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Chairman Ruby and members of the House Transportation Committee,

My name is Brent Baldwin, I am a farmer and President of the Red River Valley Sugarbeet Growers Association. We represent the sugarbeet grower/owners of American Crystal Sugar Company. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in OPPOSITION of HB 1614.

American Crystal Sugar Company is not currently using any self-driving or leader/follower technology for sugarbeet hauling. However, we are exploring the opportunities. Getting qualified CDL truck drivers for the “re-haul” has become more of a challenge in recent years. Currently, we use a third-party company called Transystems to haul our sugarbeets from the piling sites to the factory. Exploring and utilizing automation could make us more efficient in the future for the “re-haul” and by potentially not needing as many drivers.

One important distinction to flag for the committee is the difference between the main harvest and the re-haul trucks. We hope this distinction may help reassure the public that we won’t be seeing beet automated farm level beet trucks any time soon. During the main harvest, growers will transport about 10-11 million tons of sugarbeets in about 10-14 days, dumping 50,000 truckloads every 24-hour period. **HOWEVER**, farmers do not have any intent on using this technology at the farm level during the main harvest. Any form of automation will strictly be used for the re-haul of sugarbeets for the foreseeable future. There are several reasons why we farmers do not intend to utilize this technology at the farm gate.

- **Cost:** Our farm trucks are “cheap horsepower” for us. They are high milage, used trucks. We invest in keeping them safe and in good working order for harvest but generally do not invest in comforts or other technology for them. They are used for beet harvest then put away for an entire year. Additionally, most beet trucks are worth about \$20,000-\$25,000, the investment of this technology is substantial per truck, and it will not make financial sense at the farm level for some time.
- **Truck personality:** Each truck on the farm has its own “personality.” Meaning even if they are the same brand, motor and transmission they will shift differently, and act differently. Our farm level trucks are far more diverse than the professional fleet of trucks that Transystems maintains.
- **On Farm/In Field Variables:** There are countless more variables at the farm level that will be very challenging for the technology to compensate for at this time. Often the fields are muddy, the township roads are narrow and each time the route out of the field and to the piler may be slightly different. These variables are substantially minimized during the “re-haul” where the route is identical each time, the trucks are always on pavement and are on much wider roads.

We support North Dakota in adopting a safe framework that is consistent throughout the United States. However, as written, we feel this bill will put handcuffs on future development of this technology. Please consider a DO NOT PASS recommendation of HB 1614.

Brent Baldwin  
St. Thomas, ND  
President – Red River Valley Sugarbeet Growers