



Discussion Topic

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A monthly resource for the Community Action Groups of Michigan Farm Bureau

QUESTIONS

1. What should be the top priority of legislation that seeks to limit greenhouse gases?
2. What can your county Farm Bureau do to be sure science, not politics, is at the core of climate change regulation and law?
3. How can policy regarding greenhouse gases be made at the Farm Bureau Annual Meeting that will be acceptable to the non-farming public? Offer at least three suggestions.

Farm Bureau needs climate change policy

We're in an information age, observers of such things tell us, but filtering all that information through common sense tends to slow the cream of truth like milk strained through a towel. Climate change, in particular, seems unclear in many people's minds. Many scientists are sure global warming will kill us all very soon, while others either strain information through the filter of long-term trends or say the planet is actually cooling.

The only thing that seems certain, according to Michigan Farm Bureau Ag Ecology Specialist Carrie Vollmer-Sanders, is that many people underestimate agriculture's efficiency, conservation and innovation when discussing the greenhouse gas controversy.

"Despite media's continuing reporting of a United Nations report that said cows produce more greenhouse gases than cars, the fact is that agriculture is not a huge contributor to greenhouse gases," she said. "Michigan Farm Bureau has monitored the Governor's Climate Action Council, and has provided facts to that group. Those facts indicate that cattle's contribution to greenhouse gases are only about one half of one percent of the total greenhouse gas produced. Also, a cow's ecological hoofprint includes one to two acres of cropland that otherwise might be growing houses or sidewalks."

Besides that, Vollmer-Sanders said, agriculture is uniquely positioned to reduce greenhouse gases, not only because of its ponds, pastures, forests, grassed waterways and no-till crop land which holds carbon dioxide and removes it from the air, but because agriculture has the land base to provide places for wind power generation and has what it takes to make ethanol, biodiesel fuel and energy from methane gas.

Another problem – just another in the long line of greenhouse gas issues in which Farm Bureau staff seeks direction – is that many of the global warming studies are not Michigan-specific.

"A lot of studies and reports make broad generalizations, but they don't always fit Michigan's situation," Vollmer-Sanders said. "The fact is that agriculture – and Michigan agriculture specifically – needs to be part of the solution to these problems. Climate change and greenhouse gas legislation is closely tied to energy legislation, and the focus on alternative energy is supported by people with vastly different motivations. But agriculture has bridged those differences and begun to do something about climate change and energy through its land stewardship, and by growing the first crops for ethanol."

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Before solutions can be worked on in the political world, though, the Farm Bureau staff needs direction from members, Vollmer-Sanders said.

“Your Farm Bureau staff has not given in to the fright of global warming, and we know if we’re not at the table, greenhouse gas policies can be made that won’t be good for farmers,” she said. “It’s important to be at the table, but we need to know what our farmer-members want from state and national policies on greenhouse gas emissions. We hope that will happen at this year’s policy-making sessions.”

While Vollmer-Sanders said she knows there are many important things to be discussed and decided at this year’s Annual Meeting, she believes climate change policy is urgent.

“Not because we believe we’re going to burn up in a hot sun or drown as oceans rise, but because there will be legislative proposals for Governor Jennifer Granholm and the next president – no matter who he is – regarding this issue. We need to be prepared to defend agriculture and offer its solutions to politicians, or we’ll find ourselves following regulations designed for industries other than ag, and those regulations usually don’t fit well into our unique needs.”