

**CLIMATE VARIABILITY
AND
BIOENERGY
SUBCOMMITTEE**

UNIFORM SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT

Background

- ❖ At the December 2013 AAQTF meeting in Beltsville, Maryland, sustainability/certification was included as a topic of interest for the 2013-15 term.
- ❖ Chief Weller asked the Taskforce to work on emerging agricultural issues that could lead to regulatory challenges impacting the nation's farmers and ranchers.
- ❖ He asked that Taskforce members try to identify actions that could help alleviate or provide information about these challenges, especially solutions that could lead to quantifiable successes.
- ❖ NRCS intends to focus on soil, water, and air resources and provide a sustainability index with regulatory certainty.

Background

- ❖ Focus is needed on development of a uniform sustainability index based on sound science and best management practices.
- ❖ Air quality and climate change are issues the primary focus for AAQTF, and intrinsically include soil and water in ecosystem considerations.
- ❖ Air quality improvements or GHG reductions can lead to co-benefits in soil, water, and energy conservation that need to be analyzed as a whole system instead of a silo approach.

Sustainability Issues

- ❖ Production agriculture practices need to be considered, analyzed, and presented in a fair, balanced, and practical manner when used for quantifying sustainability.
- ❖ A scientific, systems-based approach is required.
- ❖ Market value of agricultural production data must be protected so it does not get underestimated or used inappropriately.
- ❖ Collecting and providing this information and making any operational practice changes takes time and money.
- ❖ If food manufacturers want to provide corporate responsibility in the form of agricultural sustainability to their stakeholders, they need to provide incentives to insure this can occur.

Food Resilience Initiative

- ❖ University of Minnesota Global Landscapes Initiative
- ❖ Field to Market
- ❖ Farmer Connect (Nesle')
- ❖ Walmart
- ❖ UN Principles for Responsible Investment
- ❖ Microsoft
- ❖ Esri
- ❖ Climate Corp.

The Emerging Sustainability Landscape

- ❖ Food Resilience Initiative
- ❖ General Mills
- ❖ Field to Market
- ❖ National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
- ❖ Biogenic Carbon Assessment

Recommendations

- ❖ NRCS work with partners such as Field to Market and others to insure a uniform, scientific, systems-based approach is developed that can be used as a template for all production agriculture sustainability index efforts.
- ❖ USDA work with EPA as they initiate implementation of the “Clean Power Plan” to investigate if there is a role for offsets to be provided to existing power plants under Section 111(d) of the Clean Air Act when agricultural producers utilize voluntary, verifiable best practice standards.
- ❖ Provide AAQTF an assessment of the 9 GHG CIGs so we can determine whether to recommend another round of funding.
- ❖ NRCS staff work with CDFA and the CARB to help quantify the water efficiency, reduced GHG emissions and any other environmental benefits that will result from the water conservation measures that are implemented using State Water Efficiency and Enhancement Program (SWEEP), authorized by emergency drought legislation (Senate Bill 103). This could serve as pilot using NRCS practice standards (i.e. 441 and 442) to provide verifiable results that can be used in various venues. The current qualitative ranking tool for GHG benefits is a good first step but is not adequate for the quantification needed for this and other venues.

Recommendations

- ❖ Provide a presentation to the AAQTF on the First Adaptation Plan and what steps are planned for the next 1-10 years.
- ❖ Update AAQTF on response and integration of NRCS to USDA Regulation 1070-001 of June 2, 2011 that instructed agencies to determine vulnerability to climate change and impacts on their agency mission and EO 13514 issued October 5, 2009 that directed the assessment of energy use, GHG footprint and methods for climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- ❖ Consult with EPA on the Biogenics Assessment to assure sound science and best management practices have been considered.