

# **Going Green: Within Reason**



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It's everywhere we look, the media, shopping malls and political campaigns. "Going Green" has become much more than a catch phrase in American society; it has become a way of life. We can flip on our recycled plastic TV's and tune into Planet Green. We can drive our hybrid, plug-in cars to the grocery store and carry out organic fruits in canvas, reusable tote bags. We can vote for candidates who embrace alternative energy and flip off a light switch when we leave the room. All of these ideas are great in theory, but for me to jump on the green band wagon, I'm going to need some definite proof and a promise to protect America's livelihood: our farmers.

When we hear the term "going green" from a political standpoint most of us think of legislation seeking to limit our greenhouse gas emissions. The most widely-known policy claiming to reduce carbon in our atmosphere is Cap and Trade. Let's take a look at this plan, its positive and negative effects, and the disturbance it will undoubtedly cause to American agriculture.

First we will begin by defining the program. Cap and Trade, Cap and Tax, Carbon Markets, Carbon Credits; they all really mean the same thing. Fundamentally, the "cap" in the name comes from efforts to limit overall greenhouse gas emissions of a governed body. The American cap has been

set at gradually lowering consumer's emissions of carbon up to 20 percent by 2020.

The trade or tax portion of the name allows provisions for selling permitted emissions within the cap. Meaning company's who can reduce pollutants easily to remain under their limit will benefit and can sell their excess credits to less-green corporations who cannot yet operate under their own cap. Since Congress spent months enthralled with the health care debate, Cap and Trade was once again been put on a governmental back burner, but is far from forgotten. It remains highly controversial among environmentalists and agriculturists alike.

Despite all the controversy, there are several positive attributes of the plan that aim towards a greener future. Environmentalists believe that mandating companies to lower carbon emissions and allowing them to buy and sell credits of CO<sub>2</sub> will create clean energy jobs, reduce global warming, and cut pollution to form a clean air economy.

A benefit to our natural carbon supply comes in the form of carbon sequestration. Companies that have a tougher time meeting their limit can purchase additional carbon credits that are then paid to agricultural producers. These producers use this additional income to implement farming practices that lower their carbon footprint. Farmers would be profiting from

a variety of methods including using eco-friendly technology such as GPS, letting pasture land serve as a buffer for a year and “sink” carbon, or even implementing no-till farming to conserve natural resources.

There are many voluntary carbon credit programs aimed towards reducing emissions and increasing agricultural profits. These credits are created when one metric ton of carbon is prevented from entering the atmosphere. Each credit has monetary value depending on its type and is not always made up of pure CO<sub>2</sub>. There are five other greenhouse gases directly blamed for accelerating global warming including methane, nitrous oxide and hydrofluorocarbons.

Now we can discuss the negative effects of Cap and Trade legislation. The fiscal impact of 22 billion dollars to taxpayers across the nation is down right irresponsible in our current economic predicament. Especially with no definitive proof that global warming truly exists. One of our very own Oklahoma legislators has infamously called climate change “the greatest hoax ever perpetuated onto mankind.”

Three thousand scientists do believe the earth’s temperature is gradually increasing due to pollutants to the ozone layer. However, a lengthy list of equally qualified scientists and 42 of the largest agricultural companies in the world say it is not. So who really wins in this game of tug-

o-war when we aren't even sure the rope exists? Most certainly not producers or consumers of American agriculture.

In addition, since not all countries operate under the Kyoto Protocol or any sort of emissions limit, we could see the outsourcing of agricultural jobs to countries that require no cap. Other countries have tried similar legislation. The European Union enacted a climate change policy and actually saw overall emissions increase by over one percent after five years.

Many agriculturists believe our industry will suffer if forced to function under government regulations of our natural resources. In fact, the Waxman-Markey Bill has been dubbed the largest tax increase in the history of the United States. This disturbance could be felt in every phase of agriculture. From an increased cost for farmers to produce and transport crops, to a tax on the methane that livestock produce-weakening the already crippled dairy industry, all the way to higher prices at the grocery store.

Ask one thousand people their opinion of cap and trade, and you'll likely get one thousand different answers. Opposing climate legislation does not mean we don't care about our planet. It means we also care about the people who live on that planet.

I'm not saying we shouldn't "go green." Let's explore alternative energy options and even wear "save the earth" t-shirts, but let's also take a

step back and maintain some fiscal responsibility. Carbon credits do benefit our industry and protect our natural resources. However, they are a part of a program that simply isn't practical. We must create a plan that reduces pollutants but is not detrimental to the success of the most important industry in the world: agriculture.

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