

Openings Statement
Chairman Edward J. Markey
“Global Warming’s Growing Concerns: Impacts on Agriculture and Forestry”
June 18, 2009

On Tuesday, the Obama Administration released a new report, *Global Climate Change Impacts in the United States*. It is the most comprehensive look at the current and potential impacts of global warming on the United States to date.

The results are sobering. Temperatures are increasing. Sea-level is rising. More extreme downpours are occurring. The report makes clear that global warming is happening and that the impacts are being felt now in every region of America and across society.

Today -- in the first of a series of hearings on the report -- we are examining the impacts of global warming on agriculture and forestry. All Americans should be concerned with the impacts on these critical sectors. We all must eat. We all use products from forests every day.

The findings of the report that rising temperatures, precipitation changes and increasing weeds, disease and pests will impact the productivity of farms and forests should make us all apprehensive. Land managers rely on the accumulated knowledge about their land, weather and crops, but climate change is rewriting the Farmer’s Almanac. The past is no longer prologue, and farmers must make decisions in the face of growing uncertainty. The serious consequences for agriculture and forestry provide yet another reason to take action now to curb global warming pollution.

The report indicates that the growing season now starts 2 weeks earlier, impacting farming and crops in rural America. Heavy downpours in the last 50 years increased 67 percent in the Northeast and 31 percent in the Midwest. Unsurprisingly, this time has been marked by record flooding in those regions. Yet in the rapidly growing Southwest, they face a different climate challenge as water supplies are becoming increasingly scarce.

Indeed, farmers and foresters are already suffering the consequences of climate change. But, unlike other impacted sectors, they can also contribute to the solutions.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. forests and soils sequestered over a billion metric tons of carbon dioxide in 2007, almost 15 percent of the nation’s greenhouse gas emissions. Land management practices designed to increase this carbon sink can pull even more carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere. Biomass can be used to generate renewable electricity, reducing global warming pollution from the burning of fossil fuels. Biomass can also produce renewable liquid fuels allowing American consumers, desperate for energy independence, the ability to power their cars with cellulosic fuels from middle America rather than oil from the Middle East. Wind turbines

are sprouting on farms and ranches, generating clean electricity while continuing the land's traditional use for food production.

These practices are already growing clean energy jobs and generating new revenue in our rural communities. With the right energy and climate policies, American farmers and foresters will play a crucial role in curbing the dangerous build up of global warming pollution while creating new sources of income. Money may grow on trees after all!

The witnesses before us today will help the Select Committee understand the challenges - - and opportunities -- global warming presents to U.S. agriculture and forestry. I look forward to their testimony.