



01-13-09

Ag/Enviro coalition urges Congress to back renewables

By Agri-Pulse Staff

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In a Tuesday teleconference, a coalition of 34 business, agriculture, energy and environmental groups called on Congress to give USDA's renewable energy programs top priority in the economic recovery legislation being readied for President-elect Obama's signature in February.

Representatives from the 25x'25 Alliance, the National Wildlife Federation, the National Association of Wheat Growers and the Environmental Law and Policy Center (ELPC) also called for renewable energy bonds and tax credits to revive the economy and help America's farmers, ranchers and rural small businesses.

Investing in agriculture-based clean energy development will diversify the nation's energy supply, create jobs, and revitalize America's rural economy, according to a proposal signed by the new coalition. The coalition partners are asking Congress to boost funding for the construction and development of advanced biofuel refineries; wind, solar, biomass and geothermal energy projects; energy efficiency; biomass research; and the development of next generation feedstocks. The coalition explains that these programs could help create and maintain thousands of jobs in the clean energy technology fields.

"While frequently among the first programs to be cut in tough economic times, investments in USDA energy programs are critical to launching thousands of new jobs in our rural communities," said Julie Sibbing, the National Wildlife Federation's Director of Global Warming and Agriculture. "Investing in sustainable next-generation biofuels, renewable energy, and energy efficiency will recharge America's rural economy and restore the environment."

"With sufficient funding, this agenda will jump-start stalled clean energy projects and jobs around the country," said Andy Olsen, ELPC Senior Policy Advocate. "This plan will improve our environment and increase energy independence."

"Our nation's agriculture and forestry industries can not only provide a good portion of our overall energy supply, but also a new green energy future that will stimulate and reinvigorate our economy," said Bart Ruth, chairman of the 25x'25 policy committee. "A small investment in rural America and clean, green energy development has the potential to provide a new economic foundation for the entire country."

“Wheat growers are excited about the commercialization of cellulosic ethanol and the use of wheat straw as a feedstock,” said Mark Gaede, Director of Government Affairs for Environmental Policy at the National Association of Wheat Growers. “This technology has the potential to help our farmers diversify and strengthen their operations while helping the U.S. become more energy independent while helping the environment.”

To read the coalition’s proposals in a letter sent to congressional leaders, click below:
<http://elpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/01/renewable-energy-stimulus-letter.pdf>

Coalition members:

- 25x’25 Alliance
- American Agri-Women
- American Coalition for Ethanol
- Association of Consulting Foresters
- Association of State Energy Research & Technology Transfer Institutions
- Biomass Power Association
- Biotechnology Industry Association
- Ceres
- CHS, Inc.
- Clean Energy
- First Climate Solutions
- Environmental and Energy Study Institute
- Environmental Law & Policy Center
- Forest Landowners Association
- Intertribal Council On Utility Policy
- John Deere
- Native Wind
- National Alliance of Forest Owners
- National Association of Forest Service Retirees
- National Association of State Energy Officials
- National Association of Wheat Growers
- National Corn Growers Association
- National Farmers Union
- National Rural Electric Cooperative Association
- National Sorghum Producers
- National Wildlife Federation
- National Woodland Owners Association
- North American Equipment Dealers Association
- Pinchot Institute for Conservation
- Society of American Foresters
- Solar Energy Industries Association
- Southern Alliance for Clean Energy
- The Farm Credit Council
- The Stella Group, Ltd.