

Yoder makes case to House

By TIM WHITE

FRED Yoder says he “enjoyed” his day testifying to Congress about ag’s role in the greenhouse gas debate. “You want to have someone up there who can answer their questions,” he says. “And that’s the part I enjoy the most.”

The past president of the National Corn Growers Association introduced himself to U.S. House members with the Committee on Small Business as a farmer from Plain City. He let the lawmakers know he grows corn, soybeans and wheat. He pointed out that he has been part of the Carbon Working Group, the Ag Carbon Market Working Group and the 25 x ’25 group. Yoder also attended the United Nations World Climate Conference in Poland in December.

“Al Gore was the keynote [speaker]. Out of 650 nongovernment organizations and 800 countries, I was the only producer from the United States. The reason I went was to see if people are talking about ag solutions. You know what they say, ‘If you’re not at the table, you’re on the menu.’”

Yoder has been learning about greenhouse gases and carbon sequestration for the past four years. He says carbon legislation is inevitable.

“The United Nations holds a world summit in Geneva next December, and President Obama has announced the United States will be leader at that summit. The administration wants legislation and agriculture needs to be part of the solution,” Yoder says.

With or without farmers, the 648-page Waxman-Markey draft legislation will be

Key Points

- Fred Yoder testified to Congress about greenhouse gas legislation.
- The bill is expected to be considered by the House this summer.
- Ag interests would prefer that USDA oversees program administration.

ready for debate in the House by later this summer, Yoder predicts.

More farmers are coming to grips with the concept, he says. When he started, most farmers were taken aback by his involvement in this debate. “They’d ask me what I was doing talking about global warming,” he recalls. “I’ve seen about every study, and whether you believe it’s real or not, doesn’t matter. This administration wants climate legislation. What we need to do is position agriculture so it is part of the solution. So we can offset some of our costs. Because there are going to be costs.”

More sense than carbon tax

If a farmer can sequester a ton of carbon, then he should be able to trade that ton to an industry like the state’s coal-burning utilities, Yoder argues. “While the coal industry is making a transition, it helps both parties. And it makes much more sense than a carbon tax, especially while the economy is trying to recover.”

“People on [Capitol] Hill are looking at ways to generate revenue, and EPA says CO₂ is a pollutant,” Yoder says. “Funny, I always thought of it as a necessity for growing crops. Talk about advantages. If the name of the game is to cut greenhouse gas, we can sequester a ton, and



CORN REP: Fred Yoder, past president of NCGA, delivered written testimony and responded to questions about climate change legislation from the Committee on Small Business of the U.S. House of Representatives.

that’s the same as cutting back a ton.”

He is the first to admit the subject is complicated, especially when it comes to establishing a market. The step from gaining an offset for sequestering carbon to a cap-and-trade policy that markets the offset to a capped entity is a big one. Agriculture should not be one of the capped entities, Yoder argues. The benefit of a fully functioning ag economy is far greater than the cost of limiting the

productivity. U.S. farms have a capacity to sequester 20% of the nation’s carbon emissions. Agriculture creates about 7% of the CO₂ emissions from fertilizer applications, livestock methane and nitrous oxides from transportation.

“My argument is ag is responsible for 7% of greenhouse gas with forestry. Yet we are able to reduce everyone’s carbon by 20%. It makes more sense to see ag uncapped so we can pursue other reductions — like lagoon covers to capture methane.”

Yoder points out that while ag can help other sectors offset their carbon footprints, its suppliers will be finding their own costs rising as production is capped. Look for higher fuel, fertilizer and transportation bills, Yoder warns.

“Our costs are going to go up even if agriculture remains an uncapped entity. We will be profoundly impacted by everyone else’s carbon,” he says. “Really, what we are looking for is an offset to bring back some of those extra costs.”

Not to mention that the ag side of the equation would like to ensure they’re working with USDA, not EPA, when it comes to designing and administering the programs that could impact agriculture. USDA has already been working on a carbon credit test program.

“No doubt EPA will be in charge of deciding who does what, but it makes more sense to use USDA if cap and trade is a system farmers can participate in,” Yoder says. “Let EPA decide what needs to be done, but have USDA in charge of protocols and policing it.”

Yoder is looking to expand the understanding of cap and trade by sharing it with Brazilian farmers this summer.

“We need to build understanding worldwide,” he says.

■ See Web Exclusives at www.OhioFarmer.com to read Yoder’s testimony.

Lal looks beyond no-till to conserve soil carbon

By TIM WHITE

NO-TILL is just one way to store and conserve soil carbon, says Rattan Lal, a soil scientist with Ohio State’s Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Lal has measured carbon levels in no-till fields in seven states. There are places where no-till works to conserve carbon and places where something else might work better, he says.

“No-till is a good practice, but it does not work for all soils, for all crops and all conditions,” he says. “We must not make carbon sequestration synonymous with no-till. The strategy is to develop a system of soil management in which carbon input into the system exceeds the output.”

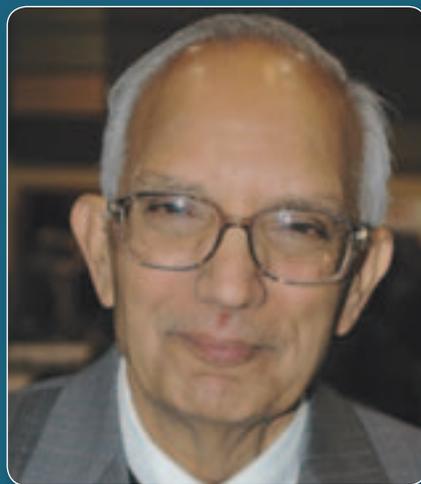
Factors like soil texture, moisture, temperature and terrain parameters affect the amount of carbon stored on the soil surface. The study compared carbon levels between no-till and conventional tillage fields and found that, in

some cases, carbon storage was greater in conventional tillage fields

The key, says Lal, is soil depth. “If you compare carbon storage between no-till and plowed fields with the plow depth, or the first 8 inches of the soil, carbon storage is generally much greater in no-till fields than in plowed fields,” Lal says. “But if you go deeper than 12 inches, one may find more carbon stored in plowed fields than in no-till.”

Soils that are well-drained, are silt/silt-loam in texture, warm quickly and have some sloping characteristics prone to erosion are excellent candidates for no-till, says Lal. “Clay soils, or other heavy soils that drain poorly, that are prone to compaction and are in areas where the ground stays cooler may not always increase carbon storage through no-till.”

Not to worry, however. There are plenty of other carbon sequestration methods available to farmers, including mulching, cover crops, complex crop rotations, mixed farming systems, agroforestry and biochar (a charcoal-like bio-



RATTAN LAL

mass material).

Lal’s understanding of ag soils and his prominence as a scientist make him a key player in establishing a position for agriculture and forestry in coming greenhouse gas agreements.

“Lal is one of the best-kept secrets in Ohio agriculture,” says Dwayne Seikman, executive director of the Ohio Corn Growers Association. “He is renowned across the globe. He is a tremendous asset. Our members know soil is what makes it all work. He’s been a leader in the discussion of no-till and pulling carbon back into the soil.”