



FREIGHT RAIL & AGRICULTURE

Key Facts

- Railroads move 1.6 million carloads of grain and 1.7 million carloads of food annually. These numbers are crucial to the agriculture industry, which relies heavily on freight rail.
- They help make America the world's top grain exporter.
- Rail is the safest, most efficient mode for transporting chemicals.

For nearly two centuries, freight rail has been vital to U.S. agriculture—connecting farms to markets and supporting every stage of the supply chain. Railroads move raw materials like phosphate and potash from mines to fertilizer processors. Then, they transport finished fertilizers to distributors, farmers, and intermodal ports for export. They also haul grain from elevators to mills and manufacturers, where it becomes food, animal feed, or ethanol. Finally, they deliver these products to markets, demonstrating the significance of the rail industry for agriculture.

Today, railroads move 1.6 million carloads of grain, 1.7 million carloads of food, and over 60,000 agricultural carloads weekly. This includes farm equipment and fertilizer. Just one railcar can carry enough wheat for 258,000 loaves of bread or corn for 37,000 chickens. This underlines how integral freight rail is for the agriculture sector.

Rail plays a critical role in national food security. It safely transports essential products like wheat, soybeans, corn, animal feed, corn syrup, frozen poultry, sugar, beer, and wine. This system keeps America's agricultural economy efficient, reliable, and globally competitive.

RAILROADS SAFELY TRANSPORT CHEMICALS.

Railroads are the [safest way to transport hazardous materials](#) and are essential for moving the chemicals that produce fertilizers. Freight rail moves large amounts of anhydrous ammonia, potassium compounds, and urea. They carry millions of tons of raw materials used to produce fertilizer each year. This includes phosphate rock, crude potash, and sulfur. One rail tank car of anhydrous ammonia carries around four tanker trucks, enough to fertilize 770 acres of corn.

AMERICA IS THE WORLD'S TOP GRAIN EXPORTER THANKS IN PART TO FREIGHT RAILROADS.

Railroads handle a significant portion of U.S. grain transportation, with 24% of domestic grain movements and 39% of grain export movements, according to USDA data. Corn, the most transported grain by rail, accounted for 51% of rail grain carloads in 2023. The efficiency of freight rail is crucial for the agriculture industry. It ensures the timely delivery of products like soybeans and wheat. The northern plains and

Midwest are the primary growing regions for these grains. They are staples in diets and critical for livestock feed and ethanol production. Railroads also transported 764,000 carloads annually of grain-related products, including corn syrup, flour, soybean oil, and meal. These are essential for various industries. To maintain this leadership in grain exports, railroads continue to invest in infrastructure and innovation. This includes high-capacity covered hoppers and shuttle trains designed for efficient bulk grain transportation.

As a result, American farmers remain globally competitive. Despite the unpredictable nature of grain production and market fluctuations, railroads consistently deliver reliable service. They connect farmers to domestic and international markets, underscoring the freight rail's vital role in the agriculture industry.

EFFICIENCY IS THE CORNERSTONE OF SUCCESSFUL GRAIN MARKETING AND TRANSPORTATION.

Railroads work hand-in-hand with freight car providers to maintain a fleet of railcars that meets the economic demands of the industry. Recent years have seen the acquisition of thousands of new high-capacity covered hoppers, designed to carry grain efficiently.

In addition, highly efficient “shuttle trains” are utilized to move large volumes of grain reliably and cost-effectively. As of early 2023, the North American railroad grain car fleet consists of approximately 273,000 cars, both owned by railroads and non-railroads, boasting a 1.4 billion cubic feet capacity. Here are just a few of the ways railroads manage the harvest season:

- **Investments:** New, high-capacity hopper cars and shuttle trains enhance reliability and efficiency for moving grain. Expanded double track and extended yard tracks further increase the capacity for railroads to transport more cars, illustrating how the agriculture industry benefits from freight rail.
- **Customer Collaboration:** Regular communication with customers, terminals, and industry experts provide railroads with insights to strategically position equipment and personnel. Mobile apps also allow shippers to order rail cars, track shipments, and get support.
- **Preparing Operations:** Railroads move hopper cars and locomotives out of storage. They beef up mechanical inspection teams ahead of the harvest season so assets are ready as demand rises.