

Climate Change Legislation Must Address Irrigated Agriculture and Rural Communities

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There is broad scientific consensus that even modest changes in the global climate would likely alter precipitation patterns in ways that could pose serious threats to water supplies and agricultural production worldwide, particularly in arid regions such as the American West, where a large portion of agricultural production is dependent upon irrigation.

While providing significant direction and funding for natural resources adaptation and international assistance efforts, the U.S. House of Representatives earlier this year passed climate legislation, *The American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009* (H.R. 2454). Amazingly, this bill contains no comparable provisions to help domestic irrigated agriculture and agriculturally-based rural communities adapt to or avoid the adverse effects of global climate change.

As passed by the House, H.R. 2454 would create a domestic *Natural Resources Adaptation* program requiring the development of federal and state plans to “*protect, restore, and conserve natural resources to enable them to become more resilient, adapt to, and withstand the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification.*”

The House bill also would establish an *International Climate Change Adaptation Program* to help developing nations cope with the effects of climate change, which the bill finds are likely to “*exacerbate competition and conflict over agricultural, vegetative, marine, and water resources.*”

Funding for the development and implementation of domestic natural resources adaptation plans and for the international adaptation assistance program would come from revenues generated from emission allowances.

Earlier this year, Congress approved the *Secure Water Act*, creating federal inter-agency programs to assess the effects of climate change on water supplies, develop strategies and technologies to address potential water shortages and increase the collection of data on current and future water supply availability.

The *Secure Water Act* is a very important step, one my organization strongly supports. However, if Congress actually enacts more comprehensive climate-change legislation, it must include additional adaptation programs for irrigated agriculture and rural resource-based communities if such efforts are to be given the necessary attention and resources.

The consequences of global climate change - including disruption of agricultural production, decreased availability of fresh water supplies and destabilization of rural economies - are likely to pose long-term challenges to the national security and economic interests of the United States. If climate change legislation is enacted, at a minimum, it must include a policy statement that underscores the intent of the U.S. to remain self-sufficient in food production and to use all practicable means and measures to enable domestic agricultural production to become more resilient, adapt to, and withstand the impacts of climate change.

Farms and communities in the West face the prospect of economic disruption and increased competition and conflict over agricultural and water resources as a result of climate change. Surely, helping them adapt to and withstand the impacts of climate change should be no less a national priority than meeting the needs of fish and wildlife and farmers in other nations.