

## Six Pillars of Climate Conversations

“Ag-vocate” with climate-agriculture perspectives this Earth Day.

April is the month for International Earth Day, an event first held April 22, 1970. Today, Earth Day is a globally acknowledged event and environmental movement, which includes a full range of programs and activities run by *EarthDay.org*. Without question, Earth Day is every day for those of us in agriculture. However, given the incredible global focus on climate and sustainability, it’s worth considering the elements of Earth Day that should be part of our own conversation.

### Six pillars of agriculture-climate conversations

As part of my consulting practice, I run a group called IN-CLIMATE, which consists of agricultural supply chain companies and trade groups. Last year, we decided to tackle this question: “What is the climate conversation for our industry?” We came up with the following six areas. In some ways, I believe each one of these affects beef producers and can have a positive opportunity for your businesses as well.

#### No. 1 - Carbon credit markets and carbon sequestration:

Today’s emerging voluntary carbon markets are the entry point for many producers when it comes to sustainability. But sequestering carbon with plants is only part of the solution. We are also hearing a lot about carbon capture and storage and how those projects may affect landowners and rural areas. There are opportunities for beef producers and row crop farmers.

#### No. 2 - Sustainability and conservation:

Sustainability and conservation practices in agriculture are nearly as old as time, and the original

movement to things like no-till, cover crops and rotational grazing is more than 40 years old. Yet, these efforts are hitting an incredible stride and coming more into the mainstream as incentive programs now exist to convert new producers into these practices.

#### No. 3 - Renewable energy and energy transition:

Farmers are doing more with renewables now than ever before, whether putting in an on-farm solar installation for energy savings or by participating in large-scale community projects. Yet, no topic is more divisive than large scale solar and wind. Some want it in rural areas, and some ardently oppose. The dialog is important as we collectively decide what is the best use of land — once you take it out of production, it rarely, if ever, goes back.

#### No. 4 - Advanced biofuels and renewable fuels:

The first renewable fuels like biodiesel and ethanol are now mature technologies that are widely adopted, yet still have incredible merit. Today, however, massive growth is expected in advanced bio technologies, from hydrogen, additional renewable diesel, sustainable aviation fuel and more. Agricultural products remain a viable feedstock and may include a growing market for animal fats and livestock waste as a source of fuel.

#### No. 5 - Green finance and climate smart agriculture:

Financing for projects, whether coming from grants or private sources, is a factor in any new technology taking flight. Yet,

navigating these sources and the implications of using them takes time and consideration. The phrase ‘climate smart’ is overall not well regarded by the livestock and row crop producers that we polled in the fall of 2023; yet programs with the climate smart moniker will abound in the next Farm Bill.

#### No. 6 - Consumer pressures and public perception:

Changing cultural norms are partial drivers for the incredible movement in ESG (environmental, social and governance) programing and investing. But does the general public really care if the beef they buy is carbon neutral or their corn chips are deemed zero-emission? The answers might surprise you. Typically, most consumers don’t want to pay more for these labels or would pay only slightly more. So, where does the pressure to add these policies really come from if research shows us most consumers won’t pay for the difference? It’s all part of the continuing conversation.

How does your farm or ranch define Earth Day? The answer is as unique and important as your own operation’s impact and commitment to leaving a sustainable legacy. **HW**

**Editor’s Note:** Readers of *Hereford World* know Sarah Beth Aubrey as the long-time author of ACT’s Playbook. She takes on the rapidly evolving arena of sustainability with this new column. As Aubrey explains, “We’ll cover definitions, concepts and ideas. We’ll explore what’s current and what we in the beef industry have known about sustainability all along. We’ll do a little cussing and discussing, too. Bottom line, we know our business and we know we’re the best at what we do. It’s time to step into sustainability and tell our story.”