

Dorgan should take new look at cap and trade

BISMARCK — Comprehensive clean energy and climate change legislation is of utmost importance to the future of our state’s sportsmen and farmers. We commend Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., for supporting a cap on greenhouse gas emissions (“Dorgan: Reduce CO2, yes; cap and trade, no,” Page A4, July 17).

We ask him to work to address his specific concerns and not let them overshadow the many positive benefits of curbing carbon pollution and investing in clean and renewable energy.

A study released Wednesday by the U.S. Department of Agriculture shows that the farm sector will generate substantial economic benefits as a result of climate change legislation. USDA estimates that American farmers could earn an additional \$75 million to \$100 million a year in 2012 through carbon and methane capture and other conservation methods.

The economic benefits are projected to swell to as much as \$20 billion per year by 2040.

The National Wildlife Federation and North Dakota Farmers Union are part of the North Dakota Climate Solutions Partnership. And as representatives of diverse constituencies, we have found common ground in addressing climate change. While the issues we are concerned about — conserving wildlife, helping farmers and ranchers prosper, protecting our rural communities and outdoor heritage — vary, the people and places we care about will benefit from laws that limit greenhouse gas emissions.

The American Clean Energy and Security Act, which currently is under consideration in the U.S. Senate, would put a “cap” on greenhouse gas emissions. Unchecked, these greenhouse gas emissions will further threaten our way of life and cost us dearly. For farmers and ranchers, this could mean reduced crop yields and livestock productivity. For sportsmen, this could mean losing vital wildlife and waterfowl habitat.

To avoid worst-case scenarios, we must reduce our carbon emissions now.

Such a limit will result in an increased demand for clean and renewable energy. That means this legislation will help our growing wind energy industry realize its full potential. The same holds true for farmers growing bioenergy crops.

In addition, this legislation also helps bring the coal industry into the 21st century by incentivizing the deployment of advanced coal technology with carbon capture.

Furthermore, capping carbon would broaden the market for carbon offsets in which agricultural and ranching operations could participate. Farmers and ranchers could become carbon-offset

providers by integrating soil conservation management or methane capture from manure practices into their operations.

In fact, many farmers already practicing such techniques would reap financial benefits with little to no changes at all.

By offering up a high volume of low-cost offsets, the farm sector has an important role to play in the carbon market, one that will provide economic opportunity to North Dakota's farmers, ranchers and rural communities.

The revenue generated from a carbon market would pay for a range of programs, including renewable energy research, and help for low-income consumers. From restoring wetlands to preserving native grasslands to monitoring wildlife populations, this funding would help keep North Dakota's fishing and hunting traditions thriving for generations to come.

On behalf of the thousands of hunters, anglers, farmers, ranchers, conservationists and people of faith who understand the need to address climate change sooner rather than later, we ask Dorgan to work on solutions to our nation's energy and climate challenges.

Carlson is president of the North Dakota Farmers Union. Schaefer is North Dakota representative for the National Wildlife Federation. Both groups are members of the North Dakota Climate Solutions Partnership, which also includes the Environmental Law & Policy Center, Ducks Unlimited, Prairie Climate Stewardship Network and the Foundation for Agricultural and Rural Resources Management and Sustainability.

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