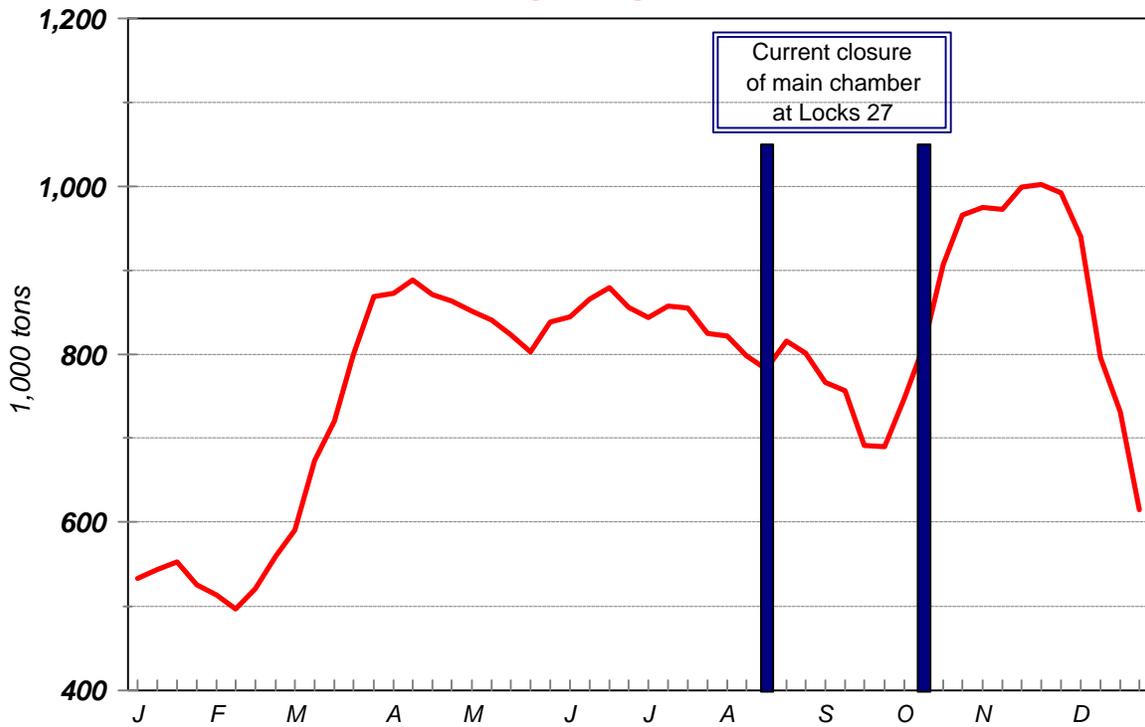
SOUTHBOUND BARGE FREIGHT RATES*

Week Ended September 19

River/Region	Contract Period	Rate**
Data not available		

* Based on Actual Trades from the Merchants Exchange of St. Louis Barge Call Session
** Rates are Quoted as a Percentage of the 1976 Tariff Benchmark

Miss. Locks 27 Weekly Grain Shipments
Moving Average, 1990-96



WEEK ENDED	1997	COMPARABLE WEEK
		1996

INSPECTIONS FOR EXPORT

1,000 Bushels

Aug 21	74,877 *	68,389
Aug 28	74,316 *	61,993
Sept 4	59,616 *	61,240
Sept 11	78,752 *	62,885
Sept 18	75,356	62,950
Calendar Year to Date	2,505,991 *	3,018,683

* Revised

RAIL CARLOADINGS

Carloads

Aug 23	22,751 *	20,413 *
Aug 30	24,817 *	23,153 *
Sept 6	18,071 *	16,879 *
Sept 13	20,539 *	18,930 *
Sept 20	21,643 *	18,781 *
Calendar Year to Date	871,117 *	887,100 *

* Revised - Soo Line Not Included

RAIL DELIVERIES TO PORT

Carloads

	North Atlantic	So. Atlantic & Gulf	Pacific Coast	North Atlantic	So. Atlantic & Gulf	Pacific Coast
Aug 20	11	3,603	2,502	4	2,710	1,663
Aug 27	2	2,585	2,734	0	2,097	1,710
Sept 3	2	2,042	3,662	9	1,975	1,242
Sept 10	26	2,675	3,266	0	2,776	1,629
Sept 17	38	2,395	2,527	1	1,547	1,890
CY to Date	1,221	83,044 *	135,353	2,609	111,494	146,570

* Revised

BARGE GRAIN MOVEMENTS

1,000 Tons

River / Lock Number	Week ending 9/20/97					Week ending 9/21/96				
	CORN	WHT.	SOY	OTHER	TOTAL	CORN	WHT.	SOY	OTHER	TOTAL
Miss./15	195	29	33	0	256	36	24	17	0	77
Miss./25	253	51	50	0	354	65	54	84	0	202
Miss./26	324	41	47	0	412	91	66	114	0	271
Miss./27	374	55	50	0	479	80	72	105	9	266
Ill./8	53	5	8	0	66	19	0	26	0	45
Ohio/52	27	36	16	23	102	45	5	6	50	106
Ark./1	0	51	1	0	52	2	21	6	0	28

Calendar year totals for Miss./27, Ohio/52 and Ark./1:

Year	Corn	Wheat	Soybeans	Other Grains	Total
1997	20,671	1,943	4,964	2,315	29,892
1996	23,815	1,855	5,224	2,923	33,817

Other grains include barley, sorghum and oats. Totals may not add due to rounding. Data source: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

MAJOR EXPORT SALES **1,000 Metric Tons*

WEEK ENDED	1997			COMPARABLE WEEK 1996		
	WHEAT	CORN	SOYBEANS	WHEAT	CORN	SOYBEANS
Aug 22	5,252	7,765	7,295	5,964	14,381	4,438
Aug 29	5,292	7,705	7,641	5,652	13,975	4,637
Sept 5	5,336	7,730	7,759	5,275	14,289	4,589
Sept 12	5,255	7,761	8,097	4,928	14,671	4,666
Sept 19	5,147	7,750	8,531	4,664	14,851	4,972

*Unshipped Balances-Current & Next Marketing Year

GULF COAST OCEAN GRAIN VESSELS

	1997			1996		
	IN PORT	LOADED 7 DAYS	DUE NEXT 10 DAYS	IN PORT	LOADED 7 DAYS	DUE NEXT 10 DAYS
Aug 28	28	52	55	26	41	45
Sept 4	33	39	55	34	38	42
Sept 11	33	46	59	28	36	49
Sept 18	35	56	64	39	32	55
Sept 25	52	48	56	40	43	50

AVERAGE GRAIN PRICES*Dollars Per Bushel*

	1997			1996		
	WHEAT	CORN ¹	SOYBEANS ²	WHEAT	CORN ¹	SOYBEANS ²
Aug 22	3.86	2.71	7.38	5.03	4.72	8.12
Aug 29	3.95	2.75	7.30	4.94	4.14	8.12
Sept 5	3.98	2.72	6.65	4.76	3.63	8.07
Sept 12	3.83	2.75	6.56	4.68	3.68	8.22
Sept 19	3.83	2.67	6.49	4.61	3.40	8.02

(Wheat-#1 HRW-ORD., Kansas City; Corn-#2 Yellow, Chicago; Soybeans-#1 Yellow, Chicago)

¹ Bought to arrive 15 days; ² Bought to arrive 30 days.**OCEAN FREIGHT RATES****Dollars/Tons - Basis Vessel Size/Ton*

U.S. Loading Port	Destination	Estimated Freight Rates	Dates of Movement
St. Lawrence	Venezuela	\$18.25 - (25M)	September
St. Lawrence	Algeria	\$17.00 - (25M)	September
Gulf	Morocco	\$11.75 - (30M)	September
Gulf	Rotterdam	\$08.40 - (33M)	September
Gulf	Japan	\$22.50 - (54M)	October
Gulf	Taiwan	\$21.85 - (54M)	September

*These ocean fixtures are based on full ship charters.