

Clearing the Confusion

Learn the terms surrounding carbon and sustainability.

Carbon is a seemingly endless topic these days and reduction of carbon, or more accurately, the emissions that surround its release into the atmosphere, is the most talked about topic in sustainability. But the number of carbon-related phrases that abound are confusing. Recently, I facilitated a strategy session for an agricultural trade group board of directors that wanted to get more familiar with this topic. I typed up 50 ‘climate terms’ on 50 individual notecards and took them to the event, laying them across the table. I invited the group to gather around and create three stacks — one with the terms they understood, one with the terms they had heard of but didn’t really ‘get’ and one with the terms they had never heard of at all. The largest stack was the set of terms they had heard of but didn’t understand.

Three years ago, I did this exercise with a similar type of organization and the largest stack (by a huge margin) was of the terms they had never heard of before. While exposure to climate terminology has increased, the

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— Sarah Beth Aubrey

comprehension of the meaning of many terms has not. This is to say nothing of whether industry leaders believe the terms they are familiar with today are even relevant to producers — but let’s table that topic for another column.

Clarifying carbon terms

In this issue, I’d like to clarify the definition of a few of these terms that you’ve likely heard floating around your atmosphere.

- **Carbon footprint** refers to a measurement of the amount of carbon dioxide (and other greenhouse gases) that an entity emits in the course of operations.
- **Carbon neutral** refers to making no *net* release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, which today is often accomplished through purchasing carbon offsets.
- **Carbon negative** means removing more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere than is emitted.
- **Climate positive** means removing more carbon than is emitted, in addition to going beyond carbon neutral and taking steps to sequester carbon so that it is not released. Synonyms are ‘carbon positive’ and ‘net positive.’

What’s in it for me?

Whether or not these terms seem valuable or concerning to your operation today, guidance from the United States Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (USRSB) — an

industry-wide consortium which counts the American Hereford Association as a member — suggests producers should care about carbon and beef production’s role in both contributing to and mitigating emissions. The USRSB has identified six ‘high priority indicators’ to aim toward improving sustainability within the U.S. beef production system, including using rotational grazing and improving feed efficiency. So, as we go into the year, I’ll be taking a dive into this topic, aiming to make it relatable for Hereford breeders of all sizes. **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.”

Let’s Continue the Conversation

If there is an area you’d like to have addressed around this topic, write to me at sarahbeth@theenvoygroup.co, and I’ll do my best.

