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EPA greenhouse gas emissions report covers farmland & inputs

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A U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) report released Friday makes clear that both farmland management practices and farm inputs will be affected by EPA's congressionally and court-mandated role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The 98-page report on "Opportunities to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions through Materials and Land Management Practices" will be part of the debate as the House and Senate continue work on a final version of the climate change legislation (H.R. 2454) which the House passed in June.

The EPA report shows that amounts equaling 13 percent of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions are absorbed by soil and vegetation and that this 13 percent reduction can be increased through improved land management practices and policies. As well, the report finds that 42 percent of emissions are influenced by materials management policies. This area includes the impacts from extracting raw materials in agriculture, forestry, and mining; food processing; and manufacturing, transporting, and disposing of products.

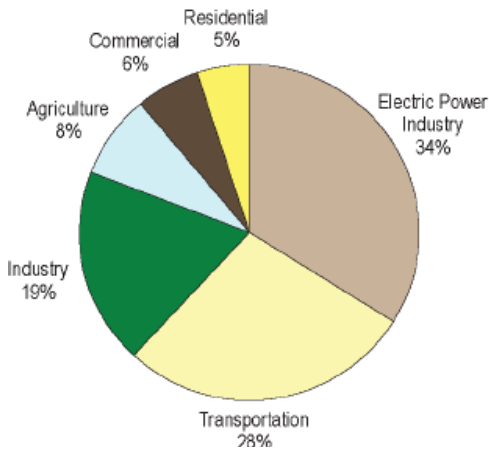
The EPA calls attention to these opportunity areas because it finds overall that:

- "Climate change is a serious global challenge. Atmospheric greenhouse gas (GHG) concentrations have increased significantly from pre-industrial levels as a result of human activities. Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is now evident from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice, and rising global average sea level. Furthermore, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has proposed that climate change is primarily the result of GHG emissions; that its effects will worsen over time in the absence of regulatory action; and that the overall rate and magnitude of human-induced climate change will likely increase, such that risks to public health and welfare will likewise grow over time so that future generations will be especially vulnerable; their vulnerability will include potentially catastrophic harms."

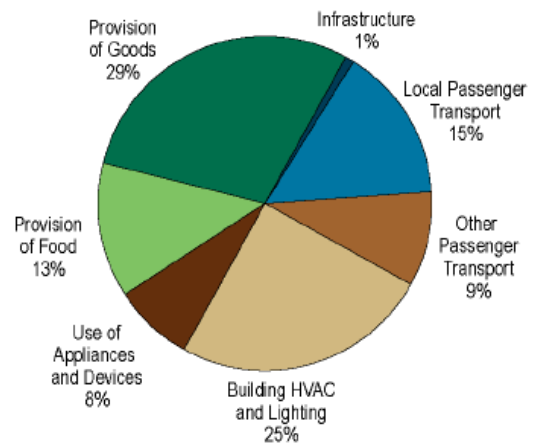
The report points out that when it comes to potential harm, specific communities could be most at risk, including those which "derive a share of their income from climate sensitive activities such as agriculture or fishing."

To deal with climate change, the EPA report calls for both “materials management” and “land management.” While much of the report focuses on urban and residential land issues and reclaiming industrially contaminated land, materials management also covers “extraction or harvest of materials and food (e.g., mining, forestry, and agriculture)” and finding ways to promote “materials management approaches that serve human needs sustainably by minimizing the amount of materials involved and their associated environmental impacts.” Therefore, overall farm inputs including fertilizer are in play. Similarly, the EPA report covers “managing land for agricultural and forestry purposes” because “The way we manage our land directly influences GHG emissions related to agriculture” and because “Some land management approaches can also yield GHG emission reductions or can protect the carbon sink provided by U.S. land.”

Sector-Based View of U.S. GHG Emissions (2006)



Systems-Based View of U.S. GHG Emissions (2006)



Source: EPA September 2009 report “Opportunities to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions through Materials and Land Management Practices”

To read EPA’s 98-page “Opportunities to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions through Materials and Land Management Practices” report released September 18, 2009, go to: http://www.epa.gov/oswer/docs/ghg_land_and_materials_management.pdf