

USDA Boss Blasts Railroads for Rail Car Shortage

(KTNC)--The nation's top agriculture official is raising alarms about the looming shortage of rail cars to carry grain from Midwestern fields to market. U-S Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack says railroad officials should have anticipated the coming bumper harvest and been ready with sufficient cars for delivery.

Two of the biggest railroads, BNSF and Union Pacific, claim they're investing in more staff and equipment, but Vilsack says the moves aren't coming quickly enough as farmers are already beginning to harvest crops. Vilsack says railroads should be penalized for poor service and they shouldn't be allowed to increase their freight rates when there's a backlog and bumper crops. He says one solution includes the use of arbitration.

Domestic crude oil production is increasing and taking up a lot of space on trains. Supporters of the stalled Keystone X-L oil pipeline say if the project were greenlighted, it could carry huge quantities of crude and free up more trains to haul grain.

Legislation is being introduced in the U-S Senate to address the problem, while lawmakers from South Dakota and Minnesota are calling on the U-S-D-A to conduct an economic analysis of rail service challenges facing agricultural shippers.

Nebraska Radio Network