



NACSAA

NORTH AMERICA CLIMATE
SMART AGRICULTURE ALLIANCE

House Special Committee on the Climate Crisis Majority Report Update
Thursday, August 6, 2020 (recorded [here](#))
1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. ET

Presenters

Ray Gaesser (*SfL*); Jeremy Peters (*NACD*); Brian Jennings (*ACE*); Pat O’Toole (*ACE*); Roger Wolf (*ISA*); Fred Yoder (*NACSAA Chair*); and Ernie Shea (*SfL*).

Welcome and Objectives

The focus of this update was to review the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis’s [majority report](#), released last month, and consider both 1) where it succeeds and where it could be improved in enabling climate solutions from agriculture; 2) the influence of SfL and NACSAA’s [enabling policies submission](#) to the Committee; and 3) how NACSAA members can continue to provide input and perspective for policy makers in the future.

NACSAA: An Invited Contributor

Ray Gaesser

Ray briefly reviewed the context of the report: the Select Committee was established at the start of this Congress with a major priority to come up with recommendations for Congressional action to help solve the climate crisis. A number of members have agriculture experience and value input from the agriculture and agricultural value chain industry; thus, NACSAA was among those invited to provide policy recommendations. NACSAA constructed its submission through an Enabling Policy Team open to any volunteers and chaired by Ray Gaesser. The team provided 50 recommendations, sorted into 10 priority workstreams, reflected in part in the report.

Assessments and Takeaways on the Special Report

Jeremy Peters

NACD (and NACSAA through NACD’s contributed suggestions) took a “back to basics” approach to encourage policies that helped farmers use climate smart practices:

- Farmers need local capacity and resources to adopt new practices that will address the challenges of a changing climate
- This requires funding and staffing for technical assistance, financial assistance, public-private partnerships and enabling programs
- The report includes a number of provisions that give specific language and conservation districts to deliver technical assistance, financial assistance and working lands programs
- On balance, the report is a good start, with the main criticism being “needs to do more”

Brian Jennings

The demand destruction brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic is a current priority for the ethanol industry, but the report is largely forward looking about the potential to position farmers and ethanol producers as climate solution providers going forward:

- One key win for biofuels was a recommendation for a new national Low Carbon Fuel Standard on top of the existing Renewable Fuel Standard
- Biofuels producers were encouraged that staff members listened to NACSAA input and recommended nuance rather than simply expanding the California LCFS nationally
- An included suggestion was to reward producers directly for climate smart production
- Future concerns will be to keep biofuel markets healthy and stand ready to continue educating policymakers as discrete policy proposals arise from the recommendations

Pat O'Toole

The relationship between water, biodiversity, and farming in the West is a distinct, complex problem that was harder for the Select Committee to fully grasp, though there is promise:

- Climate change is badly exacerbating existing water shortages and unpredictable precipitation events, straining very old, failing Western water infrastructure/storage
- If significant infrastructure bills come out of the current Congress, water infrastructure will be a badly needed piece to address, so some focus here was productive
- Effective water management requires watershed-level public-private land management – most habitat is on private lands, while federal forests help capture water in the system
- NACSAA members must help policymakers add more perspective to the report to better highlight and address the role agricultural lands can play in water management, necessary infrastructure upgrades and the need for ag water resources to increase production

Roger Wolf

NACSAA's contributions were validated by the report's recognition of its proposed enabling policies and the potential for ag to be a climate solution. Iowa Soybean's focus is on soil health:

- The report recognizes the three pillars of climate smart agriculture – sustainable intensification, resilience building, and techniques to profitably sequester carbon
- Many suggestions in the report enable carbon adaptation and new revenue streams
- Some of the more specific suggestions on soil health and other items draw on existing or introduced bills (Ag Resiliency Act, Farm Bill, etc.); parts need updating or correction
- The report should be used as background to help policy makers create policies that scale up practice adoption – ecosystems services markets are one possibility – and include more farmers and other members of the agricultural value chain in these solutions

Further Talking Points

During the Q&A, several other points of concern or promise were raised:

- Policymakers need to hear very clearly that working with nature on water and other issues is a valuable tool in the toolbox, but a focus on infrastructure/storage is necessary
- The industry needs to spotlight, build and foster farmer leadership to make these changes

- Farmers and ranchers who have already done the right thing need to be rewarded; new and existing farmers need to see potential rewards and encouragement to adopt and scale
- Continuous adaptation and improvement is needed, for both farmers and policymakers
- State/federal agents on the ground are crucial partners who also need to buy into change
- Policymakers and environmental groups still need to be educated on some of the critical pathways (such as biofuels) that allow ag to reduce carbon emissions
- All stakeholders who care about carbon drawdown and understand that perfect is the enemy of the good must come to the table (i.e. Midwest Clean Fuel Standard policy)
- Not all environmental organizations are opposed to driving demand for ag solutions
- The role of well managed livestock and grazing landscapes must be emphasized; current dairy sector efforts to showcase the climate benefits of methane digesters is an example
- Ag's positive externalities must be brought into the market to make these pathways profitable; partnerships between ag producers can help collate more tools in the toolbox
- Technology will be needed to quantify positive externalities, and this is being pursued
- NACSAA and other ag organizations must stay engaged and course correct where needed

Closing Remarks

Fred Yoder

Fred reminded the group that risk management and resources are the ingredients that allow producers capacity to build resilience. This is true for every agricultural scale and system and this truth must be reiterated at local, national and global levels. He is encouraged by the report's claim that the time is right for this effort and its acknowledgment of the need for economic viability for farmers. Agricultural practices and partnerships that improve climate, ecosystems services, and farmer livelihoods can be pragmatic, profitable and co-beneficial.

The next step for the HSCCC majority report will be its distribution among authorizing committees, after which parts may reemerge as full-fledged policy proposals. NACSAA must continue to educate and engage policymakers to make sure these are productive.

The work is not done. NACSAA is not an advocacy body, but the NACSAA partnership allows for consensus building and creating a bigger tent for agriculture industry. SfL will be reaching out to NACSAA partners for ongoing input, guidance and support in this process.

SfL and NACSAA extend their thanks to everyone who attended this webinar update.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ernie Shea (*SfL*), Facilitator
 Cara Urban (*SfL*), Recorder

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