



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **AGRICULTURE SECRETARY VILSACK DISCUSSES HOW OBAMA ADMINISTRATION IS PARTNERING WITH FARMERS AND RANCHERS TO COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE**

### *Announces Historic Agreement with Dairy Industry to Cut Greenhouse Gas Emissions*

COPENHAGEN, Denmark, Dec. 15, 2009 - U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack today spoke at the key note event, Clean Energy Investments: Creating Opportunities for Rural Economies, at the climate change talks in Copenhagen, Denmark.

"Rural economies will benefit from incentives in comprehensive energy legislation that reward production of renewable energy and sequestration of greenhouse gases," said Vilsack.

Climate change is one of the great challenges facing the United States and the world. But for our farmers, ranchers, and those who make a living off the land, the challenge presents unprecedented opportunities.

Secretary Vilsack shared how the Administration is actively partnering with rural communities to create solutions for curbing greenhouse gases and preventing the worst impacts of climate change.

At the event, farmers revealed how a viable carbon offsets market - one that rewards farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners for stewardship activities - will play a very important role in helping America reduce its dependence on oil.

On Monday, the USDA released a report outlining the impact climate change will have on America's ecosystems. The report is available at the following link:

[http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/!ut/p/\\_s.7\\_0\\_A/7\\_0\\_1OB?  
contentidonly=true&contentid=2009/12/0611.xml](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/!ut/p/_s.7_0_A/7_0_1OB?contentidonly=true&contentid=2009/12/0611.xml)

Vilsack's remarks as prepared for delivery are below:

"Yesterday, the USDA released "The Effects of Climate Change on U.S. Ecosystems," a report that identifies the effects of climate change on natural resources and ecosystems services in the U.S. over the next several decades.

"Based on a wealth of source and review literature, the report concludes that climate change is already affecting U.S. agriculture, land resources, water resources, and biodiversity, and will continue to do so. The report identifies the effects climate is having and is expected to have on natural resources and ecosystems services in the U.S. over the next several decades, including:

- Grain and oilseed crops will mature more rapidly, but increasing temperatures will increase the risk of crop failures, particularly where precipitation decreases or becomes more variable.

- Horticultural crops (such as tomato, onion, and fruit) respond to a greater degree than grains and oilseed crops to climate change due to the high sensitivity of their quality and appearance to climate factors.
- Livestock mortality will decrease with warmer winters; however this will be more than offset by greater mortality in hotter summers. Hotter temperatures will also result in reduced productivity of livestock and dairy animals, due to changes in consumption and lower pregnancy rates.
- Weeds grow more rapidly under elevated atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>, extend their range northward, and are less sensitive to herbicide applications.
- Disease and pest prevalence will escalate as a result of shorter, warmer winters, challenging crop, livestock, and forest systems.

"It is clear climate change will affect agriculture and has already begun to do so. But it is important for us to realize that agriculture has tremendous capacity to not only limit its greenhouse gas emissions but to act as a carbon sink. Through research efforts and program support we are helping producers minimize their carbon footprint every day.

"A viable carbon offsets market - one that rewards farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners for stewardship activities - has the potential to play a very important role in helping America become energy independent, and in our efforts to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

"A response to climate change also represents a significant opportunity to create wealth and revitalize communities in rural America and across the globe. Such an effort in the United States is a key component to our efforts to revitalize and rebuild rural America as offsets create income opportunities.

"Legislation passed by the House of Representatives and under consideration in the Senate will create a market for carbon offsets that can be sold by America's farmers, ranchers and landowners to businesses that are large carbon emitters.

"USDA's analysis of the legislation shows that it will be a net gain for America's producers. A USDA study found that the House climate bill would increase farm expenses by \$700 million, or 0.3 percent, from 2012-18, which would be offset by revenue from a carbon offset market, estimated by USDA at \$1 billion a year in the near term and \$15 billion in 2040.

"Markets for environmental services such as greenhouse gas offsets will reward innovation.

"Today I am lucky to be joined by two farmers who have a long track record of the sort of innovation that will lead the transition towards agricultural production that is less carbon intensive. But they are representative of the changes that many American farmers have been making for years to reduce their energy needs.

"Energy intensity-defined as energy consumption per dollar of total output-has steadily declined in America over the last 50 years due to gains in energy efficiency and increased yields. Today, American farmers use half as much energy per dollar of total output as they did in the late 1970's.

"And recently, more American farmers are taking active steps to limit their carbon footprint. According to the 2006 Agricultural Resource Management Survey, 524,000 operators-representing about a quarter of all American farmers-took some action to reduce fuel or fertilizer use in 2006. To reduce fuel use, the most common practices were to regularly service engines of their farm equipment, to reduce the number of trips over a field, and to cut back on the quantity of fertilizer applied.

"In my travels around the United States I have seen farmers who are pursuing other options. They are helping run their operations with methane capture, by burning corn stover in their grain dryers, and by using solar and wind energy.

"This event is an opportunity to hear directly from farmers who understand and practice these sorts of solutions.

"These men are out in front in their efforts to address climate change. I hope they'll share their views on emerging markets for renewable energy and greenhouse gas abatement in promoting wealth and job creation in rural communities.

"I believe that it is vital that America demonstrate in our domestic approach to climate change how agriculture and forests can produce real and lasting benefits for both landowners and the climate.

"But we must also demonstrate our commitment to addressing climate change.

"Today, the USDA and U.S. dairy farmers are announcing that we are entering into an historic agreement to help accelerate the development of manure to energy systems and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

"We know that anaerobic digesters that convert animal manure into electricity are a powerful renewable resource. One 700 head dairy herd can power 200 homes with electricity.

"Yet, currently the United States is only utilizing dairy power on 2% of the farms that serve as candidates for profitable and sustainable sources of energy.

"The U.S. Dairy industry has committed to a 25% reduction in greenhouse gas by the year 2020. USDA can support this goal through program modifications, added program enhancements, and better marketing of anaerobic digesters to dairymen. Although USDA operates programs that support anaerobic digesters, less than 150 have been funded by USDA to date.

"Today's agreement will make many far reaching steps and common sense improvements to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions associated with Dairies.

For example, we will look for ways to fund nutrient management components of a digester system with conservation funds and the electricity generation components with our renewable energy dollars.

- We will look to provide digester projects with a higher ranking in the competitive application process.
- We will work to adjust the timing of our program awards to better match construction seasons and reduce the time needed to get digester projects completed.
- We will jointly cooperate with U.S. dairies to undertake a major marketing and public outreach effort to U.S. dairy producers to ensure that they are aware of the opportunities and benefits associated with greenhouse gas reduction practices on their farm.
- We will also step up our efforts in research to develop better scientific recommendations on ways that greenhouse gas emissions associated with dairies can be reduced.

"The actions we are taking today will not only help mitigate climate change, but also provide immediate local environmental benefits, and assist in reducing America's dependence on foreign fossil fuels.

"I applaud U.S. dairyman for initiating and supporting these actions.

"Today we'll have the opportunity to see how efforts to address climate change are already creating wealth in rural communities across America; demonstrate the commitment of America's farmers and ranchers to address the issue of climate change; and have a discussion about the path forward so that agriculture is part of the climate change solution."

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