

AFBF: Rushing Climate Bill Would be “Height of Folly”

WASHINGTON, D.C., July 22, 2009 – American Farm Bureau Federation

President Bob Stallman today asked the Senate Agriculture Committee to take an active and aggressive role in the climate change debate, but cautioned committee members that rushing to pass such sweeping legislation would be a fundamental mistake.

“On a matter that could affect our nation for literally decades to come, it would be the height of folly to rush to judgment in a matter of days or weeks,” said Stallman.

Testifying before the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, Stallman encouraged members to analyze the issue closely, carefully and thoroughly. He also recommended that the committee improve climate change legislation so that it is as beneficial as possible for the agriculture industry.

Currently, the Senate is examining H.R. 2454, the House-passed climate change bill, which will serve as the basis for writing Senate companion legislation. AFBF is strongly opposed to H.R. 2454 for several reasons. As written, the bill would impose enormous costs on agriculture and other sectors of the economy; the cap-and-trade program would take effect whether or not competing nations like India and China adopted similar programs, meaning U.S. industries would have an incentive to locate overseas. It also provides no concrete alternative energy program, such as nuclear, to hold down energy costs; and, lastly, the measure would appear to have little or no impact on the climate, Stallman noted.

“Most recently, the administrator of EPA testified before the Senate that the H.R. 2454 would have a negligible impact on temperature by the year 2050,” said Stallman. “And virtually everyone agrees that the U.S. alone can’t solve the problem.”

AFBF contends that reducing carbon emissions must be a shared, global responsibility. Without other countries doing their part to lower greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, H.R. 2454 will never work. Stallman noted that while the United States may be a large emitter of GHGs, if emissions are measured based on unit of output, the U.S. is one of the cleanest producers. The effect of HR 2454, Stallman pointed out, would be to punish environmentally sound practices while letting others off the hook.

“A ton of GHG emitted in China is the same as a ton of GHG emitted in Virginia,” said Stallman. “Regulating emissions in Virginia without regulating emissions in China will have little or no effect on the environment.”

AFBF also maintains that an agricultural offsets program administered by the Agriculture Department is an essential cost containment measure, but revenues from offsets will only partially defray increased costs and not all agriculture sectors will benefit from offset opportunities.

“Inclusion of an offset program is not the complete answer,” said Stallman. “Even with a robust agricultural offset program, the bill still does not make economic sense for producers because a number of sectors will be not able to participate.”

Participating in an offset program will depend to a great degree on where the producer is located, what he or she grows and if his or her business can take advantage of the program, Stallman noted. Not every dairy farmer can afford to capture methane. Not every farmer lives in a region where wind turbines are an option. Not every farmer can take advantage of no-till. And not every farmer has the land to set aside to plant trees, according to Stallman.

“Yet, these producers will incur the same increased fuel, fertilizer and energy costs as their counterparts who can benefit from the offsets market,” said Stallman.