

Wisconsin Ag Connection

Republicans: Vilsack Changed Direction on Role Over Ag Offsets Program June 9, 2009

The ranking Republican member of the House Agriculture Committee claims that U.S. Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack has made conflicting statements over the past two weeks about the role the U.S. Department of Agriculture should play with a national cap-and-trade system that would be created under the Waxman-Markey climate change and energy bill.

According to a statement released by Frank Lucas, Vilsack said last week that he would be "advocating forcefully" for two provisions to be added to the Waxman-Markey bill. One of those provisions would add carbon credits for agriculture and forestry while the other would give authority to USDA to administer those programs. Vilsack added that USDA is better suited than EPA to administer an offsets program since it has offices and employees 'in virtually every county in the country.'

"Then about a week later, Secretary Vilsack changed his view that USDA should play a lead role in any agriculture and forestry offsets program," Lucas said. "According to an article by E & E News, Vilsack said 'it's important for us to focus on the fact that both agencies need to work together. This is very complicated legislation, and we both have to work together. I am absolutely committed to working with EPA.'"

Lucas says the Agriculture Committee will hold a public hearing on the Waxman-Markey legislation on June 11. Secretary Vilsack is scheduled to be a witness on the first panel of the hearing.