

Profitable opportunities for agriculture to reduce carbon emissions

We have recently written a couple of columns identifying issues that we believe Congress should consider like antitrust legislation that addresses the concentration farmers face on both the input and output sides of their operations and Country of Origin Labeling for beef and pork.

But Congress is not the only actor when it comes to policies that emanate from Washington DC. In the past 4 years, the President has acted in ways that have had a direct impact on US agriculture. The most significant has been the trade war with China and the subsequent loss of a major market for US farm production. To compensate farmers for the market loss and resulting decline in crop prices, the administration made several major payments to farmers.

With the election in the rearview mirror, it makes sense to us to begin looking at some of the policy directions of the incoming Biden administration that will have an impact on farmers. The most significant of these is the decision to reengage with other nations on the issue of climate change.

Most likely the first action in this direction will be to bring the US back into the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and recommit the country to reducing the emission of greenhouse gasses.

Almost everything we do results in the emission of these gasses, whether it be a trip to the store, heating our homes this winter, or getting into the tractor to plant crops next spring. The challenge is to identify ways that we can do many of our daily actions while releasing fewer greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere.

As a couple of guys who became teenagers in the 1950s—a time during which horsepower was more important than mileage—when it came to dreaming about the cars we couldn't afford, the thought of tailpipe emissions was the last thing on our minds.

Now it is different. As two of those who have passed the 75 mark, our focus is on our children and grandchildren and the world we are bequeathing to them. Issues of sustainability are more important to us than ever before.

Even today we can see indications of climate change: the recent extensive fires in Australia and the West Coast of the US, flooding in the Midwest, a record year for named hurricanes in the Caribbean, and the list goes on.

As custodians of a large amount of land in the US and around the world, farmers and foresters are in a position to have a significant impact on climate change. Rather than waiting on government regulations to push farmers into taking actions that result in reduced greenhouse emissions, we think it is in agriculture's best interest to get ahead of the curve.

Today there is a significant segment of the agricultural community that has begun to find ways to increase the amount of carbon being stored in the soil. They have found ways to reduce field passes. They are working on ways to reduce methane emissions while developing systems that economically turn manure into energy and the list goes on.

As we have seen with the fires and floods, the risks to the agricultural community are significant but so are the opportunities.

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Dr. Harwood D. Schaffer: Adjunct Research Assistant Professor, Sociology Department, University of Tennessee and Director, Agricultural Policy Analysis Center. Dr. Daryll E. Ray: Emeritus Professor, Institute of Agriculture, University of Tennessee and Retired Director, Agricultural Policy Analysis Center.

Email: hdschaffer@utk.edu and dray@utk.edu; <http://www.agpolicy.org>.

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