

FOCUS ON AGRICULTURE

For the week of: May 3, 2010

American Farm Bureau Federation

Farmers and Ranchers Must Plan for New Air Quality Standards

By John Hart

America's farmers and ranchers certainly don't agree on everything. Some farmers will only drive tractors with green paint, while others would never think of driving a tractor that isn't painted red. Some farmers are Democrats, others Republican. And for recreation, some prefer bird hunting, while others prefer bass fishing.

However, there is one principle all farmers and ranchers can agree about: the necessity of planning for successfully running a crop or livestock operation. The adage still rings true: "if you fail to plan, you better plan to fail."

With this in mind, farmers must begin planning now for the impact new Environmental Protection Agency air quality standards will have on their operations. New regulations are coming, and they will be more stringent.

May 3-7 is Air Quality Awareness Week, which is a good time for farmers to make plans to adapt to the new EPA air quality standards. On Jan. 6, 2010, EPA proposed revisions to the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for ground-level ozone. EPA is expected to release its final standards on Aug. 31.

Farmers and ranchers are expected to be most impacted by EPA's secondary standards affecting ozone levels. EPA's secondary standards are designed to protect public welfare and the environment, including sensitive vegetation and ecosystems. The primary standards are targeted to public health protection, including the health of at-risk populations such as children, people with asthma and older adults.

Farmers and ranchers will have to comply with EPA's secondary standards. Crop farmers who burn their waste after harvest and livestock operations where ammonia and methane can be emitted will be impacted. And dust, an ongoing challenge, particularly for farmers in Arizona, New Mexico and California's San Joaquin Valley, will face more stringent regulations.

And whether they prefer a red tractor or green tractor, farmers need to know that the farm equipment they buy and use will be affected by the EPA's drive to reduce emissions. Beginning in 2011, EPA will require off-road diesel engines, such as those in tractors and combines, to meet stringent "Interim Tier 4" emissions regulations.

Those stringent standards will require diesel engines with 174 horsepower or more to reduce particulate matter emissions by 90 percent and oxides of nitrogen emissions by 50 percent,

beginning in 2011. Farm equipment manufacturers anticipated these new standards and have spent billions of dollars to make sure the combines and tractors they make will meet the guidelines.

The equipment makers will have to pass the cost of this research and development on to their customers, which means farmers can expect to pay more for new equipment. In fact, Caterpillar estimates that equipment prices will likely go up 12 percent over the life of Tier 4 implementation, Jan 1, 2011-Dec. 31, 2014.

These regulations aren't going away. Many of the regulations will be implemented by the states, and farmers and ranchers will have to be active in the various meetings and public hearings that will take place as state governments move to implement the rules.

Farmers and ranchers agree that careful planning makes any challenge easier to handle. Now is the time for farmers to plan for this new challenge of more stringent air quality regulations.