

Candidates share ag opinions

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AS the nation prepares to elect a new president next month, *Indiana Prairie Farmer* sought to travel beyond the sound bites on agricultural policy. The questions and answers below are relevant not only to farmer readers, but in many ways to the general public, as queries about ethanol, food vs. fuel, trade and farm subsidies continue to make headlines outside agricultural press. With that in mind, the following set of questions were posed to both candidates, Sen. John McCain and Sen. Barack Obama.

If elected president, the most recent farm bill won't expire in your term. Would you do anything in the next four years to address any problems you see with the current legislation?

Obama: It's important to implement the 2008 Farm Bill in keeping with the intent of Congress. The legislation is the product of more than 18 months of difficult negotiations that attempted to satisfy a complex set of competing priorities. If particular provisions are difficult to administer or present technical challenges to the Department of Agriculture, I will work with leaders from both parties in Congress and relevant stakeholders to make appropriate adjustments that are acceptable to the key stakeholders involved.

As president, I will work to ensure that the protections in the bill against gaming the system are properly enforced, and I will work with Congress to push for greater reform to ensure that payments are targeted appropriately.

McCain: I support a risk-management program for farmers. When a farmer suffers from a natural disaster, such as droughts or floods, we should assist them; this is a commitment we have made to our farmers, and I will honor it. As president, I will fight on behalf of family farmers to enact reasonable reforms to our crop insurance program and our system of countercyclical and direct payments.

If elected president, what steps would you take to improve our renewable fuels policy?

Obama: I will focus my efforts in two key areas to:

- Mandate all new vehicles are flexible-fuel vehicles. Sustainably produced biofuels can create jobs, protect the environment and help end oil addiction, but only if Americans drive cars that will take such fuels. I will work with Congress and auto companies to ensure that all new vehicles have FFV capability by the end of my first term in office.

- Develop the next generation of sustainable biofuels and infrastructure. Advances in biofuels, including cellulosic ethanol, biobutanol and other new technologies that produce synthetic petroleum from sustainable feedstocks, offer tremendous potential to break our addic-

tion to oil. I will work to ensure that these clean alternative fuels are developed and incorporated into our national supply as soon as possible. I will require at least 60 billion gallons of advanced biofuels by 2030. I will also invest federal resources, including tax incentives and government contracts into developing the most promising technologies and building the infrastructure to support them.

McCain: I believe alcohol-based fuels hold great promise as both an alternative to gasoline and as a means of expanding consumers' choices. Some choices such as ethanol are on the market right now. The second generation of alcohol-based fuels, like cellulosic ethanol, which won't compete with food crops, are showing great potential.

I support flex-fuel vehicles and believe they should play a greater role in our transportation sector. In just three years, Brazil went from new cars sales that were about 5% FFVs to over 70% of new vehicles that were FFVs. American

capture carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, creating new opportunities for rural America to help solve the climate crisis.

McCain: I will propose a cap-and-trade system that would set limits on greenhouse gas emissions while encouraging the development of low-cost compliance options. A climate cap-and-trade mechanism would set a limit on greenhouse gas emissions and allow entities to buy and sell rights to emit, similar to the successful acid rain trading program of the early 1990s. The key feature of this mechanism is that it allows the market to decide and encourage the lowest-cost compliance options.

If elected, what would you do to enhance world market opportunities for U.S. farmers? What, if any, trade agreements would you seek to push for approval or revisit as president?

Obama: Trade is vital to our agriculture sector. About 50% of the wheat, 20% of the corn and 35% of the soybeans we grow in the United States are exported. These markets increase demand for our homegrown products and provide American farmers with additional revenue. Our farmers are among the most efficient in the world, and if given a level playing field, can compete effectively with anyone in the world.

There are several steps we must take to remain competitive and expand our access to markets. I support providing full funding to vital market promotion programs that enhance our access to important international markets. I have fought to break down trade and investment barriers that restrict our access to markets and will continue to do so. I supported bipartisan efforts to lift Korea's and Japan's bans on American beef.

It's also important that we ensure that our trade agreements create a level playing field for American businesses and workers, and that our farmers and businesses secure robust market access as a result of these agreements. Trade agreements must contain strong and enforceable labor and environmental standards so that American farmers are able to compete on a level playing field. I will also continue to support providing resources to research and technology that enhances the productivity and profitability of our farmers.

McCain: I believe that globalization is an opportunity for American workers today and in the future. Ninety-five percent of the world's customers lie outside our borders, and we need to be at the table when the rules for access to those markets are written. To do so, the U.S. should engage in multilateral, regional and bilateral efforts to reduce barriers to trade, level the global playing field and build effective enforcement of global trading rules.

■ For more questions and responses from the candidates, go to www.IndianaPrairieFarmer.com.



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