



Regional Global Warming Adaptation Conference Results in Recommendations for Agricultural Sector

Thursday, March 25, 2004

For immediate release
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Portsmouth, NH--Scientists, stakeholders and decision-makers from across the region met last week in Boston for "Climate Change in New England and Eastern Canada: Natural Resource Impacts and Adaptation Responses," a symposium sponsored by the New England Governors Conference, in conjunction with the Eastern Canadian Premiers.

The workshop was organized in the hopes of providing direction and increasing momentum toward meeting the specific goals outlined in the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers Climate Change Action Plan, which, when signed in 2001, became the nation's first regional climate action model.

According to Clean Air-Cool Planet Executive Director Adam Markham, who facilitated the final "Looking for Solutions and Strategies" discussion for the agriculture/horticulture sector, "One of the goals of the regional plan is to develop adequate adaptation strategies for the changes caused in the Northeast by global warming, especially to crucial natural and economic resources.

But what the plan doesn't contain is specifics on how to do that. Our job at this meeting was to create that 'road map' for specific adaptation measures."

Looking at New England's natural resource sectors -- fisheries, forests, and agriculture, for example--panelists and participants engaged in informational sessions and facilitated dialogues regarding priorities and strategies for protecting the region's resource base, as the effects of global warming increasingly make themselves felt.

Out of the three-part forum on the agricultural sector, Markham said, a set of specific recommendations related to New England's billion dollar agriculture and horticulture industries has emerged, designed to give governors, premiers, state officials and planners a sense of focus and priorities:

1. Identify invasive pest and noxious weed threats and develop strategies for early detection and intervention.

2. Help educate farmers and producers about global warming by working through local Cooperative Extension Services, providing material for written case studies on farming success stories, and undertaking on-site demonstrations of best cultivation practices.
3. Improve nutrient management strategies: for example, through better soil conservation and reduced fertilizer input.
4. Create incentives for improved water storage and conservation, and strategies for regional watershed management, especially in order to reduce the threat of future droughts.
5. Work with crop insurers to improve risk management strategies.
6. Increase or continue research on options for more adaptive crop types.

"Protecting New England's crop-dependant economies from the inevitable impacts global warming will require states to be proactive and collaborative," Markham said. "These steps, in coordination with continued, broad emissions reductions measures, can help preserve everything from large scale apple and potato production to the local community sugar shacks and small family gardens of New England."

Underlying the six recommendations, Markham noted, are some additional infrastructure and information needs that must also be met: these include the identification of the region's most vulnerable crops and sectors; increased engagement from agricultural officials and the food processing industry; better communication between Canada and the U.S. on this subject; and improved, more detailed climate change predictions or models, especially related to agricultural impacts.

New England as a whole has warmed nearly 1° F over the past century. Impacts such as earlier spring lilac flowering, increased pest and noxious weed presence, and more erratic maple sap runs are already being noted as a result. Science predicts that the continued changes slated for the region according to current climate change models could mean more drastic effects in terms of water and soil degradation, emergence of non-native (invasive) weeds, and poorer growing conditions generally.

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