American Farmers Stand Behind Proposed SAFE Vehicles Rule

By Karolyn Zurn, First Vice President, American Agri-Women

In the coming weeks, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) will determine whether or not the proposed Safer Affordable Fuel-Efficient (SAFE) Vehicles Rule will be implemented.

The proposed rule stems from the current unworkable Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards. These required auto manufacturers to develop vehicles that would reach 54.5 miles per gallon by 2025, a stark increase from today’s 24.7 miles per gallon. To achieve these goals, combustion engines would have to become more compact and lighter. While working to preserve the environment is critical, the original fuel economy mandates were unrealistic for many working Americans – especially in rural regions.

As Vice President of the American Agri-Women, I felt it critical that our organization support a rule that fits the complexities of our industry. The proposed rule defends the wants and needs of consumers, keeps rural American businesses running, and protects our nation’s drivers from unnecessary accidents. Why keep unworkable standards in place of attainable ones that preserve our nation’s top performing industry?

The 2016 US Census reported that rural areas cover 97 percent of our nation’s land, with much of that domain used for agriculture. My home of North Western Minnesota focuses on corn, soybeans, sugarbeets and wheat. To transport our products, farmers like us utilize large trucks that rely on large horse power and dependable motors. Motors and systems that the current rule phases out limiting efficient and workable options. Farming isn’t easy, but the American farmer delivers more with less each and every day. Let’s find a solution that keeps it that way.

The USDA reports that agriculture, food, and related industries contributed $992 billion to the US gross domestic product (GDP) in 2015, and the output of America’s farms contributed $136.7 billion of this sum. Exporting goods also plays a large role in our
country’s global presence and value, as our farmers export over 70 percent of the volume of US production of tree nuts and cotton. However, unfortunately, our US imports are on a steady incline. If our farmers aren’t allowed the proper equipment and tools due to unworkable directives, this trend is sure to continue. Maintaining the current standard for model year 2020 standards for both government programs ensures that the American agriculture sector can continue to flourish and encourage a decline in seeking products from other countries.

While the automobile industry is making strides in innovation and development of trucks that meet both fuel efficiency standards and the needs of consumers, the price is still far out of reach for many. The Reason Foundation released a study that found that, “a consumer who drives their pickup for 12,000 miles per year (about the average according to the Department of Energy) purchasing a two-year old Ford F-150 in 2018 would have paid about $5,000 extra for a vehicle that saves them, on average, $150 per year in gas (at a gas price of $2.50/gallon).” The numbers simply don’t make sense for rural Americans and leave their options for new cars less than desirable.

Aggressive pricing and a disregard for consumer choice has led to many Americans retaining their old vehicles in lieu of purchasing newer models. Auto dealers warn that these new models will cost on average $3,000 more than their aged predecessors, making it more desirable to hold onto current vehicles that are still running (regardless of if their safety features are up to date.)

As a mother, farmer and businesswoman, my hope is that future generations are set up for success with workable, realistic efficiency standards. Rural Americans should be confident that their businesses will continue to thrive, and parents should be assured that their children are safe when they hit the road. Embracing the proposed SAFE vehicles rule is the smart choice, and one I hope to see implemented.

About the author: Karolyn Zurn serves as the First Vice President of American Agri-Women. She along with her husband Bill and two sons in Northwestern Minnesota raise corn, soybeans, sugarbeets and wheat. The Zurn’s have 5 grown children and 12 grandchildren that are all involved in production agriculture or agriculture related job.