

Inslee sees ag warming to carbon tax, but farm groups don't

Governor sees 'revolution' of support

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Gov. Jay Inslee spent three days in Eastern Washington last week and came back saying he had never heard so much support in farm country for taxing fossil fuels to combat climate change.

"I went into a fruit company in Wenatchee, talked to the production manager, who said, 'We want action on climate change,'" Inslee said, speaking to reporters. "That's really amazing to have agricultural leaders say that."

The fruit company the governor referred to was Northern Fruit. Messages to the company were not answered.

The Washington State Department of Agriculture documented that the extremely hot and dry summer of 2015

affected the size of apples and cherries.

Washington State Tree Fruit Association President Jon DeVaney, however, said he's not heard any orchard attribute losses to climate change.

"It's difficult to say what's climate change and what's weather," he said.

Inslee has made climate change his signature issue. He has spoken at United Nations conferences, the Paris climate summit and most recently at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. At home, however, he has been unable to persuade the Legislature to tax carbon to discourage the consumption of fossil fuels.

The policy has achieved a minor milestone this session. The Democrat-controlled Senate Energy, Environment



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee gestures at a press conference Feb. 8 in Olympia. Inslee says he sees a "revolution" in support for a carbon tax, including from agriculture, though the state's largest farm group, the Washington Farm Bureau, remains staunchly opposed.

and Technology Committee advanced a bill to tax carbon at \$10 per ton, half the level Inslee proposed.

The tax would grow automatically to \$30 a ton by 2030. It's not a straight gas tax, but it would eventually

increase gas prices by an estimated 30 cents a gallon. The tax also would increase the cost of electricity and natural gas.

The bill remains far from the governor's desk, but Inslee said he was "ecstatic this

has gone through the first committee."

"I can't overstate how optimistic I am about this because there are so many open minds to this idea, particularly in the business community," he said. "Look, we have never had businesses in the state of Washington engage in a dialogue about how to reduce carbon pollution. This is like a revolution."

The Washington Farm Bureau has been among the staunchest opponents of a carbon tax, and remains so. An energy tax would increase the cost of transportation, fertilizer and other inputs and put Washington farmers at a competitive disadvantage in the global marketplace, according to the Farm Bureau.

Rather than growing alarm over climate change, the specter of climate-change activists qualifying their carbon tax proposal for the November ballot may be driving support

among lawmakers for a bill this year, Farm Bureau associate director of government relations Evan Sheffels said.

"The momentum would be due to the fear that an initiative would be worse," he said.

The Farm Bureau has not adopted that thinking. "Almost across the board, farmers and ranchers are experiencing painfully low commodity prices and (a carbon tax) just creates more costs," Sheffels said.

Carbon-tax opponents in Olympia aren't debating climate-change science. They are making pocketbook points and questioning whether one state's stand on carbon would have any effect on temperatures.

"We're not arguing with the governor about climate change. We just question whether the right way to deal with it is with a state tax," DeVaney said. "It essentially drives up our in-state production costs."

Farm leaders urge Senate to fix law on livestock gas reports

Senate bill said to be coming

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

A court mandate to report that decaying manure is releasing hazardous gas will expose farmers to penalties and interfere with responding to actual emergencies, national farm leaders told a U.S. Senate committee on Feb. 7.

American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall said he would welcome Congress nullifying a D.C. Circuit Court decision to make farmers report livestock emissions to the Coast Guard.

"It's a big issue across farmland," Duvall said to the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. "We applaud the senators getting involved in trying to fix something that is wrong."

The committee hearing was on the broad topic of how regulations affect agriculture. Many of the questions and comments from senators were about the D.C. court's decision, due to take effect May 1.

The court sided with environmental groups and applied the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act to agriculture. Livestock operations that emit more than 100 pounds of ammonia or hydrogen sulfide in a 24-hour period will have to register with the Coast Guard's National Response Center. The center coordinates federal emergency responses to chemical leaks and spills.

Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., called the court's decision "unfortunate" and said he expects colleagues to introduce a bill to affirm that Congress didn't intend for the 1980 act, commonly



U.S. Senate

American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall testifies Feb. 7 before the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee in Washington, D.C. Duvall said a court order to report emissions from manure poses problems for farmers and emergency responders.

known as the Superfund law, to cover agriculture.

National Pork Producers Council President Howard Hill said the trade group "would support that bill 100 percent."

"We don't consider farming and the emissions from a farm an emergency. It's an everyday process, and we ask ourselves, 'Who wants this information?' In some cases, it's advocates who don't want livestock production, and they can misuse that information," he said.

The court ruled last year, but has granted several delays to give the Environmental Protection Agency time to prepare farmers to register their livestock as continuously releasing gas. The rule will affect an unknown number of farms. Estimates range from about 45,000 to more than 200,000. The EPA says there is no generally accepted way to calculate emissions.

Failing to report a range of emissions, however, can be punished with fines of up to \$50,000 a day. The act also allows citizen lawsuits to force compliance.

"It would put our farmers at risk," said Duvall, a beef

and poultry producer. "You know I have 400 momma cows that have calves spread out over 1,500 acres in Greensboro, Georgia. How in the world am I going to monitor that? How am I going to report that? And then I have four chicken houses. How am I going to report the emissions of those animals? It puts us at a big liability. There is no need to do it."

Farms that meet the threshold will not be required to reduce emissions. The court agreed with environmental groups that having the information on file could be useful to first responders investigating foul odors.

Duvall said requiring tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of producers to report will burden the Coast Guard. He said he also was concerned about the details that farmers will have to disclose about their operations.

"The individual farmer will have to give up his personal information, where he lives, and that exposes him to being harassed by activists all around, and don't think that's not happening because it does happen," he said.



Oregon Department of Forestry

As Democrats in the Legislature propose a "cap-and-trade" carbon measure, timber companies and several lawmakers are advocating a bill that would require the Department of Environmental Quality and Department of Forestry to evaluate using "natural ecosystems" to absorb and store carbon as an alternative.

Carbon sequestration proposed as 'cap-and-trade' alternative

Bill would direct Oregon regulators to study sequestering carbon

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — Oregon's forestry and environmental regulators would study "sequestering" carbon as a possible alternative to penalizing emissions under a bill before the House Agriculture Committee.

Lawmakers are currently debating a controversial and prominent "cap-and-trade" proposal under which companies that exceed a ceiling on carbon emissions could buy credits from those that fall below it.

Timber companies and several lawmakers are advocating a less publicized carbon-related bill that would require the Department of Environmental Quality and Department of Forestry to evaluate using "natural ecosystems" to absorb and store carbon while promoting economic development, as well as using tax incentives for

companies to reduce carbon emissions.

Under House Bill 4109, the study would also examine "regional approaches" to reduce carbon emissions "other than adopting or participating in a greenhouse cap-and-trade system."

Oregon's annual wildfires emit more carbon monoxide, nitrous oxide, fine particulates and volatile organic compounds than industrial sources or vehicles, said Rep. David Brock Smith, R-Port Orford, the bill's chief sponsor.

Supporters of HB 4109 argue it would encourage discussions about thinning overstocked federal lands that are prone to catastrophic forest fires.

There's also an opportunity to direct harvested timber toward novel products such as "cross-laminated timber," or CLT, which is used for larger-scale buildings.

These objectives can be accomplished without sacrific-

ing "viewsheds" or native fish — otherwise, projects would just wind up in court, said Ken Humberston, a member of the Clackamas County Board of Commissioners.

However, the bill encountered some mild criticism from the Nature Conservancy, an environmental nonprofit.

While the group supports carbon sequestration to fight climate change, the science isn't yet conclusive as to the best return-on-investment for carbon sequestration, said Catherine Macdonald, its Oregon conservation director.

The study should be expanded to include Oregon State University and to examine the most effective methods to increase carbon sequestration, she said.

A work session on HB 4109 was scheduled for Feb. 15, which is the legislative deadline for the proposal to be approved by the House Agriculture Committee.

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