

July 28, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin, Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss,
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Barbara Boxer, Chairman
Committee on Environment and Public Works
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable James Inhofe,
Ranking Member
Committee on Environment and Public Works
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members:

As the Senate considers climate change legislation, we urge you to establish a robust emissions offsets program with the US Department of Agriculture as the principal agency responsible for the development and implementation of agricultural and forestry offsets projects. The Agriculture and Forestry offsets provisions in recently passed American Clean Energy and Security Act (H.R. 2454) identify USDA as the lead federal agency responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of these projects. We recommend that a similar provision be adopted in Senate legislation as well.

Climate change policy should fully recognize the potential contributions of the forestry sector and utilize the full suite of benefits provided by working forests and harvested wood products to sequester and store greenhouse gases and reduce the nation's overall greenhouse gas footprint. Over the course of several decades, forest owners and manufacturers have worked with USDA to exchange information and expertise on private forest management and forest products. As a result, USDA has unique and specialized experience and expertise necessary to develop the methodologies and processes for appropriately crediting offset projects in the agriculture and forestry sectors.

Congress recognized such a role for the USDA in last year's Farm Bill. Similar to Section 2709 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, climate change legislation should place responsibility on USDA to establish technical guidelines and regulations to assess offsets from forest projects, including establishing project protocols, certifying and verifying specific projects, and considering additional forestry projects beyond those specified in legislation.

We recognize as well that the Environmental Protection Agency has a critical role to play in implementing climate change policy as a whole, including the development of offset programs for certain projects outside the domestic forestry and agriculture sectors. Combined, the two agencies can leverage their respective expertise to produce an effective and efficiently implemented offsets program that will achieve further sequestration of atmospheric carbon while containing costs for consumers and energy producers.

We look forward to working with you on a final policy that achieves these important objectives.

Sincerely,

American Forest Foundation
American Forest & Paper Association (AF&PA)
American Forest Resource Council
Binational Softwood Lumber Council
California Forestry Association
Empire State Forest Products Association
Hardwood Federation
Intermountain Forest Association
Minnesota Forest Industries
Minnesota Timber Producers Association
National Alliance of Forest Owners
National Woodland Owners Association
Oregon Forest Industries Council
Plum Creek
Society of American Foresters
Washington Forest Protection Association
Weyerhaeuser Company