



North American Climate Smart Agriculture Alliance Statement at COP21

The North American Climate Smart Agriculture Alliance (NACSAA), is participating in a number of events around the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Conference of the Parties, or COP21) in Paris this week to reaffirm the high value, near-term and lower cost contributions that agriculture can make in international efforts to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that are driving up global temperatures and causing increasingly volatile and unpredictable weather that impacts food production.

NASCAA, which is supported by Solutions from the Land, is a collaboration of farm and conservation leaders, value chain partners and academics who recognize that climate change is real and have come together to do something about it. NACSAA partners recognize that the climate is indeed changing, and the associated impacts represent a major threat to all types of production systems - big, small, family, commercial, organic, local, and any other descriptor one would use to describe a farming operation.

Founded to facilitate efforts to share knowledge and the climate science that can be applied to agriculture, NACSAA is working to:

- sustainably intensify production systems to ensure the needs of a growing world population are met;
- provide the tools that can build production resiliency and allow growers to adapt to the changing climate; and
- offer major reductions in GHGs through methane capture, soil carbon sequestration and biofuels that burn more cleanly than fossil fuels.

COP21 is a critical stage in a mammoth effort needed to curb climatic changes that can have harsh impacts on the quality of life around the world. As important as these negotiations are, NACSAA members understand that the real work will take place after COP21 adjourns and is focusing its attention on helping farmers adapt to changing climatic conditions and implement practices and provide solutions that will make impactful and measurable contributions in sequestering and reducing GHGs.

To date, most of the discussion about agriculture's role in climate change has been narrowly focused on actions the sector can take to reduce direct GHG emissions generated through the production of food, feed and fiber. But equally important is the need to adopt new production and conservation practices and implement risk management strategies to improve resiliency and buffer farm operations from increasingly erratic and volatile weather.

Another less understood or accepted contribution the sector can make to abate climate change is the scope and magnitude of additional mitigation services the sector can deliver, such as:

- carbon sequestration through practices like conservation tillage and cover crops;
- reduced GHG emissions provided by biofuels when compared to petroleum based fuels;
- the efficient use of resources like applied nutrients; as well as
- renewable energy production and energy efficiency measures.

While the sector does generate about nine percent of U.S. GHGs, little effort has been made to secure major soil carbon sequestration services from agriculture. Considerable efforts have been made to utilize forests as a means of sequestering carbon - in 2013 COP20 helped develop a program for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation ([UN-REDD+](#)), which provides results-based payments for developing countries to reduce emissions from forested lands and invest in low carbon paths to sustainable development. But no similar effort has been undertaken to exploit the benefits that could be provided by agriculture, which the International Panel on Climate Change has estimated could potentially sequester more than 4 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent by the year 2030.

The reality is that agriculture offers big weapons in the fight against climate change and it's time to harness these solutions. For these benefits to be realized there have to be similar incentives for both developing and developed countries to implement systems that reduce GHG emissions from agriculture. Climate change does not differentiate – it affects all. Any effort to curb emissions is the responsibility of all, and any agreement reached in Paris must promote the contributions that all stakeholders can make, regardless of the state of their technological prowess or degree of prosperity. These incentives should also require the development and harmonization of measuring, reporting and verification (MRV) standards.

Towards this end NACSAA is calling on the COP to direct its [science advisory body](#) to establish agricultural sequestration protocols similar to the [UN-REDD+](#) program. Given that it has taken several years for countries to gain interest and ownership in the UN REDD+ program, as well as the fact that it takes time for countries to develop their protocols and record baseline levels, it is critical that the UNFCCC use the opportunity of COP21 to begin this process for agriculture now.

Agricultural systems, forests, and other land uses can be sustainably managed to simultaneously satisfy domestic and global demand for safe, abundant, and affordable food, feed, and fiber; as well as support economic security and sustainable development; reduce hunger and malnutrition; improve soils, water and air quality; enhance biodiversity and ensure ecosystem health, while also delivering mitigation and adaptation solutions to a changing climate. While more work remains, agriculture deserves credit for the tremendous progress the sector has made in reducing GHG emissions and achieving sustainability goals up to this point.

The barriers that hinder large-scale change must be removed and the technology, resources, and policies needed to overcome those barriers are needed now. Greater efforts are also needed to better integrate production, conservation, sustainability and GHG initiatives. NACSAA believes there is a wide array of opportunities for additional solutions from agriculture through collaboration between major companies, growers, and their partners in government and civil society. Now is the time to exploit them.

For more information about NACSAA's planned activities in Paris, contact Ernie Shea, President of Solutions from the Land and coordinator of the NACSAA, at 410-952-0123, or at EShea@SFLDialogue.net.