



Climate change and agriculture in the Biden administration

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Iowa farmer Nick Meier talks to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack (right) and La Porte City, IA, Mayor

Iowa farmer Nick Meier talks to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack (right) and La Porte City, IA, Mayor Buck Clark during a tour to view water quality conservation practices on Meier's farm in 2015. USDA photo by Jason Johnson.

President Biden has made clear that addressing climate change will be a cornerstone of his administration. Many of Biden's cabinet picks indicate that confronting the climate crisis will be a strategy undertaken across the entire government. One of those appointments—Tom Vilsack as agriculture secretary—highlights that the USDA will be front and center in the government-wide climate response.

President Biden has said he wants American agriculture to be the first in the world to achieve net-zero emissions of greenhouse gases. Vilsack's first goal at USDA will be to make agriculture a bigger part of the climate solution. While more and more agriculture

leaders are coming around to the idea that farmers should play a central role in curbing greenhouse gas emissions, both the administration and farm groups agree that mitigation efforts should be voluntary.

Getting farmers to buy into the idea that adopting climate-smart practices will not only help the environment, but also their bottom line is a central strategy for Secretary Vilsack. One of the most talked about ideas is creating a national carbon bank at USDA to pay farmers for sequestering carbon in the soil. At the moment, Secretary Vilsack is short on details for what the program would look like and has indicated that a carbon bank is a long-term goal for USDA.

Climate change is not only a priority for the administration. The first hearing from the House Agriculture Committee, "Climate Change and the U.S. Agriculture and Forestry Sectors," makes clear the role climate change will play for Congress as well.

Representative David Scott (GA), the new House Agriculture Committee Chairman, started the hearing by saying the issue of climate change would be key for his panel this year. Representative GT Thompson (PA), the new ranking member of the committee, agreed that the hearing, "puts agriculture at the table" with regard to addressing climate change.

The Committee requested Outside Witness Testimony for the climate change hearing, allowing outside groups to submit official comments that can be included as a part of the committee record. With the help of the three Science Policy Committees, ASA, CSSA, and SSSA submitted testimony emphasizing the critical role American agriculture and forestry can play in addressing climate change. The comments focused on carbon sequestration, expanding conservation programs, diversifying cropping systems, and investing in research and extension. Our testimony also stressed that implementing science-based policies and arming producers with new tools, new

markets, and stronger incentives will enable rural Americans view themselves as an essential partner in America's flight against climate change. Read the full testimony here: www.agronomy.org/science-policy/issues/statements.

Clearly, climate change will be an extremely important issue during the Biden administration, and ASA, CSSA, and SSSA are ready to engage. The Societies recently formed a Climate Change Task Force, with two representatives from each Society and a CCA representative. The task force has been charged with developing an updated climate change policy document. Look for future updates and opportunities to provide feedback to the task force through *News Flash* and the *Science Policy Report*.

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