



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

OCT 31 2013

Ms. Debbie Reed
Executive Director
Coalition on Agricultural
Greenhouse Gases
1201 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 300
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Ms. Reed and CIG Project Participants:

Thank you for your letter of August 15, 2013, sent on behalf of the Coalition on Agricultural Greenhouse Gases (C-AGG), providing recommendations and feedback about the benefits of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Greenhouse Gas Conservation Innovation Grants (GHG CIG) projects funded by USDA in fiscal year 2011. I would like to commend you and the C-AGG stakeholders for embracing the projects. USDA values our relationship with C-AGG and has benefited enormously from your engagement. The GHG CIG projects represent the first attempt to focus the CIG program on a single topic, and we have since built on the success of this work to offer similarly focused funding opportunities.

Farmers and ranchers acutely feel the impacts of weather variability, and the threat of climate change poses many challenges and opportunities. USDA has a responsibility to provide leadership to farmers, ranchers, and rural communities in addressing climate change. This responsibility was recognized in President Barack Obama's Climate Action Plan, released this June. The Plan highlights USDA's climate efforts, including ensuring the health of forests as a carbon sink, developing next-generation biofuels, building drought resilience, and creating seven Regional Hubs for Risk Adaptation and Mitigation to Climate Change. These actions will improve our defenses against weather extremes, allowing us to manage our natural systems to store more carbon, and help landowners to meet the challenges of a changing climate.

This year, I challenged USDA to hold forums on drought, advance innovative carbon partnerships, expand international climate-smart agriculture, and improve our outreach and extension efforts to farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners on science-based risk management related to climate variability. The GHG CIG projects helped us reach these goals, and C-AGG's continuous efforts to incorporate agriculture into climate solutions will contribute to USDA's ability to accomplish our climate priorities.

Ms. Debbie Reed

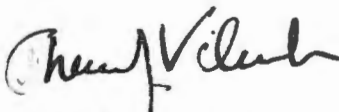
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Your letter highlights the many successes realized so far through the GHG CIG projects. You also highlight a number of challenges that the CIG awardees have faced, including the timing of availability of EQIP funding, the 3-year cycle of CIG awards, and the need for additional data to support GHG methodologies and protocols. Finally, your letter makes a number of thoughtful recommendations on how USDA might build on the successes of the GHG projects and address some of the challenges the awardees have faced. USDA welcomes your feedback and input—it is detailed critiques like yours that will help us improve our programs. I have asked our experts at NRCS who administer the GHG CIG effort to reach out to you and follow up on your specific recommendations.

USDA has been buoyed by the interest in the GHG CIG projects. C-AGG's leadership in convening the awardees and tackling common obstacles has been instrumental in many of the successes realized through the projects. In the very near future, USDA will be carefully considering how to capitalize on what has been accomplished so that we can keep moving the science and on-the-ground approaches forward. I understand that the next C-AGG meeting will be in Washington, D.C. on November 5th and 6th. If your time allows, I will ask NRCS leadership to meet with you to discuss these issues of mutual interest.

I appreciate the effort you invested in preparing your letter, and I appreciate the thoughtful and deliberate comments you provided. I value C-AGG's insight and enthusiasm for helping USDA and the Nation's producers navigate this emerging issue. I look forward to staying engaged with you and your work in the years to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas J. Vilsack". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Thomas" and last name "Vilsack" clearly legible.

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary