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TRIP: Better Rural Roads Needed

Not everyone knows that AEM traces some of its roots back to 1894 as the *National Association of Agricultural Implement and Vehicle Manufacturers*, whose mission, in part, was to promote better roads in rural America so agriculture goods could get to market quickly and efficiently.

Surface transportation infrastructure is still the way commodities exiting the farm gate move to market. As part of AEM's commitment to better roads for all Americans, AEM supports [The Road Information Program \(TRIP\)](#), the Washington, DC-based nonprofit that researches and publicizes critical data on surface transportation issues.

TRIP released an important study in early September entitled "Rural Connections: Challenges and Opportunities in America's Heartland." Not surprisingly, the research shows that rural America needs infrastructure upgrades just like the rest of the country. The difference is that basic commodities – food stuffs – travel rural roads to get to market, and according to USDA, improved roads can mean better prices for farming inputs such as fertilizer and seed. Lower farming input costs could therefore translate into better food prices for consumers.

(Thirteen died, 145 were injured, and a much needed bridge had to be replaced.)

A point not fully raised in the TRIP study is worth noting: the world's population is expected to reach 9 billion by 2050, and U.S. production agriculture will have a major role to play in supplying food. That role demands modernized

transportation improvements in rural America, here are some facts from the study that could serve as talking points and content for letters to elected officials who oversee infrastructure funding:

- Rural America – "all places and people living in areas outside of urban areas with a population of 5,000 or greater." – is where most of our food is produced. Rural America has 50 million residents (17% of the total U.S. population), 83% of U.S. land, and almost all of the 2.2 million farms.
- Most agricultural products go to market on trucks, and better, wider roads make a difference. Trucks account for 91% of the "ton-miles of all fruit, vegetables, livestock, meat, poultry, and dairy products in the U.S."
- Annual U.S. agricultural value is \$2.2 trillion. Farming provides only 6% of all U.S. jobs, but 7 more jobs result from each of those in other facets of agribusiness. Better roads for the 6% mean better quality of life

Rural roadways provide "the first and last link in the supply chain from farm to market and other retail outlets."

transportation systems.

Since that initial gathering of AEM equipment manufacturer members, and their agreement that our quality of life depended in part on rural road improvements, the demands for increased productivity, efficiency, and faster delivery of goods haven't changed, although today's science and technology would be

for the rest of us.

- Poor rural road design, narrower lanes, limited shoulders, sharp curves, and other deficiencies help make the rate of fatalities on rural roads 3 times higher than all other roads. To illustrate: Lane width for arterial roads should be at least 11 feet, but in rural areas width is often 10 feet or less. And there are some wide agriculture vehicles on the roads in rural America.
- Rural roadways provide "the first and last link in the supply chain from farm to market and other retail outlets." And the quality of rural American life is "based largely on the production of energy, food and fiber, and is highly reliant on the quality of the nation's transportation system."

- In 2010, 13% of our rural bridges were structurally deficient and 10% were functionally obsolete. (Perhaps that doesn't sound like that much of a problem until we recall the Minneapolis bridge collapse on I-35W Mississippi River.

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unrecognizable to that group in 1894. For more on AEM's work to fund transportation infrastructure improvements, see the website at www.IMakeAmerica.com <<http://www.imakeamerica.com/>.

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