

## Farm Bureau's grassroots unite for climate change rally

Nearly 300 people, predominantly North Carolina Farm Bureau members, traveled to Greensboro on August 20 for a grassroots rally focused on concerns about climate change legislation being addressed in Congress.

On June 26, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a climate change bill, the American Clean Energy and Security Act, which in its current form is opposed by Farm Bureau and many other organizations.

American Farm Bureau economists state the House legislation would cost U.S. farmers \$5 billion annually in farm income by 2020. By 2050, that number would increase to \$13 billion.

In North Carolina, the House bill would wipe out more than 25,000 jobs by 2015, with 87,000 lost by 2030.

The U.S. Senate was scheduled to start working on its version of climate change legislation this month after returning from the Congressional break. However, healthcare reform may have delayed that schedule. Nonetheless, members rallied to send a message to the Senate.

NCFB President Larry Wooten was one of the event's seven speakers, and he stressed the importance of asking senators to get it right when drafting climate legislation.

"Getting it right means providing farmers and business owners with significant incentives to engage in activities that improve our environment," Wooten said. "I hope for the sake of farmers, our Senators do their jobs well."

Wooten pointed out several flaws in the House bill, namely that energy costs will rise and farmers have no way to pass along higher costs. He also pointed out there is no provision requiring other nations to curb their carbon emissions.

"Anytime there's something big brewing, we've got to have a voice," said **Mark Hayes** of Randolph County Farm Bureau.

**Anna Rae Hodgin**,

also from Randolph, said she was there to learn more about Congress' potential course on climate change and take what she learned back to her county.

**Ronnie Burleson**, Stanly County Farm Bureau, said in the end the legislation would only accomplish raising prices for anyone who uses fuel or fertilizer without doing much for the environment.

"If we're not really efficient operators, it will put us by the wayside," Burleson said.

Most speakers said they were against any climate change legislation. Gordon Hunt spoke on behalf of the National Federation of Independent Business. He acknowledged that his green energy-industry company would actually benefit from climate legislation—in the short term.

Ultimately, however, he said more regulation and control would lead to higher taxes and operational costs, and that hurts everybody.

The event also featured speakers from the worlds of politics and entertainment, including U.S. Rep. Howard Coble and a video message from country music singer Trace Adkins.



*Farm Bureau members stood united for reasonable climate change legislation during a grassroots rally in Greensboro.*

# General Assembly out of session, but legislative work continues

Although the North Carolina General Assembly is out of session until May 2010, activity continues in the state's capitol with various commissions and committees studying issues likely to catch the attention of state lawmakers next spring and possibly spurring legislative action.

A number of topics impacting farmers and rural communities will go up for review over the next several months.

"Now that the General Assembly has gone home and the session's over, that does not mean we can sit by and rest," said Paula Page, North Carolina Farm Bureau's state legislative director. "There's still a lot of legislative activity being done through the use of study committees and commissions, and we'll be following a number of them. We still are very active in the legislative arena."

On Sept. 10, North Carolina Gov. Bev Perdue signed off on a number of new and continuing commissions, many of which were to appoint members and begin meetings this month.

Many of the commissions are expected to write recommendations that could guide legislation in the upcoming short session, which is scheduled to convene at noon May 12, 2010.

The new Legislative Study Commission on Water and Wastewater Infrastructure could look at any number of water issues, including permitting and water rights.

"We're following it closely to make sure agricultural interests are represented on the commission," Page said.

North Carolina Farm Bureau will also be paying attention as a standing Environmental Review Commission resumes weekly meetings.

That commission has been authorized to consider a variety of environmental topics, which could include water allocation, interbasin transfers, the phasing-out of lagoon and spray field systems, use and storage of reclaimed water and strengthening the pesticide law.

Also, a Utility Review Commit-

tee may consider what could be precedent-setting guidelines for pesticide applications and notification.

In that group, they could study the necessity of having utility providers notify adjacent property owners before applying pesticides to rights-of-way. The committees work would be confined to issues affecting utility providers, but it could set a precedent extending to agriculture.

A new study may be considered by the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to look at the health and environmental impacts regarding current regulations for the application of septage and sludge.

NCFB is keeping an eye on a Revenue Laws Study Committee that could include discussion of renewable energy and alternative fuel tax credits, which could offer on-farm possibilities.

Farm Bureau is also continuing participation in a Climate Change Commission and the Offshore Energy Exploration Subcommittee, which meets again Oct. 7.

## Federal tax bill could maintain estate tax's \$3.5 million exemption

Farmers' up-and-down experience with the federal estate tax could finally level off when lawmakers consider a tax bill, which had not occurred at publication deadline but was expected to happen.

The estate, or death, tax has been a point of debate in Congress for years.

Currently, the tax provides a \$3.5 million exemption per person, and the value of the estate has to exceed this level to trigger the 45 percent tax.

In 2010, however, the estate tax will be eliminated. But in 2011, the law will revert back to the 2001 exemption of \$1 million and a 55 percent tax rate.

The President's current budget proposed keeping the tax at the \$3.5 million exemption, 45 percent tax.

"There's room in the budget to enact a bill to maintain the status quo," said Jake Parker, national legislative director with NCFB. "All Congress needs to do is to pass a tax bill."

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North Carolina Farm Bureau (NCFB) is the unified, statewide Voice of Agriculture®. Working through our grassroots organizations to enhance and strengthen the lives of rural North Carolinians, we strive to build strong, prosperous agricultural communities. We are a private, non-profit, grassroots organization that has been actively promoting farm and rural issues since 1936 through legislative and policy initiatives, member services, field representation, agricultural education, public relations and other programs.

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# Immigration troubles in Congressional crosshairs, clean shot at reform needed to squeeze trigger

Despite an economy where unemployment rates have climbed to their highest levels, farmers—especially in the produce business—have had a difficult time finding and keeping laborers.

Furthermore, growers must worry about meeting all of the government's standards for the workers they do hire, many of whom are still immigrant guest workers.

Currently, it seems there's reason to worry—while immigration reform stalls, employers are coming under closer scrutiny.

For example, earlier this year, the U.S. Department of Labor hired more labor inspectors who quickly arrived on farms to inspect pay and working and living conditions for laborers, sending the signal that the government is paying attention.

But some farmers penalized said they were issued hefty fines without much direction about what needed to be improved.

In mid-March, the U.S. Labor Department published in the Federal Register a notice to suspend the Bush administration's Final Rule, which took effect Jan. 17. The suspension was recently blocked by a federal court.

The Bush administration's H-2a rule changes resulted in a reduction in the adverse effect wage rate and a reduction in transportation expenses and some red tape for growers who participate in the H-2a program.

Last week, the Obama Administration issued a new proposed H-2a regulation. NCFB is reviewing the proposal and will submit comments to the Department of

Labor. Additionally, NCFB is requesting the Department of Labor to extend the comment period.

Furthermore, the H-2a program only covers seasonal labor, with no provision for animal operations that use labor year-round.

## ***NCFB is requesting the Department of Labor to extend the comment period.***

Decision-makers in the Obama Administration and on Capitol Hill haven't yet taken up immigration reform, but advocacy groups on either side of the issue are already speaking out, portending a rocky road for reform.

Congress is back in session, but it's unlikely an AgJOBS bill re-introduced in the House and Senate last spring will move forward on its own.

"The main focus (of Congress) for the next few months is health care," said Jake Parker, national legislative director for NCFB. "The question is whether or not that debate will drown out everything else."

The two-part bill would allow workers who can prove they were employed in agriculture the past two years to qualify for temporary resident status and eventually apply for permanent residency with continued work in agriculture, and it would also revise the H-2a program.

If anything, the AgJOBS bill could be rolled into a more comprehensive immigration reform bill. Farm Bureau supports immigration reform that protects agriculture's needs.

## **Pork Crisis at Issue**



***Farm Bureau presidents met with U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack Sept. 4 in Washington, D.C. specifically to discuss the crisis facing the pork industry. The National Pork Producers Council estimates U.S. hog farmers may lose \$1.25 billion during the 8-month period between April and the end of 2009—due in large part to miscommunication and misperceptions surrounding the H1N1 flu outbreak and its impact on exports. In the photo, from left to right, Philip Nelson, president of Illinois Farm Bureau; Craig Lang, president of Iowa Farm Bureau; Vilsack; Bob Stallman, president of American Farm Bureau; and, Larry Wooten, president of North Carolina Farm Bureau.***

# Carbon credits add expense, but could offer opportunities

It will be expensive for farmers to install new systems that allow them to offer carbon credits for sale, but they'll have little choice if climate change legislation passes Congress, according to panelists during a recent 2009 Carbon & Energy Markets Producer Forum.

Legislative efforts to limit carbon emissions and move the country toward renewable fuels would force industry to buy carbon credits to offset its carbon outputs.

One place industry could spend carbon credit money is on swine farms that have carbon-saving measures in place, such as manure-management systems that capture methane.

"...There are some significant opportunities right now," said Tim Profeta, director of Duke University's Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions.

Profeta said the new carbon offsets market could generate as much as \$3.4 billion in the next

five years and \$9 billion by the year 2030.

"They cannot get enough ag and forestry projects to meet the demand," he said. "What does that mean to you (the farmer)? If you can make a project, there will be a buyer out there."

Ollie Frazier, of Duke Energy and a member of the NC Green Power Board of Directors, said offsets are already being sold in North Carolina, but at this time, mostly from landfills that capture methane.

He said Duke Energy isn't waiting for legislation to tell them they have to buy offsets; they are buying them now and want to be able to buy from farms.

Carbon credits are currently selling for up to \$10 a ton, but that price will rise as legislation creates a demand.

"You are the people who are going to be the wave of the future, whether you know it or not," said Ryke Longest, director of Duke's Environmental Law and Policy

Center.

A trio of Duke students talked about a number of new technologies that make carbon credits available on farms, but some attendees said they worry how much these new systems would cost, which wasn't mentioned. None of the systems have yet to be proven cost effective.

Vernon Cox, with soil and water conservation, said the new technologies allow waste treatment without having to worry about heavy rainfall, like with a lagoon.

But he said there is some money from the state available to convert lagoons to new systems.

Other attendees added that companies needing credits might make investments on farms or there could be federal money.

Swine producers are seeing input costs as much as triple what they were a couple of years ago, at the same time prices are down by an average of \$20 a head, and producers can't afford new investments, one attendee said.

# Food Safety Forum highlights top public concern

The recent 2009 Food Safety Forum at the N.C. State Fairgrounds in Raleigh facilitated a discussion on the future of food safety with several top experts in the field.

"America has the safest food supply in the world, but (U.S. food) being safe is not enough," said U.S. Rep. Bob Etheridge. "We've got to make sure that what comes in here is just as safe as what we grow here."

Despite the nation's unmatched food safety record, there have been several outbreaks of food-borne illness within its borders over the past few years, includ-

ing with peanut butter, spinach and a recent pepper scare that was erroneously blamed on tomatoes and caused severe economic damages to growers.

Reforming the nation's food safety system has become a top concern of the White House. The Food Safety Enhancement Act, HR 2749, passed the U.S. House in July. The Senate is expected to take up the legislation sometime this fall.

"President Obama has made food safety a high priority for his administration," said Michael R. Taylor, a senior adviser to the commissioner of the U.S. Food

and Drug Administration. "A very fundamental change is coming."

Taylor said the FDA is working with the states to focus on prevention as the core objective in building a new integrated national food safety system.

"This is what the public expects," he said. "It builds consumer confidence and benefits agriculture, the food industry and the economy as a whole."

Challenges include a lack of uniform standards, enforcement and inspectional coverage.

"We need to look at lots of ways importers meet our standards," he said.

# BUREAU BRIEFS

**BOARD OF AG**—N.C. Gov. Bev Perdue recently appointed and reappointed several Farm Bureau members to the North Carolina Board of Agriculture. **Billy Johnston** was a first-time appointee of the governor. Johnston is a member of the North Carolina Farm Bureau Board of Directors. He is also President of Buncombe County Farm Bureau. Johnston, of Fletcher, is a partner in Taproot Dairy. **Kirk Mathis** and **Bert Pitt** were reappointed to the board. Mathis is also a member of the State Board of Directors, as well as President of Wilkes County Farm Bureau. Mathis raises beef, broilers, corn and grain. Pitt is a sixth-generation tobacco farmer in Edgecombe County.

**DISASTER FUNDS**—USDA announced in mid-September that producers may apply for benefits under the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) and the Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP). These permanent disaster programs, authorized in the 2008 farm bill, replace previous ad-hoc disaster assistance programs and are funded through the Agricultural Disaster Relief Trust Fund. For both programs, producers must have suffered losses that occurred on or after Jan. 1, 2008, and before Oct. 1, 2011. There is a total \$100,000 limitation per crop year.

**FORESTLAND OWNERS**—Two programs offered by the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Environmen-

tal Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), provide financial assistance to forestland owners to improve and conserve their forestland. This fiscal year, more than \$1 million dollars was administered through these two programs to improve forestland in North Carolina. Most of the financial assistance was for prescribed burning and other forest stand improvement practices. NRCS expects to offer these programs again in fiscal year 2010. Interested landowners should contact their local USDA Service Center or North Carolina Division of Forestry Office.

**PORK AND BEEF**—U.S. pork and beef exports through July are down amid the global economic downturn and lingering effects from the H1N1 flu outbreak, according to the U.S. Meat Export Federation. The most recent statistics show pork exports of 2.38 billion pounds valued at \$2.53 billion, 10 percent below last year's record-shattering pace, but still 53 percent higher in volume and 48 percent higher in value than in January-July 2007. Beef exports of 512,053 metric tons, valued at \$1.94 billion, were 6 percent lower than last year's volume and reflected a 10 percent drop in value. H1N1 has put a damper on U.S. pork exports in several key markets, including China.

**RESEARCH GREAT**—Dr. Norman E. Borlaug, 95, the plant pathologist who grew up on an Iowa farm and earned the Nobel Peace Prize, the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Congressional Gold Medal, died of cancer on Sept. 12. Borlaug was a tireless advocate for modern production agriculture and his research was

credited with saving the lives of millions of people. He continually stressed the need for chemical fertilizers and pesticides for increasing food production. He was one of the world's strongest advocates for the critical need of high-yielding agricultural practices. Borlaug was known as the "man who fed the world" for his groundbreaking plant breeding work in Mexico in the 1940s, Asia in the 1960s and 1970s and the savannas of Africa in the 1980s. He proved science had the capability to increase food production exponentially.

**SAVING FARMLAND**—Protecting farmland for future agricultural use is critical to maintaining the future viability of the country's agricultural sectors and rural communities, according to agriculture commissioners and officials from 13 states who signed a Sept. 8 joint letter to U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack. American Farmland Trust coordinated the letter commenting on the federal Interim Final Rule regarding the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP).

**WEB SITE UNVEILED**—The Obama Administration's Food Safety Working Group recently unveiled a new consumer Web site at [www.foodsafety.gov](http://www.foodsafety.gov). The site is designed to help consumers and families get all the latest information on food safety and food recalls in one convenient place. The new site features information from all the agencies across the federal government that deal with critical food and food safety information, including preventive tips about how to handle food safely, alerts on life-saving food recalls, and the latest news from the key agencies.

# FIELDNOTES

by Larry Wooten, NCFB President

## Just saying no isn't a solution

I'm always inspired when our grassroots network reacts with action to a call for help on an issue important to farmers and agriculture. The recent Climate Change Legislation Rally in Greensboro was a prime example.



Thank you to the hundreds of Farm Bureau's volunteer leaders who took the time to travel to Greensboro to stand united for sensible climate change legislation.

There were a lot of folks outside of Farm Bureau who said they would attend, but they didn't fill the seats. Farm Bureau did!

There are some whose battle cry is "Just Say No" to climate change legislation, how-

ever, Farm Bureau knows that just saying no isn't enough when it comes to legislation of this magnitude and importance, nor should it be.

Farm Bureau's mission dictates that we work toward realistic solutions rather than attacking the issues with polarizing sound bites.

Farmers have too much riding on the outcome of climate change legislation to be cut out of the policy development process. Past history reveals that zealots get cut out of Congressional discussions, but grassroots groups that are reasonable and prepared with the facts and backing of their members are listened to in legislative debates.

Just saying no is never a viable option; and bluntly, it's not good enough for Farm Bureau, especially when the issue is as serious as climate change.

Farm Bureau has to be in the discussion from day one, until the ink on the final signature dries and through the implementation process.

We are focused on helping our elected officials do their jobs well, rather than seeking to stop them.

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National Farm-City Week is November 20-26.

## NORTH CAROLINA FARM BUREAU LEADER

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