

Green New Deal calls for ag to be 'greenhouse gas free'

By Don Jenkins
EO Media Group

The Green New Deal introduced last week by Democrats in the U.S. House and Senate does not propose banning cow flatulence, but it does strike at something that powers farm production — diesel fuel.

The 14-page resolution calls for agriculture to be “greenhouse gas free” as much as “technologically feasible” in a decade.

Biodiesel could sharply reduce emissions, especially if it's manufactured with renewable energy, but it's far from being ready to supplant all diesel, said Don Scott, director of sustainability for the National Biodiesel Board, a trade association for biofuels.

“We use a lot of diesel fuel,” he said. “It would be extreme to say we're going to replace all diesel with biodiesel.”

The resolution, introduced by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., and Sen. Edward Markey, D-Mass., outlines a “10-year national mobilization” to make the U.S. entirely powered by zero-emission energy sources.

The resolution is co-sponsored by 67 House Democrats and 11 Senate Democrats, including Oregon Sens. Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden. Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, a possible presidential candidate, endorses the resolution, according to a spokeswoman.

A fact sheet provided to National Public Radio by Ocasio-Cortez's office acknowledged that there would still be greenhouse gas emissions in 10 years because “we aren't sure that we'll be able to fully get rid of farting cows and airplanes that fast. ...”

R-CALF USA CEO Bill Bullard said it was unreasonable to link cows to climate change. “If they believe it's manmade, it can't be livestock,” said Bullard, whose organization represents cattle and sheep producers. “It's just beyond absurd.”

Though making no mention of cows, the resolution is a general statement on reordering the U.S. economy, including agriculture.

The government would be “working collaboratively with farmers and ranchers in the U.S. to remove pollution and greenhouse gas emissions from the agricultural sector as much as is technologically feasible,” according to the resolution.

“That would be a huge paradigm shift in every segment of our industry,” Bullard said. “I don't know how you would accomplish that in a 10-year period of time. I don't see this



U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Oregon

Eagle file photo



U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon

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as a realistic goal.”

The U.S. Energy Information Administration projects that petroleum will still provide a majority of the energy used in agriculture in 2050, even with an increase in renewable energy.

Diesel currently provides two-thirds of the energy used to power farm equipment, according to a study by the Diesel Technology Forum, an association of diesel suppliers and equipment manufacturers. There is no cost-effective substitute to power heavy equipment at slow speeds in remote places, according to the study.

Diesel-powered trucks, trains and ships move 90 percent of the nation's freight, according to the study.

The Green New Deal resolution didn't propose anything specific beyond support-

ing family farmers, protecting the soil and “building a more sustainable food system that ensures universal access to healthy food.”

Ocasio-Cortez said at a news conference the resolution wasn't a bill, but presented a large vision to transition the U.S. into the future and not be “dragged behind by our past.”

“So when people say, ‘What about this?’ Or, ‘What about that?’ The answer isn't, ‘This is why it's not in here.’ The answer is, ‘That is part of the solution, too.’ So I hope you all see that, too. I hope you all see the hope and the scale,” she said.

The National Farmers Union issued a statement “applauding” congressional attention to climate change.

“Farmers Union mem-

bers understand the need for action on climate change, and they will be active in ensuring farmers have the tools and incentives they need to both adapt to and help mitigate climate change,” stated Rob Larew, senior vice president of public policy and communications.

Merkley and Wyden were at the forefront in announcing the Green New Deal. Besides Ocasio-Cortez and Markey, the Oregon senators were the only ones to speak at the news conference at the Capitol.

Merkley said the vision presented in the Green New Deal resolution would combat income inequality and “climate chaos.”

“We know the damage being done to agriculture, to our farmers in America. We know the damage being done to our forests and our forest timber communities. We know the damage being done to our fisheries,” he said.

Wearing a white baseball cap with “Oregon” printed on it, Wyden said he will use his position as the top-ranking Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee to push the Green New Deal agenda.

“It's my intention to work with all these good people to throw the dirty-energy tax relics of yesteryear into the garbage can and work to put clean energy front and center for a healthier future for Americans from sea to shining sea,” he said.

Efforts to obtain further comment from Wyden and Merkley on how the Green New Deal could affect cattle ranchers were unsuccessful.

Bullard wryly observed that one animal might benefit if agriculture must replace diesel's horsepower.

“It might pick up the horse market,” he said.

Eastern Oregon industrial development bill gains traction

By Mateusz Perkowski
EO Media Group

A proposal to allow industrial development outside cities in 10 Eastern Oregon counties has passed a key legislative committee without encountering opposition from farm and conservation advocates.

Senate Bill 2 would allow each of the counties — Baker, Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Lake, Malheur, Sherman, Union, Wallowa and Wheeler — to designate up to 10 sites totaling 50 acres outside urban growth boundaries for “industrial uses or other employment uses.”

Each designation would be based on an economic opportunity analysis, and the development could not occur on high-value farmland or sage grouse habitat.

The Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources recommended the bill for approval 3-1 during a Feb. 12 work session.

“It's totally local control. If the local people don't want it, they don't have to do it,” said Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, during an earlier public hearing on the bill.

While SB 2 doesn't solve all the land use problems facing Eastern Oregon, the proposal “recognizes the incredible difference between Eastern Oregon and the Willamette Valley,” where growth is more robust, said Sen. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario.

The legislation aims to provide flexibility for “very rural” parts of Oregon without harming the state's overall land use system, said Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem.

“I've heard about this and heard about this. One size does not fit all,” Courtney said.

Sen. Arnie Roblan, D-Coos Bay, said it's “remarkable” that groups with disparate interests could reach a consensus on the proposal, even if it doesn't resolve every land use disagreement in Eastern Oregon.

“We've been looking for the solution to everything for 14 years, and we've gotten nowhere at all,” he said.

While studying the issue, a workgroup that crafted the proposal found rural counties often didn't have the planning staff or resources to guide large-scale development through the existing land use process, said Mary Kyle McCurdy, deputy director of the 1,000 Friends of Oregon conservation group.

These rural areas also came across development opportunities that weren't an easy fit under current land use laws and were too different to encompass with one legislative proposal, McCurdy said.

Stakeholders reached an agreement on SB 2 “as kind of a pilot project” that “no one loves but perhaps we can all live with,” she said.

Members of the Oregon Farm Bureau disagreed with the reasons for a lack of economic opportunity in Eastern Oregon but appreciated that SB 2 was kept “limited in scope,” and the organization is neutral on the bill, said Jonathan Sandau, a government affairs specialist with the group.


Once a county designates 50 acres for industrial development under the bill, it cannot enlarge the footprint without another legislative change or an “exception” to Oregon's land use goals under existing law.

The proposal will allow counties to demonstrate the economic opportunities that are available under more flexible land use rules, said Dave Hunnicutt, president of the Oregon Property Owners Association.

“Under this bill, the max they'll get is 50 acres, and we'll see where it goes from there,” he said.



State Sen. Cliff Bentz



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