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## **EPA greenhouse gas ‘health threat’ finding concerns farmers**

By Jon H. Harsch

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The U.S. EPA’s “proposed finding” announced Friday that greenhouse gases pose a public health threat triggered immediate warnings from some farm groups and members of Congress that regulating emissions under the Clean Air Act could force food prices higher and drive farmers out of business. However, some others see the new regulations, if properly constructed, as a potential new revenue stream for agriculture.

The EPA’s controversial finding was issued in response to a 2007 Supreme Court order. EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson said Friday that “This finding confirms that greenhouse gas pollution is a serious problem now and for future generations. Fortunately, it follows President Obama’s call for a low carbon economy and strong leadership in Congress on clean energy and climate legislation. This pollution problem has a solution – one that will create millions of green jobs and end our country’s dependence on foreign oil.”

The finding itself states that “In both magnitude and probability, climate change is an enormous problem. The greenhouse gases that are responsible for it endanger public health and welfare within the meaning of the Clean Air Act.”

In response, American Farm Bureau President Bob Stallman warned that “The American Farm Bureau Federation is deeply concerned about the impact of the Environmental Protection Agency’s finding on greenhouse gas emissions, released today. The agency’s announcement could lead to harmful consequences with the government overextending its arm into every facet of the economy, including the agriculture industry.”

Before the finding could take effect, EPA is required to hold the finding open for public comment for 60 days and then issue proposed regulations which again would be subject to a public comment period. So EPA’s “deliberative process” could take another two years or more. Meanwhile, today’s announcement will increase pressure on Congress to move ahead on climate change legislation. In fact, today’s EPA announcement included the message that “both President Obama and Administrator Jackson have repeatedly indicated their preference for comprehensive legislation to address this issue and create the framework for a clean energy economy.”

Farm Bureau's Stallman was among the first to provide public comment. He warned that "If EPA were to regulate greenhouse gas emissions under the Clean Air Act, U.S. agriculture would be hard hit. Many agriculture facilities would be subject to permit requirements for structure construction or modification. Further, according to the Agriculture Department, any agricultural operation of more than 25 dairy cows, 50 beef cattle, 200 hogs or 500 acres of corn would be subject to emission fees. AFBF calculates it would cost farmers and ranchers \$175 per dairy cow, \$87.50 per beef cow and \$21.87 per hog and affect more than 90 percent of the livestock industry."

Senator John Thune (R-SD) also issued an immediate response Friday. He warned that "This is the first step in a slippery slope that could result in implementation of a tax on all CO2 emissions. The EPA has opened the door by starting with automobiles, but the reality is that this is the first step in a process that could result in sweeping regulations that could result in a tax on naturally occurring emissions from livestock."

Thune said "If the Administration wants to implement climate change legislation, it should work with Congress to pass bipartisan legislation rather than finding a way around working through the legislative process. . . The Clean Air Act was written to curb pollution from the smokestack industries, not to regulate the livestock industry." He called on the public to submit their comments and warned that "unless there's strong public opposition, I have no doubt that the EPA findings will result in actions that get us one step closer to policies that will have a significant impact on all Americans, including the taxation on emissions from livestock."

Last week, NFU President Roger Johnson said his organization supports a national, mandatory carbon emission cap and trade system. He was responding to responded to the U.S. House of Representatives Agriculture Committee questionnaire on climate change.

"Because agriculture and forestry lands have the potential to sequester nearly 25 percent of all annual greenhouse gas emissions in the United States, it is critical that a flexible offset program, that ensures maximum voluntary participation by the agricultural and forestry communities, is developed," Johnson said. "Offset projects would be meaningful revenue streams for producers who will experience some increase in agricultural input costs as a result of climate legislation."

Congress is already on track to move ahead quickly with further hearings in the coming weeks on proposed energy, cap-and-trade, and climate change legislation. And the battle lines are drawn. Responding to the EPA's Friday finding, the House Energy and Commerce Chair of the Energy and Environment Subcommittee, Ed Markey (D-MA), said that "History will judge this action by EPA. . . as the environmental equivalent to what *Brown v. Board of Education* meant to our nation's civil rights laws."

In sharp contrast, Senate Environment and Public Works Ranking Member James Inhofe (R-OK) said the finding "is the beginning of a regulatory barrage that will destroy jobs, raise energy prices for consumers, and undermine America's global competitiveness."