

## **Grassroots Voices Can Help Defeat Climate Change Bill**

*By John Hart*

This summer's raucous town hall meetings on national health care reform have brought high drama, while illustrating the considerable uneasiness of many Americans on the subject. Less theatrical, but equally important, are the grassroots efforts of Farm Bureau members on the Waxman-Markey climate change bill passed by the House that awaits Senate action.

To spotlight attention on this important issue, Farm Bureau joined forces with like-minded organizations to form "Energy Citizens." The alliance focuses on publicizing the impact of the pending legislation and the potential harm it poses to the U.S. economy.

Urging the Senate to "get it right" and ensure that climate and energy legislation does not take money out of Americans' pocketbooks, while costing the economy millions of jobs, is a primary focus.

A key part of the effort is 21 rallies across the country that began mid-August in Houston and conclude the first week of September in South Dakota. At many of the rallies, Farm Bureau members and leaders will take the podium and explain the severe economic consequences the legislation will have on American agriculture. They will point out that the climate change bill will mean higher costs for fuel and fertilizer with little to no benefit to farmers and ranchers. In the rallies and through their personal letters and contacts, farmers are speaking out, and with good reason.

Today's farmers and ranchers receive on average 19 cents out of every retail dollar spent on food, compared to 31 cents in 1980. Expecting farmers and ranchers to survive on even smaller margins is simply unrealistic.

The climate change bill in its current form is bad for agriculture and bad for America because it fails to provide alternative sources of energy that could help hold down costs. It also places the U.S. at a competitive disadvantage to global trading partners who don't face "cap-and-trade" restrictions called for in the House bill.

Proponents of the bill argue that it will be A-OK for farmers because they can benefit from an embryonic yet complicated scheme called "offset revenues" that has to do with changing the way crops are grown in order to capture and retain (sequester) carbon in soil. Although details are sparse, it's apparent that no-till cropping—a type of farming that's not an option for many crop producers—is the centerpiece of the plan. Further, fruit and vegetable growers would be virtually shut out of the program. Similarly, many farmers engaged in animal agriculture are likely to face higher costs that will exceed any revenues they might receive from the offsets program.

Fortunately, members of the Senate are beginning to hear the ringing voices of dissent from the countryside about the climate change bill. They will return to Capitol Hill after Labor Day with the knowledge that the bill in its current form will inflict serious harm to U.S. agriculture and the economy as a whole. Once again, the grassroots voices of Farm Bureau members are making a difference.