

Agricultural Air Quality Task Force (AAQTF or The Task Force) FY2014 Annual Report

Background and History:

The Agricultural Air Quality Task Force (AAQTF) was created in accordance with Section 391 of the Federal Agricultural Improvement and Reform Act of 1996, to advise the Secretary of Agriculture on issues related to agricultural air quality. In 1996, Congress found that various studies alleged that agriculture is a source of Particulate Matter (PM) emissions and that many of these studies have often been based on erroneous data. Congress also cited ongoing research by USDA and declared that Federal policy in regard to air pollution be based on sound scientific findings that are subject to adequate peer review and take into account economic feasibility. The Task Force's mandate is to strengthen and coordinate USDA's air quality research effort and identify cost effective ways for the agriculture industry to improve air quality and meet Federal and local air quality emissions requirements. The Chief of the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service chairs the AAQTF. The AAQTF membership consists of leaders in farming, industry, health, and science. The Task Force also includes representatives from USDA's Forest Service, Agricultural Research Service, and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture. Currently there are 28 individuals on the AAQTF. The current charter for the Task Force is for two years, ending on April 15, 2015.

FY2014 AAQTF Activities and Recommendations

The AAQTF held three meetings in FY14. These were: December 4-5, 2013 in Beltsville MD; April 30-May 1, 2014 in Boise ID; and August 20-21 in College Station TX. FY14 efforts of the AAQTF centered on forming new subcommittees and making them active. There are now three subcommittees of the AAQTF: Air Quality Standards (AQS), Climate Variability Impacts (CVI), and Emissions Measurement and Mitigation (EM2). The AQS focused efforts on the newly proposed ozone and particulate matter (PM) standards that EPA has been working on. The CVI developed a paper entitled "How Production Agriculture and USDA/NRCS can Collaborate to Develop a Uniform Sustainability Assessment Method" that was approved by the full AAQTF on September 23, 2014. The EM2 has developed a white paper entitled "Ammonia Emissions: What to Know Before You Regulate" that was approved by the full AAQTF on September 30, 2014. The AAQTF also had several recommendations forwarded to NRCS Chief Jason Weller, who chairs the AAQTF, including one dealing with recent Federal Aviation Administration rules on Unmanned Aircraft Systems that would severely restrict the use of UAS for agricultural purposes.

For additional information on the AAQTF please contact Dr. Greg Johnson, AAQTF Designated Federal Official at greg.johnson@por.usda.gov; 503.273.2424. Recommendations and minutes from previous meetings and presentations made before the Task Force can be found at the AAQTF web site: <http://www.airquality.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/air/taskforce>