

Carbon, Agriculture Issue Heats Up

MIKE PLUMER

CARBONDALE, ILL.



The carbon and agriculture topic is gaining attention across the world. The new Cap and Trade legislation discussion is getting serious, and implications may be huge here in the U.S. – for both industry and the farmer.

“Cap and Trade” sets limits

on how much carbon is produced, who produces the carbon or greenhouse gases (GHG), and who can reduce emissions or store the carbon. Then, those who release or create GHG – from burning coal, diesel fuel, industry manufacturing processes or “tilling soil” – will have to pay a fine or “tax” to reduce or offset those emissions. Yes, I mentioned tilling soil as a GHG pollution activity. Several groups that I work with are involved in addressing the tillage issue.

Just so you understand the gravity of the situation, the carbon footprint of ethanol production is being hotly contested. Recently released University of Illinois research has shown how modern agriculture can reduce that footprint. Conservation tillage and no-till are major components of that reduction as well as good nutrient management.

But, scientists across the U.S. do not agree on

the numbers, and a prime example is the California Air Resources Board. For the last year, the Illinois Corn Growers Association, National Corn Growers Association, U of I researchers and Extension staff have been involved in discussions with this group, presenting the latest research, documenting changes in practices and showing the efficiency of current agriculture practices.

Contrary to the facts presented, a major decision was made last week. Starting in 2011, California will not allow ANY Midwestern corn-produced ethanol into the state. This decision comes at a time when California goes to mandatory 10 percent ethanol gasoline blends for emissions. Where are they going to get the ethanol? They have already announced that all the ethanol could be imported from Brazilian sugar-produced ethanol. The California decision will have a major impact on corn producers in the Midwest.

The next problem may be the Cap and Trade rules developed against any tillage, or maybe the attacks on GMO crops by the Union of Concerned Scientists who say these crops have no yield or economic advantage. Are they serious???

Δ

Mike Plumer is Extension Educator, Natural Resources Management, with the University of Illinois at the Carbondale Extension Center.



Link Directly To: **PIONEER**