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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Mississippi River Cities, Producers, Transporters, and Ports Urge  
U.S. Elevate Food Security as a Priority Policy Issue**

**May 19, 2022, St. Louis, Missouri** – Mayors of the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative, the Soy Transportation Coalition, and the Port of South Louisiana held a virtual press conference today to urge U.S. policymakers promote food security issues to a higher priority. Intersecting impacts from the Ukraine War, climate stress, geopolitical shifts in energy production, and global supply chain disruptions are colluding to amplify food security considerations. Joining the group to offer insight on these current issues and discuss U.S. food stability was Scott Gerlt, economist for the American Soybean Association.

“The global commodity supply chain and manufacturing economy is the largest economy on the Mississippi River influencing the competitiveness of most of our cities along the entire ten-state corridor and larger 31-state Mississippi River Basin, explained **Errick Simmons, Mayor of Greenville, MS and MRCTI Co-Chair**. “My city, in the heart of the Mississippi River Delta, faces food insecurity every day. We are here to move beyond the rhetoric and outline for our policymakers the facts on the ground and recommendations for addressing food security through 2022 and into 2023.”

“Despite many unique challenges right now in the food supply chain—including war, weather and trade policy—the U.S. is fortunate to have plentiful food production. Yet, ensuring free trade around the globe is critical for maintaining international food security,” said **Scott Gerlt, Chief Economist for the American Soybean Association**.

Economic policy is not the only consideration in understanding and addressing food security issues. Both natural and built infrastructure implicate the planet’s food web just as much, if not more than economic guidance.

“It is imperative for the United States to ensure our food delivery system is as efficient and reliable as possible – particularly during such a period of global uncertainty. American farmers have repeatedly demonstrated the ability to produce safe, healthy, and affordable food for domestic and international customers, but we need to have a transportation system that can effectively connect supply with demand. Maintaining and improving our roads, bridges, railroads, inland waterways, and ports must continue to be one of our nation’s highest priorities,” urged **Mike Steenhoek, Executive Director of the Soy Transportation Coalition**.

“My city is in the nation’s #2 agriculture state. It is imperative we keep our commodity system reliable to control inflation, stabilize the supply chain, and build resilience to prolonged and future shocks,” stated **Brad Bark, Mayor of Muscatine, IA and only city on the Mississippi River**

**with a sister city in Ukraine.** “We need to ensure the newly passed Bi-Partisan Infrastructure Package creates new investment in the conservation and ecological restoration of our inland waterway system to improve soil health and sustain production capacity into the future. We also need to ensure the 2022 Water Resources Development Act includes ecosystem restoration and built infrastructure resilience for the commodity supply chain.”

Beyond transportation and economic repercussions, the logistical capacity to protect trade is significant and has a bearing on national security.

“The Port of South Louisiana is the leading grain exporter and the second largest port by volume in the nation. The ports of the Mississippi River support a \$164 billion commodity export economy. Collectively, we continue to send product to Ukraine to bolster their food security as much as possible, but these operations impact trade at a global level and implicate American economic prosperity. Thus, the Mississippi River Corridor and its infrastructure should be considered in the Administration’s forthcoming National Security Strategy,” advised **Paul Matthews, Chief Executive Officer for the Port of South Louisiana.**

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#### **Press Conference Participants and Contacts:**

##### *Presiding:*

Hon. Errick Simmons, Mayor of Greenville, MS, MRCTI Co-Chair

Hon. Brad Bark, Mayor of Muscatine, IA

##### *Food Security and the Nation’s Economy:*

Scott Gerlt, Chief Economist, American Soybean Association

Mike Steenhoek, Executive Director, Soy Transportation Coalition

Paul Matthews, Chief Executive Officer, Port of South Louisiana

**The Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative (MRCTI)** is a coalition of 101 mayors from along the Mississippi River Corridor , which spans ten states. The Mississippi River provides drinking water to more than 20 million people and 50 cities. The river’s resources support 1.5 million jobs and nearly \$500 billion in annual revenue.

**The American Soybean Association**, The American Soybean Association represents U.S. soybean farmers on domestic and international policy issues important to the soybean industry. ASA has 26 affiliated state associations representing 30 soybean-producing states and more than 500,000 soybean farmers. More information at [soygrowers.com](http://soygrowers.com).

**Port of South Louisiana**, as America’s leading grain exporting port district, the Port of South Louisiana is the premier sea gateway for U.S. export and import traffic... Governed by a board of nine commissioners, the Port of South Louisiana, which stretches 54 miles along the Mississippi River, is one of the largest tonnage port districts in the western hemisphere.

**Soy Transportation Coalition**, is an organization established by thirteen state soybean boards, the American Soybean Association, and the United Soybean Board.

The video will be placed on the MRCTI YouTube channel [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChNL2z\\_Vhgdet2rcQor1-rg](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChNL2z_Vhgdet2rcQor1-rg)