

Farm, Ranch, and Rural Communities Advisory Committee

2020 Annual Report

America's farmers and ranchers provide food security for the U.S. and much of the world. Rural communities depend on a strong and resilient agricultural economy to thrive and provide basic services for those living in the heartland of America. Farmers and ranchers depend on healthy soil, clean water, and fresh air to produce food and fiber as a part of our national security. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) mission to protect human health and the environment aligns perfectly with the mission of American farmers and ranchers. We must have a healthy working relationship to achieve our respective missions. The Farm, Ranch, and Rural Communities Committee (FRRCC or Committee) is an excellent venue for EPA and the agriculture community to collaborate and develop productive working relationships.

The FRRCC is a Federal Advisory Committee originally chartered for 2 years by the EPA in 2008 and rechartered several times in the last 12 years. The current iteration of the Committee is chartered from February 2020-2022. The FRRCC provides policy advice, information, and recommendations to the EPA Administrator on a range of environmental issues of importance to agriculture and rural communities. The Committee is comprised of 32 members from across the U.S. representing academia, industry (producers, producer organizations and allied industries), non-governmental organizations, and state, local, and tribal governments. The COVID-19 pandemic delayed the Committee appointments until June and all committee activity to date has been in a virtual format. Nevertheless, the Committee and its ad hoc work groups have been very active, meeting 10 times, and making substantial progress toward the goal of providing valuable advice to the EPA Administrator on the following charge topics:

- “Creating a Holistic Pesticide Program for the Future” - The questions asked included: How can EPA reduce barriers for American agriculture to continue to feed the world with less resources through innovations in crop protection? How can we better communicate with the American public and our international trading partners about EPA's holistic approach to pesticide management and improve the availability of information about our science-based process? How does encouraging and facilitating technologies and practices like new active ingredients, plant incorporated protectants, biotechnology, and integrated pest management advance this mission?
- “Supporting Inter-agency Environmental Benchmarks with Interagency Partners” - The questions asked included: How can EPA facilitate the development of new technologies, practices, or market-based approaches to advance environmental goals around nutrient pollution, water reuse, and food loss and waste? How can EPA coordinate with other agencies to better measure data and information regarding proactive measures that production agriculture and rural communities take; utilize or coordinate data from state, local, or federal level partners; leverage existing EPA programs; and support agriculture's and rural America's efforts in these areas?

The first virtual FRRCC meeting was held on September 10-11, 2020. In the first meeting, the Committee received the charge topics identified above from EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler and Carrie Vincenta Meadows, Agriculture Advisor to the EPA Administrator. The FRRCC approved bylaws and began deliberations around the charge topics. The Committee received briefings from Dr. Bruce Rodan, Associate Director for Science, Office of Research and Development; Anne (Idsal) Austin,

Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator, Office of Air and Radiation; Susan Bodine, Assistant Administrator, Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance; Peter Wright, Assistant Administrator, Office of Land and Emergency Management; Dave Ross, Assistant Administrator, Office of Water; Alexandra Dapolito Dunn, Assistant Administrator, Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention. The speakers provided FRRCC with background information about the structure and work of EPA generally. FRRCC felt the presentations were necessary to provide a baseline of knowledge for the FRRCC to deliberate most effectively on the charge topics. A significant portion of this first meeting was then spent in a full committee deliberation regarding initial thoughts of additional information needed and possible actions EPA could take regarding each charge topic. FRRCC members were also given an opportunity to list their preference of topic for additional work group efforts.

In the weeks following the first virtual meeting, Chairman McDonald established three ad hoc work groups to address the following charge topics: pesticides, water quality and quantity, and food loss and waste. Chairs were appointed to lead each work group and Chairman McDonald provided each work group with a specific charge and a brief summary of the brainstorm session highlights from September. The work groups have met 8 times since formation to learn additional information, hear from outside speakers, identify additional information needed, and discuss the charge topics to begin prioritizing areas of focus within the topics.

The second virtual FRRCC meeting was held November 12-13, 2020. The ad hoc work group chairs reported progress on their charge topic, key speakers presented information requested by the work groups, and the full committee deliberated each charge topic. Specifically, the committee received presentations from Anna Wildeman, Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator, EPA Office of Water; Sharon Nappier, National Program Leader for Water Reuse, EPA Office of Water; Lana Suarez, Associate Chief, Materials Management Branch, EPA office of Land and Emergency Management; Jean Buzby, USDA Food Loss and Waste Liaison, Office of Chief Economist; Dana Gunders, Executive Director, ReFED; Sheryl Kunickis, Director, Office of Pest Management Policy, USDA; Ed Messina, Acting Office Director, EPA Office of Pesticide Programs; and Michael Goodis, Acting Deputy Director for Programs, EPA Office of Pesticide Programs. This meeting allowed for an in-depth analysis of specific EPA programs relevant to the charge topics. Chairman McDonald also presented a tentative workplan and timeline to guide the future work of the Committee. The outlined upcoming activities included the establishment of a SharePoint site for the Committee (which was completed prior to year-end), identifying advice issues, and creating an initial draft advice letter from each ad hoc work group for full Committee discussion at the next meeting. The advice letters will continue to be refined over 2021, and the final recommendations of the FRRCC will be presented to the EPA Administrator in December 2021 or January 2022.

While the Committee has not finalized advice for the Administrator, our work group discussions and full committee deliberations to date have generally focused on the following:

- The pesticide ad hoc work group has met 2 times and discussed reducing barriers to bringing crop protection tools to market while at the same time protecting the environment, natural resources, and human health, as well as safeguarding pollinators and endangered species. There has also been a great deal of discussion around the concept of improving consumer confidence and building trust with the American public and international trade partners related to pesticides. Outside speakers were invited to inform work group deliberations.

- The water ad hoc work group has met 3 times and discussed ecosystem markets that include water quality, carbon sequestration and soil health. There have also been discussions about certainty for farmers and ranchers as it relates to both voluntary efforts and regulatory programs. There is also interest in facilitating collaboration between EPA, USDA, FDA, and State environmental agencies to enhance water reuse.
- The food loss and waste ad hoc work group has met 3 times and focused on the definition of food loss and waste. The work group discussed liability and tax incentives associated with the topic, as well as barriers and incentives needed to divert more food waste from landfill and incineration to either livestock feed or anaerobic digestion and composting operations.

In 2021, the full FRRCC plans to meet 3 times and the ad hoc work groups will be meeting at least monthly in the first quarter. The FRRCC is making substantial progress despite the COVID-19 pandemic delaying our official start and resulting in all deliberations having to be virtual. Members of the Committee want to meet in person to have the opportunity to deliberate the issues face-to-face. We recognize the importance of the agriculture community and EPA having a good working relationship and we appreciate the opportunity to advise the Administrator on charge topics that are important to farmers, ranchers, and rural communities.